Future-proof vote

Nepal turned out in large numbers to vote in the final phase of the final elections Thursday that marked the end of a post-war transition that lasted 11 years. Everywhere, voters said they hoped for a stable and prosperous Nepal. Some poised at the ballot box. Some were afraid to cast their vote, either mothers like this one in Ilam, or on Thursday in Kathmandu brought along their babies to drive home the point that they were voting for a brighter future.

Despite the cold, a busy harvest season, and some threats of violence, the average turnout touched 65% in the second phase of parliamentary and provincial elections in 45 hill and Terai districts. With the last of three tiers of elections now done, the Constitution of a federal, secular and democratic republic is now operational. Despite widespread criticism for having squandered the gains of repeated struggles to restore democracy, and for prolonging the transition, ageing leaders from the three main parties deserve some credit for having brought the country to this historic crossroad. Fourth-time prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has partially redeemed himself by pushing through with the elections against all odds.

Gagan Thapa, idolised by many as the future face of Nepali politics, posed for a photo with his daughters before going to vote, and shared it on social media with a caption: “My resolve is to handover a prosperous Nepal to my daughters’ generation.”

[See p.11 for social media posts.]

Thapa, an NC candidate in Kathmandu-4, was injured in a bomb attack on Monday, and his past summed up what Nepal voted most for: peace, prosperity and stability.

Despite the hope for a brighter future, however, many remained skeptical about changes because they saw many of the same leaders of the same parties that repeatedly let voters down over the past 27 years still standing for office.

Anti-corruption activists, Govinda KC who has been on multiple hunger strikes against the medical mafia, told us: “I don’t think there will be a drastic change in the country because we are going to have the same people who betrayed the people back in office. But we know how to make irresponsible leaders responsible.”

A state of uncertain stability

Hopes are high, but the preponderance of old faces does not bode well for the future.

Voters’ voices

All people want is stability so we can have development and economic growth.
I t has become an accepted truism that Nepal lost two decades to a turbulent transition. Actually, this prolonged political transition has lasting since the overthrow of the Rana oligarchy in 1950. What we have lived for the past 67 years is trial-and-error politics—experimenting with a hybrid federalism, dabbling in parliamentary democracy, trying a parties system, and档次 monarchy for 30 years, suffering a rain maker, a monarchy led military coup, and riding a roller coaster of coalition politics.

This week marks a milestone in Nepal’s political history. It is not just the end of the last 33 years of war and 11 years of waffling, but an interregnum that has lasted nearly seven decades.

Time and again in that period, politicians, plutocrats and kings have taken Nepal to the brink. It was only the sacrifice of the people, their capacity to overcome oppression, their innate belief in an open society, that repeatedly pulled us back from the edge. Citizens stood up to resist as Nepal’s rulers tried their best to wreck the country.

But it is at this point when we look at Nepali history from the current historic vantage point that we will see just how momentous this moment is.

However flawed, we now have a people’s constitution that has laid down the law of the land with its core values of inclusive democracy, pluralism and tolerance.

Aside from those inalienable principles, it is a document that can be amended as we go along.

Even those who were against the constitution, rose up violently against it, warned of sidelining local and provincial elections and even threatened to secede are now taking part – albeit with a little prodding from their memories. This signals that the constitution and these elections have not deftly led anyone away, except a trigger-

blockade of Nepal in support of the stir led by Madhavajjana-based parties in 2015 nearly tore the country’s ethnic fabric apart by polarized hills and plains. It is true that extremism in Kathmandu’s centre of power was reluctant to devolve and thought it could bulldoze through a new constitution, as it had always done. But it was also clear that the strings of the central movement were being blown from elsewhere.

This political enthaupting in constitution formation soon pushed Nepal northwards, making New Delhi back-seat to the past year to allow electors to be heard. How soon from all this that if there hadn’t been so much cross-border micro-management of our politics, perhaps things would have been sorted out much earlier.

Despite the cynicism and negativity that preceded the three tiers of elections this year, we have to congratulate ‘the fact that the last 11 years have not been completely wasted. Yes, the transition lasted longer than it need have, but the country went from war to peace, from a theocratic monarchy to a secular republic, from a centralised unitary state to one where powers are to be devolved to elected local government.

Despite the violent legacy of the war, this dramatic transformation of state structure took place relatively bloodlessly. In an age when murder and crime are political wars are tearing counties apart, Nepal must be credited for handling its political evolution in a civilised manner.

The main challenge now is to fix the broken links in the constitution, sort out knotty issues like provincial names, borders, language, their rights and responsibilities. All this so that we can finally take that big leap we have been waiting 70 years to take: ensure that decentralised and accountable decision-making by elected officials will lead to sustained development, growth with job creation, and improvements in the affordability and accessibility of schooling and medical care.

It is not a far-fetched dream. But realistic and only needs an extrapolation of the strides Nepal has taken in upgrading its Human Development Index in the past 25 years. This progress in slashing maternal mortality, doubling female literacy and halving poverty rate has happened despite a war and parlous politics. Image how much further we would have been if governance was more efficient and transparent.

The results of these elections will be clear by next week, the new parliament will sit in mid-January, and the biggest party will have up to 40 days to form a government.

Although there is great hope that the elections will represent a milestone in Nepal’s political history, as our report on page 10-11 shows, the fact that most of the candidates are unformed oldies doesn’t offer much hope.

Federalism should have been the perfect opportunity to finally devolve Kathmandu’s powers, but the legacy given to provincial candidates shows it may end up being just a rubber stamp body. Indeed, party hierarchies have dumped weaker candidates to their lineage for provincial assemblies.

Whichever party gets to lead the country at least for the next three years, and whoever is in the pipeline opposition, let them not sneer at this chance. There is a lot of catching up to do.

Kültura

Online packages

What’s trending

ELECTIONS

VOTES VOTERS

The first proportional and parliamentary elections under the new constitution are held in the past year while we are in a situation where we will go a government that will work for the people and each people should visit this website to find out what Nepalis think the newly-elected leaders should do for the country.

Total votes: 124
% of NCP: 49%
% of CPN-UML: 28%
% of Biplav: 23%

MISLEADING

I am writing in response to your article Korea Kafails (883, Om Astha Rai). The Employment Permit System (EPS) is a slowly regulated government in accordance enabling transparency and prevents corruption which could occur during workers selection and interview process. As it bears no resemblance to the Kafails sponsorship system, I am deeply concerned that the title of the article is not only erroneous but vastly misleading to the readers.

The Republic of Korea is equal to both domestic and foreign workers on the application of labor related laws such as Labor Standards Act, Minimum Wage Act, and Industrial Safety and Health Act. In case of employment by employers such as contract labor violation and unfair dismissal, remedy of rights in possible through the Working Condition Improvement Department and Labor Relations Commission, Foreign workers are also eligible for Social Insurance Application which comprises of the industrial Accident Compensation Insurance, National Health Insurance and National Pension. Despite some limitations placed on changing

RETURNING TO CHITWAN

Biplav Senghar

Returning to Chitwan by guitar

Tiger licks his gums and gives us the first glimpse of the original, while the columnisers in his full suit of a cow costume in Nepalite after a restless to the legendary tiger show in the previous world tour. Nepalities must read this article to stay updated!

Most commented

Election Buzz

Meryl Streep

Andersson (Sveriges Radio)

Not a good deal. Commercially not interested in making effective decision during Constituent Assembly show

David Buss

A terrible movie. I don’t understand how the power of the words have changed the tone of this movie. Thank you for the legendary

Daniel Braud

Interesting show. Well done. The movie of the year. I have never seen such a great performance by a great actor. Thank you very much,

Rahul Saini

Great performance. Best of luck to the entire production cast

I like the movie. It’s a real hit! mortar and pestle world tour

Most visited online page

Tweets

Voters' voices

The first proportional and parliamentary elections under the new constitution are held in the past year while we are in a situation where we will go a government that will work for the people and each people should visit this website to find out what Nepalis think the newly-elected leaders should do for the country.
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Fasten seat belts

Brace yourselves for a ride into uncharted constitutional territory

Nepal’s descent into Hodas in the democratic era began in 1995 when the fringe party that was the CPN-Maoist blazed arms against a democratic system that was barely five years old. This downward spiralling continued through a series of disasters and disasters – the Maoist attack massacre, Gyanendra’s coup, the interminability of constitution making, the April 2015 earthquake, the Indian blockade and the Lokman Singh Karki lapse followed by the attempt to impeach the Chief Justice.

But the Constitution is written, and the last hurdle to begin its implementation in earnest was the first phase of elections on Thursday. We got here despite the dark forces – national and international – seeking to sabotage firstly the writing of the Constitution, then the holding of local government elections, then the national/provincial. But we got through, and some amount of credit must be given to the national political leaders who, having been handed a near-impossible task, ultimately lived up to the trust. This needs saying for the pillorying of politicians is the easiest pastime of the pretentious intelligentsia, in Kathmandu as it is in the world over.

Having pulled all layers, used guile and perseverance to get to this point, where do the people go from here? It will be foolishly to think that it will be smooth sailing henceforth, for that never happens. We will never be above the clouds, it will always be turbulent, but there we must strive for base-level political stability which allows economic acceleration and social progress. Right off the bat, we need to guard against those who will point to the failure of democracy and urge any one of the following – a politically active army, a Kwan Yew strongman, a return of kingship, the Hindutva agenda, or another inducement. Lifting of arms. Meanwhile, those who seek a directly elected president should be simply asked to read the Constitution just adopted. The path to the new Constitution’s implementation is now cleared with the full set of elections completed, but if anything we have to be even more on guard when it comes to the rule of law, human rights and due process. And let us remember that the peace process is not over until the accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity is established, which will allow the process of reconciliation to proceed.

One of the bigger challenges, given the devolution of governmental powers to the grasplings by the Constitution, is development of a vibrant civil society in all seven provinces. To take just one example, given the power that the public is bound to suffer human rights abuses all over the country in the absence of human rights activists.

The civil society of tomorrow will have to promote constitutional implementation and protect civil rights, but it will also have to guard against ultra-nationalism, right wing and ultra-left populism, and identify activism that goes against the interests of the very communities sought to be protected. We have to watch out for the politicians and bureaucrats who would sabotage the constitutional devolution of powers to local entities.

But to even get started on the journey ahead, we have to ensure political stability amidst the new democracy. Indeed, today we are at more or less the same point where we were at the first elections after the 1996 ceasefire from the Fourth estate, the Nepali Congress and the UML went at each other like fighting cats. The racism exhibited during the last phase of the 2017 election campaign gives grist to the foreboding.

The list is going to feel the pinch harder than in the elections to the Constituent Assembly of 2013, and among the leadership there is going to be a great sense of loss of control. The new Constitution does not allow no-confidence motion to be brought for two years, and so there will be temptation for parties/pacts out of power to try extra-constitutional means to somehow bring the house down. Those out of power are bound to feel beleaguered because the ‘transitional politics’ of the past decade had everyone eating from the honey-pot, whether you were in government or in opposition. From the national to the local levels, all-party mechanisms had made everyone into a fellow-traveller, but now the role of the opposition becomes paramount.

The inevitable bickering among the political parties is going to make for roller-coaster politics up ahead, but we have to try and ensure that a modicum of civility is maintained. There is a Constitution to implement, hundreds of new laws and regulations to enact under it, constitutional principles of local government to be defined and drafted, and a confidential new foreign policy put in place, especially to tackle the two ascendant neighbours.

Political stability will allow economic growth to accelerate, after all these years of hanging fire. The social justice goals that are central to the new Constitution, including inclusion and equity, must be implemented forthwith and not be made up for last time. It is obvious that civil society in the seven provinces has its work cut out.
The Nepali Dream

Four motivated millennials who are paving the way to socio-economic reform

For Sanabu Sumwar, the sky is quite literally, not the limit. In his mid thirties now, he was forced to drop out of school during the insurgency but went on to learn to be a white water rafting guide. Then he took up paragliding.

CONNECTING DOTS

Drinker Nepal

Even though he wasn’t a trained mountaineer, his audacity and determination made him rope up with a highly trained guide to climb Mt Everest, paraglide to the Khumbu Glacier, then kayak down the Kosi all the way to the Bay of Bengal. This extraordinary feat earned the duo the Nat Geo Adventurer of the Year Award in 2016.

But Sanabu did not stop there. He went on to jump off six of the seven highest peaks in all continents and now runs a paragliding training school in Sikkim of Syangja where he recently organised an international paragliding championship. He has plans to bring in the Paragliding World Cup to Nepal in 2023.

Sixt Bhatta is a dashing young man, speaks eloquently and every time I take a ride through his app based Bike Taxi Company called Tootle, I think him. It has made living and working in Kathmandu a lot easier. Quitting a comfortable banking job, Sixt started Tootle, and brought the sharing economy home for us in Kathmandu. Tootle was recently nominated for the top ten Global Impact startups by Skift, a Finland based annual startup and tech event.

Sumana Shrestha is always creating a buzz about town. An MIT graduate with experience in a global consultancy firm, Sumana came back to Nepal because “so much needs to be done here, literally in every field, and nobody is doing it”.

She coordinated the Carpool idea during the Great Indian Blockade of 2015, a social media based platform through which people could share transportation. We fought the fuel shortages together, and tech based solutions like this built a new aspect to the well-acknowledged toughness of the Nepali people.

Last we worked together was for the flood victims in the Terai, where she created platforms using the social media and the cloud to coordinate relief efforts of volunteer organisations. Sharing data and activities in real time, it could clearly see the impact of the nimbleness she had imparted to the relief effort. Last year, Sumana was busy launching a new ‘Urban Racer’ skirt for bikers and launched a travel guide app this year named Bhuntu.

Sumana is inspiring not because she is tech savvy, but because of her unique attachment to things local, and her relentless effort in looking for solutions, trying to figure out what works and what doesn’t at the grassroots, and her dedication to the spirit of social entrepreneurship.

Prakash Koirala is on a mission to spread financial literacy among the needy in Nepal and elsewhere. When I met him for the first time few years back, he was struggling with a dilemma. He did not want to continue with chartered accountancy that he had already put three years into, and wasn’t sure what to do instead. Still in his twenties, Prakash has created impact by training people in financial literacy.

He dropped out of the CA course, wrote a book with illustrations that explained the concept of finance to children and everyone else lost in the world of money. Many financial institutions, NGOs and donor agencies have reached out to him to help spread financial literacy. He was invited by TeZ India Mumbai as a speaker this year.

Sano Babu had to drop out of school because of insurgency. Sixt is an MBA with professional experiences of more than a decade, Sumana is an MIT graduate, and Prakash went to school in his native Dali. There are many more Nepalis like them. And although there be differences between them, there is one thing they all have in common: audacity, ambition and drive to stay and help Nepal.

The future of Nepal will be driven by the global ambition of millennials like these four extraordinary people to make the Nepali dream come true.
Temporary protection

Under the Trump, the future looks bleak for Nepalis staying on

TSERING D GURUNG
in NEW YORK

Shaina Shaky was nearing completion of her Optional Practical Training, which allows international students to work in the United States for up to three years after graduation, when the 2013 earthquake struck Nepal.

The Department of Homeland Security gave Nepal Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for 18 months, allowing Nepalis who had been living in the US before June 2013 to stay and apply for work and travel permits, regardless of previous immigration status. Nepal’s TPS was renewed for another 18 months in October 2016.

“TPS was a blessing,” says Shaky, who is currently a program officer at a nonprofit in Manhattan. “It helped me stay on in the US, find a job and gain work experience that I would not have been able to get otherwise.”

Nearly 15,000 Nepal had received TPS as of October, according to a Congressional Research Service report. Some like Shaky came to the US legally as students, and were struggling to obtain work visas. Many others are undocumented, having overstayed their visas or crossed the border illegally from Mexico.

“TPS has benefited thousands of Nepalis who were out of status,” says Nethuda Chhetri, director of organizing and advocacy at Adhikar, a New York City-based nonprofit that campaigned for the extension of TPS for Nepal. “Many are individuals living here for over 10-15 years and are here because they want better lives for their children and their families.”

Mona Lama, 49, came to the United States on a tourist visa with her husband in 2005. While he returned home to Kathmandu soon after to take care of their two daughters, Lama stayed behind, becoming an undocumented immigrant. For 12 years she lived in constant fear of being detained by immigration authorities.

“Every time I saw a cop on the subway or on the streets, I’d start panicking,” recalls Lama, who works as a nanny in New York City. “I’d think they had come to get me and that I’d be immediately deported.”

Despite the uncertainty she had no other choice since she is the main support for her family back home. Her husband’s trekking business suffered during the conflict and eventually shut down.

“The situation at the time was very bad,” says Lama. “There was nothing I could do there to be able to provide sufficiently for my family.”

Lama applied for TPS with assistance from staff members at Adhikar in 2015. After her application was approved, she says, she applied for health insurance and work and travel permits.

“For the first time in 12 years, I was able to finally go to a hospital without fear,” says Lama. “And that happened only because I received TPS.”

But given the Trump administration’s recent decisions to end the Temporary Protected Status program for over 58,000 Haitians and 5,000 Nicaraguans, there’s now concern in the Nepal community about the possibility of TPS extension for Nepal.

Nepal’s TPS expires in June 2018 and if it is not renewed, tens of thousands of Nepalis will have to go back within a given time period (usually between 6-18 months) or face deportation.

“Looking at Haiti, it seems like they’re planning to end Temporary Protected Status for all countries,” says Paibung Khati Benjamin of Adhikar. “But it’s hard to read the mind of the Trump administration. The way they make their decisions doesn’t often have a logical course.”

The decision rests on the Department of Homeland Security’s evaluation of current conditions in Nepal, including factors such as political instability, slow recovery and other natural disasters, while assessing the conditions.

Benjamin says her organization will be actively campaigning for the program’s renewal and sees a small hope in the fact that Nepal has had TPS for only three years as compared to other TPS recipient countries that have enjoyed the protection for much longer. Mona Lama, who was hoping to visit her family, whom she hasn’t seen in 12 years, in February is now reshinking her plans. “I had high hopes of seeing my family, spending time with them,” she says, “now that things are so uncertain here I won’t be able to. It’s heartbreaking.”

HOME AWAY FROM HOME: (From left to right) Mona Lama in bed with her daughters and husband, at the day care in New York where she now works, and her grown up daughters in America. Shaina Shaky (right) could stay in the US to gain work experience after her college studies. But both Mona and Shaky are among 15,000 Nepalis in the US who benefited from the TPS scheme, and may now have to return to Nepal.

NATIONAL TIMES
8 - 14 DECEMBER 2017

NEPAL WHEREVER YOU ARE.

Times.com
The Kathmandu Chorale turns 35

“A collective friendship built upon the love of music and globalisation at its best.”

Every Monday evening for the past three decades or more, music lovers from across the Valley gather at a Dhobi Ghat school to practice Western choral music. It is a weekly highlight for singers like American psychiatrist Nadine Rogers.

She says: “Whatever has happened during the day, no matter how tired I am, when I go to choir it lifts my spirits. Creating something beautiful together with others can be a transcendent experience.”

The Kathmandu Chorale turns 35 this year, having revolutions, strikes, blockades, blackouts and even the occasional grenade nearly to hold weekly practice and twice-yearly concerts.

When Karen Messerschmidt (pictured above, right) invited a small group of singers to her house in Patan in 1982, she may not have imagined that the choir would go on for so long. “Our home was the only place I knew of with a good piano as I had brought a small upright with me,” recalls Karen about the early days when it was just her husband and United Mission to Nepal staff.

Each year brought in new members, including Europeans with their grand traditional music background and the ability to sight-read most everything. The choir at first accompanied a concert pianist, Cynthia Hale, a UMN doctor based at Am Pipped hospital in Gorakhi who moved to Kathmandu in 1982. Soon the home became too small. St Mary’s from St Xavier’s School and artist Una Singh. Bangel helped to find venues to practice and perform. Rehearsals took place at Lincoln School, The British Library and even at the British Embassy. The concert was held at St Mary’s auditorium.

One early challenge was that some members were stationed outside of Kathmandu, and Karen’s solution was to tape everyone’s part with the help of an audio technician from the French embassy, while she banged on the piano their part over a recording in the background.

The choir took a mix of classics to Kathmandu, including Mozart’s Requiem, Handel’s Messiah and Robert Shaw’s American folk songs. Karen was followed by 15 conductors one of whom was Dutch musician Annette Donker. When she slipped in the bathroom after promising to replace Norma Kohlsberg as conductor in 1994 and broke both wrists she found a creative solution: a tuning fork to tap the beat with one plastered hand on the other.

Another long term conductor was Americans Bryan Varekamp whose program included Beatles medleys and popular music, which attracted many young singers. Lincoln School teacher Katie Lennon replaced him in 2011 and this month travels back to Nepal to perform a Christmas song with the chorale.

US music teacher Iris Kohlidelzko over from Hannah Doreen earlier this year. The 35th anniversary concert on Saturday 9 December will be her first conductor role in Nepal. “I feel grateful to lead such a well-established group,” she says.

Much has changed since 1982, but many things remain the same: the members pay a membership fee for expenses during and during the free concerts, donations are collected for charities. Members are an eclectic mix from various nationalities and backgrounds. Expect get a taste of home, and the choir introduces Nepali singers to Western choral music.

Says Nadine Rogers, whose composition Winter Hymns will be premiered on Saturday’s concert: “The chorale is an amazing opportunity for people from across the globe. It is a collective friendship built upon the love of music and globalisation at its best.”

Lucia de Vries

The Kathmandu Chorale
35th Anniversary Concert
Saturday 9 December - 2:30pm and 6pm
KSC (Junctosala) (new location)
Bullet to ballot

After 21 years of war and wilderness Nepal finally looks to future stability by holding three elections in one year

SAN'NA GAHA MAGAR

When the Maoists launched their armed struggle to topple the Nepali state in February 1996, the country had just reclaimed democracy from an autocratic monarchy. What followed was a decade of bloodshed, and another decade of turbulent transition to a federal and secular republic.

This week, Nepal has finally ended its painfully protracted political transition by holding the last phase of parliamentary and provincial elections. Earlier this year, the first local government elections since 1997 were also held.

Nepal’s political rollercoaster actually began during the conflict when a group of mainstream parliamentary parties and the underground Maoists joined hands in New Delhi to launch a non-violent pro-democracy movement in November 2003. The street protests escalated and what the Maoists couldn’t achieve with ten years of war and 17,000 deaths, was attained in 19 days of a relatively peaceful people’s movement.

But in Nepal, fighting for democracy has always been easier than making it work. A ceasefire came into effect, an interim constitution paved the way for elections and the first Constituent Assembly (CA) voted to abolish the monarchy in 2008. But the CA soon got bogged down in a polarised debate about the kind of federalism. When the second CA finally promulgated the new Constitution in September 2015, Nepal was one step closer to ending its transition.

Today, there is disagreement about whether the transition began after the abolition of the monarchy, or much longer ago – after the fall of the Rana oligarchy in 1990 (See Editorial, page 2).

As two communist parties that have forged an electoral alliance and aim to unify themselves after polls are expected to win a majority, the hope of most Nepal is foremost for stability, a prerequisite for development and growth (See pages 10-11).

Two Tarai-centric parties were left out of the Constitution writing process and they are yet to own this document wholeheartedly. They were threatening to disrupt elections in the plains until a few months ago. But they eventually took part not just in local but also parliamentary and provincial elections, which is a positive signal for a more stable future. However, there are still many unknowns. The main leaders of the parties are the same ones who stoked the flames of instability in the past, and there are still lots of issues to sort out about the new provinces. And then there are regional geopolitics, and the competing interests of India and China.

A decade after the end of their war, the Maoists have become a part of the system they wanted to overthrow. The federal Parliament for which Nepal has voted last week and this week may have devolved some of its power to provincial assemblies, but it is still the same bourgeois system entwined with rebel despots.

The United People’s Front, the political wing of the Maoists, has emerged as the third-largest party in the first parliament under the new Constitution in 1993 with more than 350,000 votes. Three years later, when the mid-term election was held, they did not win a single seat, and only 100,000 votes. That electoral loss drove the Maoists to wage an armed struggle against the state, and they dragged the country into war. They had to come back to an absolute ideology as a crafty way to justify the violence. A radical fringe of the Maoists still doesn’t believe in parliamentary democracy and tried to disrupt this year’s elections with violence.

Aside from these challenges, it is safe to assume that come January Nepal will enter a new age. Hopefully, stability will improve governance, encourage investment and allow Nepal to finally take a leap forward.
SHREESANA SHRESTHA

More than 4.4 million Nepalis have left the country for foreign employment since the war ended in 2006. Those who stayed back have waited most of their lives for stable politics to create jobs at home. As voting finally ended on Thursday for three tiers of government under a new constitution, the fervent hope of most Nepalis is for a stable government to guarantee economic growth. However, there is dismay that the same old politicians may be elected again so that they can misbehave like they always have.

Nepali Times interviewed a cross section of voters about what they hope from newly elected leaders, and how the new Parliament should conduct itself.

SAURABH JYOTI

Businessman

The peaceful entrance of Maoists into multiparty democracy was a great achievement of our peace process. Now we see in the final phase of the transition. With these elections I am very hopeful there will be political stability because we will have a government at least for five years. Power will also be decentralised to provincial governments. I hope this will lead to more even development throughout the country.

GOVINDA K C

Surgeon, Teaching Hospital

To be very honest I don’t think there will be a drastic change in the country after the elections because we are going to have the same faces that we had for many years. The leaders who betrayed the people will continue to serve in the government. The chances of having new faces in Parliament are very slim. But we know how to make the irresponsible leaders responsible towards the people and the country. We will do it.

PANWAMA SHRESTHA

General Manager Nepal, Ethihad Airways

I am very excited about the provincial and parliamentary elections. I believe the formation of a new Parliament will bring more stability to the country. We can see the new voices and parties with strong determination and commitment. This will help other leaders to be more accountable and responsible. When we have a responsible new government we can actually focus on infrastructure development and tourism development.

OM ASTHA RAI

After the last phase of elections to three levels of government under the new Constitution on Thursday, the question on most voters’ minds is to whom it is in the new government structure can ensure political stability.

The Election Commission hopes to wrap up vote counting in just over a week, and we will know whether the Left Block or Democratic Alliance has a higher combined score. Whoever wins, the new government will be keenly watched to see if it behaves any differently from the political cartel of the past, whether Kathmandu will really devolve power, and if that sets Nepal on a path to development, job creation and prosperity.

A lot will depend on what kind of majority the winning alliance gets, whether it will bring the same old politicians into government, how intense the inter- and intra-party rivalry will be in the coming years, and of course how much geopolitics will play a part in making and breaking coalitions.

Nepal has endured an excruciatingly long constitutional transition to a federal, secular and democratic republic by voting for central, provincial and local governments. But that may not necessarily translate into political stability.

The Left Alliance of the UML and the Maoists has promised a stable government for at least five coming years if it wins. It certainly has an edge over the Democratic Alliance led by the NC, and is likely to get a majority.

According to the new Constitution, the opposition cannot bring down the government through a no-confidence vote for at least two years. And if that motion fails, another no-confidence proposal cannot be tabled for a year. This provision was inserted into the new Constitution to ensure political stability.

But Bipin Adhikari, an expert
of uncertain stability

on constitutional law, says that useful as it may be, the rule may not guarantee stability: “It is just a constitutional experiment, and we are yet to see whether it works in our favour.”

Adhikari says the grounds on which ideologically opposed political parties have merged, electoral alliances are very shaky, and these coalitions could collapse at any time. “Theoretically, we have found a remedy for our perennial political instability,” he explains, “but practically, it is still difficult.”

If a single party fails to win a majority, and forms the government with the backing of one or two other parties, governments will still be fragile. The Constitution restricts the opposition from registering a no-confidence vote for two years, but does not bar coalition partners from pulling out.

Nepal has been ruled by a triumvirate of three main parties and a plethora of fit-up parties, and the possibility of a single party winning is slim. The UML and the Maoists have said they will contest the elections but they may change their minds if they do not get the desired results jointly and separately.

Indu Shukla Mishra, a professor of political science in Birgunj, says: “If the Maoists could ditch the UML to lead the new government with the NC’s support in the past, they can do the same again. They may just be biding their time for a more lucrative deal.”

Mishra sees little chance of stability because the political leaders are the same greedy ones whose shortsightedness was the underlying cause of instability in the past.

New PM: who, when and how?

Vote counting may be over in a week, but the process of forming a new government will start only when the new Parliament gets full shape in January.

The Election Commission (EC) will finish counting votes under the First Past the Post (FPTP) system by 16 December, and the Proportional Representation (PR) votes by 14 December. But the EC will require at least three more weeks to proportionately divide PR votes and discloses a list of nominated MPs, ensuring 33% participation women and inclusion of ethnic clusters like Madhesi, Dalit, Janajati and Tharu.

Only then can the process of forming the new federal government be initiated. “No matter how fast we work, the new government is possible only in January,” says NC spokesperson Surya Prasad Adhikari.

If a party wins an absolute majority, its parliamentary leader will be appointed as the new Prime Minister by the President during or soon after the first meeting of the federal parliament, probably in the first week of January. If no party wins a majority, the process could drag on till the end-January.

If no party secures over 50% of the 275 seats in Parliament, an MP, not necessarily from the largest party, can claim to be Prime Minister but will need to prove support from a majority of MPs from two or more parties. In such a case, the opportunity will go to the parliamentary leader of the largest party who also needs to show a majority in 30 days.

If the Left Alliance wins a majority, it will probably choose UML Chair KP Oli as the new Prime Minister. Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal will likely be nominated for President or be given a chance to lead the unified communist party.

If the Democratic Alliance wins, NC President Sher Bahadur Deuba will be Prime Minister for a fifth time. NC leaders Ram Chamra Pandey and Shashank Koirala have also expressed interest in leading the government, but they are unlikely to beat Deuba.

Which means whatever the winning configuration, the personalities in government will be the same people we have seen for the past 27 years.

leaders responsible”

PRITHU BASKOTA
Cricketer, Nepal National Team

These provincial and parliamentary elections carry historical importance. I am hopeful that they will bring political stability. A stable government and a new Parliament will pave a way for overall development of our country, mainly in the service sector. In addition to this, I believe that the implementation of federalism will bring positive changes in delivery of services throughout the country.

PRASHRAYA RATNA TULADHAR
Creative Director, Ads Market

This is the fourth time I am casting my vote, but I have yet to see any significant change in the country. After this election we will have a new parliament and I am hopeful that this will bring a stable government with opportunities for business and for everyone in the country. Nepal’s young people will not have to migrate for work if there is a stable government.

DEEPPENDRA TONDON
Director, Business Advantage

With this election I hope that the instability that has plagued the development of Nepal for the last couple of decades is finally put behind us. I believe now the political agenda and issues will take a back seat, and we can actually concentrate on a more stable government which will lead to more economic growth and the development of Nepal.

ANGEL LAMA
Activist LGBT rights

We will soon have a new Parliament, and hopefully it means stable government that paves the way for development. There will be new gates opening for the LGBT community as well.

nepaltimes.com
Can a little want, big things can, a little effort makes a great change of the world, Nepal and their future.
Stranger Things Season 2

Like my past column on the first season of Stranger Things which came out in July of last year, on Netflix, a streaming service now available in Nepal, I will not be summarizing the rather complicated, multi-threaded plot of this wonderful new series. This is because the real charm of Stranger Things, in both seasons, is the ability of the directors, the Duffer Brothers, to create an absolutely nostalgic inducing recreation of what it was like to grow up in the 1980s, in suburbia, with the BMX bikes, the 80s synth music, the video game booths, and all that was so great about that time. Including the Spielberg films that this series backs back to, mixed in with a healthy dose of the uneasy and bizarre, and a combination of both science and horror and wonder that caught even the adults, but mostly the children, in a thrilling, chilling time for cinema.

Luckily, while the Duffers (a nickname name, great talent) are great at recreation and emulation, they are also able to take a genre approach and transcend it, introducing characters that are archetypal but also deeply original, in both personality and humour, making for a great ensemble cast that practically runs with these odd stories, so much so that we can feel their pain at working with some of the richest source material around on television today.

Stranger Things’ second season comes back once again to the fictional town of Hawkins, Indiana. This small, tightly knit town was torn apart in the first season by the mysterious appearance of one strange little girl, and the disappearance of a few other children who went missing under deeply disturbing circumstances that are designed to break out even the most cynical of adults, so chilling is the hinted at but yet unseen.

Suffice to say that Hawkins has a little crew of the bravest, cutest kids ever, who band together to save their missing friend, defend the odd little girl, and save their town from a savage, completely unethical science experiment that is being conducted on their pets, unknown to most and hidden by the few town officials who don’t quite understand the vicious intent behind the people who are so keen to experiment on children, and, of course, harness a power they do not understand.

If all this sounds ‘just too vague’, I will cop to it but it is done on purpose to save the potential audience from anything that might spoil or ruin your expectations before you reach into and get addicted to the absolutely magical space created by this series. The first season was prodigiously great; the second season is pure pleasure because we finally have the time to get to know our characters better, even as creepy things start to stir.

Winona Ryder, almost the only star among a cast of fairly unknowns, anchors this film in her comeback as a moody, creating the 80s ethos so precious to us and the Duffer Brothers, her ethereal but earthy air (the same) that made so many others into smash hits. That aura that Ryder brings defines this film and amasing to the eyes and to the psyche shows that has blissfully now been renewed for a third season. Miss it at your own peril.

Watch trailer online

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Sophia Pande

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ON GUARD: A soldier patrolling the streets of Kathmandu early on election day Thursday.

DUSTY DAY: A man sweeps an alley near Baglamukhi temple on the morning of the elections.

BOOKWORMS: Election day may mean school is off, but that does not mean they get a holiday. Sisters Dipa, 14, and Dipa Shrestha, 10, work on their English homework in Kathmandu on Thursday.

HAPPENINGS

ALMIGHTY: A woman prays at the temple of Ganesha (the god of good fortune) at Patan Dhoka on the morning of the elections on Thursday.

YOUNG HELP: As schools remained closed, a young girl helps her family sell gewanmai on the election day.
Election Day on social media

Gapphu Chhetri on Twitter
I watched this matter after she cast her ballot in Pokhara as she played over the ballot box. I was overwhelmed. She must have played that this party she voted for would help the next generation.

Rabindra Mishra on Facebook
Received blessings from my entire family this morning. The journey to change the country will start again tomorrow.

Bimalendra Nidhi on Twitter
I have voted for your rights as your own representative. This election will address the people’s aspiration for peace and prosperity.

Prakash Lohani on Facebook
Proud to have voted in the first of first in a like manner other than those of the country. The election is about changing the country.

Gagan Thapa on Facebook
My political resolve is to lead our party to victory. I endorse the vote to them.

Kamal Thapa on Twitter
Took my grand daughter with me to the polling station. Declaring my vote to the bright future of her generation.

Hari Bansa Acharya on Facebook
There are rules about who wins and who loses. This time, it should be the country rather than a party or its leader that is a winner. Nepal’s new Parliament and government under the new Constitution after a decade of struggle, the road ahead must be one of stability, prosperity and development. No one will lose. Everyone will win. The party, the country, the people. I cast my vote. Did you?
Although the daily average for air pollution throughout the week was in the “Unhealthy” red band, a 20% drop was registered on 7 December at 7AM due to a ban on vehicular traffic on Election Day. This shows the contribution of car exhaust on the Air Quality Index of Kathmandu Valley. The weekly average also dropped slightly because of the early morning drizzle on Tuesday. This weekly roundup of air quality is based on measurements of the US Embassy’s monitoring station at Phora Durbar.

https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/
Nepal hosts Asia for Animals

2-5 December 2017 | Kathmandu, Nepal

HUMANS FOR ANIMALS: Singla Sapotla of the Jane Goodall Institute (left), Andrew Rowan of the Humane Society, Alex Meyers from Orinkey Sanctuary and Taiwanese activist Chu Teng-Hung at a panel (left to right, above) conservationmemorablisto right, speaks at the plenary of the Asia for Animals conference in Kathmandu on an art mandala.

The theme for this year’s conference was ‘Changing Human Behaviour’, and indeed that was seen as the key to caring for animals in a meaningful way. Experts emphasised educating local communities across Asia on scientific and humane methods to interact with animals.

Indian environmentalist and historian Nancthi Krishnas said: “You cannot succeed by just issuing laws. The only way we can change human behaviour is by going to village by village and talking.”

Praduma Shah of Animal Nepal highlighted how Lalitpur and Kathmandu municipalities have slowly changed their attitude towards ‘stay’ dogs and instead of poisoning them are now supporting campaigns to spay and treat street canines.

Indeed, Kathmandu has made dramatic strides in reducing the population of its street dogs and also their mistreatment. Volunteer groups have established ‘mobile vet’ units and involved local communities to monitor canine welfare. As a result fewer injured animals are coming in from road accidents and infections.

‘What we want is a cruelty-free society. It is innate in our culture,’ said Shah. “I am positive, in this day and age that Nepal is a progressive planet.’

Nepal’s animal rights movement scored a major victory just days before the conference with a Supreme Court ban on culling street dogs, as well as the use of pest control dog populations.

Efforts to stop illegal wildlife trafficking were also discussed at the conference, with Balak Ram Thapa from the Government of Nepal citing the arrest in October of six persons smuggling chimp paws and exotic birds through Tribhuvan International Airport.

Make no mistake,” Thapa said of the incident. “The criminals will be in jail for 26 years.”

Andrew Rowan, executive director of the Humane Society of the United States, said that although animal welfare in Nepal has improved there is still much more work to be done. He says that animal groups in Nepal should be working more closely together, and under the backing of standardised government law.

“THERE are many drafts of laws being made today, but the next step is to pass them,” said Rowan.

The conference ended with a field trip to Wednesday to Chitwan National Park, in Nepal’s conservation success story which has rescued the Royal Bengal Tiger and the Asian One-horned Rhinoceros from the brink of extinction.

Ryan Chang

Johan Reinhard gets Hillary Medal

This year’s Sir Edmund Hillary Mountain Legacy Medal has gone to Johan Reinhard, an Explorer in Residence at the National Geographic Society, and world-acclaimed explorer and anthropologist who has done important work on the Incas in Peru as well as in the sacred ‘brow’ valleys of Tibetan Buddhism in Nepal.

The medal will be conferred to Reinhard on 11 December in Pokhara Mountain Museum to coincide with International Day of Mountain. He has also returned to Nepal to continue his earlier research into hunter-gatherer groups.

In 2003 the Sir Edmund Hillary Mountain Legacy Medal was initiated by unanimous resolution of the Mountaineering Conference Parks, People and Mountain Tourism. The Hillary Medal both recognises Sir Edmund’s life-long commitment to the welfare of mountain people and their environment and also encourages the continuing emulation of his example. It is awarded ‘for remarkable service in the conservation of culture and nature in mountainous regions’.

Reinhard is a Senior Fellow at The Mountain Institute. He is also the discoverer in 1995 of the Incan Ice Maiden, a frozen woman on Peru’s Mt Ausangate. In the 1980s he directed the first underwater archaeological project in Lake Titicaca. His expeditions in the Andes have led to the discovery of over a dozen Incan human sacrifices on five mountains, including three on Argentina’s Mount Llullallilaco, the world’s third highest archaeological site at 6,000m in 1999.

His investigations have led him to present theories to explain the mystery of the Nazca Lintos, the giant desert drawings, pre-Hispanic ceremonial sites built on Andean mountain summits, and the ancient ceremonial centers of Machu Picchu, Cuzco, and Tiwanacu. He has more than 650 publications, including six books, and his research has been featured in a number of television documentaries. His work has been distinguished with several awards, including the Reno Award for Enterprises, the Puma de Oro (Silver’s highest award in the field of archaeology), and the Explorers Medal of the Explorers Club, while Outside magazine selected him as one of the 25 most extraordinary explorers and the Ford Motor Company chose him as one of 12 “Heroes for the Planet.”
Finally, something not about elections

We expect most royal leaders and loyal readers of this paper to be suffering from EPS's Election Fatigue Syndrome which is why the Ass will not mention anything to do with elections for the duration of this week's column. Maybe next week, but can't promise.

As you all know by now, this was a week that we learnt of the devastating news that evolutionary biologist at the State University of New York at Buffalo declared that the Yeti does not exist. After detailed DNA analysis of the genome sequence of the fur, uniformed hair and toe-nails from Yeti body parts from monasteries in the Himalayas they found the tissue samples belonged to three species of bears and a Tibetan mastiff, but not the Yeti, Nyet.

This is indeed terrible news for Nepal's tourism industry, which has always reaped benedictions from the aura surrounding the existence of the beast. It was the Yeti legend that preserved Nepal's mystique in the outside world and ferried tourists to our country. We even honoured it by naming an airline, a development bank, a casino, a luxury hotel, and a vacuum insulated mug the Abominable Snowman.

To add insult to injury, the announcement about the non-existence of the Yeti was made while an international conference was taking place in Kathmandu this week of Asia for Animals at (where else?) the Yak & Yeti Hotel.

It is clear the international community is not going to lift a finger to help Nepal to restore the Yeti's existentialism, in fact countries with their own hypothetical animals like the Loch Ness Monster, Bigfoot or Sasquatch may have a vested interest in deceiving there are no Yeti in Nepal so that their own tourism sectors will reap the benefit.

Nepal cannot take this international conspiracy lying down. We should be standing upright on our hind legs. It is incumbent upon higher up authoritarians in GONs to take this matter up forthwith with the agency it deserves. We should immediately call a national strike and shut down the country. We should advise all our embassies abroad to get our Ambassadors and High Commissioners to denounce Yeti outflanks and host press conferences. We should fire off a few IGMs in the general direction of Guam. We should declare 2018 as the International Year of the Yeti and convene an international conference in Tebochho titled "Yes, The Yeti is Alive and Kicking."

Celebrities who believe in the existence of the Yeti, like Reeholz Messer and (pathetically via Skype) George Mallory, should be invited to give keynote speeches. What many people do not know is that Mallory was misquoted when he answered the question "Why do you want to climb Mt Everest?" In actual fact, the question was "Why do you keep looking for the Yeti?" To which his answer was the now famous line: "Because it is there."

Nepal should allow international scientific expeditions to look for the Yeti, and even subsidise them with tax payer's money. These expeditions should sign MoUs putting them under contractual obligations to find just enough evidence that the yel exists, without actually finding a specimen of the said animal. We want to keep looking for the Yeti, but we don't ever want to find him and be ber.

The Ass