The current post-political transition transition in Nepali politics is not due to President Bidya Devi Bhandari sitting on an ordinance, or the Nepal Congress insisting that it get more seats in the Upper House.

What is actually holding things up is uncertainty over the announced merger between the UML and the Māstāṭa. Whether they unite and how well, in large measure, determine the outcome of Nepal’s politics in 2018 and beyond.

After their Left Alliance scored a better-than-expected win in this year’s elections, the two party leaders K P Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal have been regarding each other with suspicion. Oli was a revolutionary who used violence as a political weapon in the Japa Uprising of the 1960s – long before Dahal launched his armed struggle in the 1990s. It would be a stretch to label either of them ‘communist’ today, but both have suspicion, intrigue and conspiracy in their DNA.

Which is why in the past week, they have been fliriting with the two largest Machine-based parties, threatening to go it alone. While the Māstāṭa have kept quiet on the President, the UML has persuaded her from behind the scenes to put the ordinance in the bottom drawer.

The UML’s strategy is to buy time to work on party unity by measuring the Māstāṭa that it is desirable, and shore up geopolitical support with the big neighbours to the north and south. Oli and Dahal finally met on Wednesday, climbed the air somewhat, and instructed their unification task force to begin work.

But progress will depend on how much trust Oli and Dahal can build on power-sharing. The two have decided to rotate the prime ministership, but the crucial bargaining is over who will chair the merged party. Dahal would deeply like to, but Oli knows he will have a UML minority in his band if he lets that happen. The other options under discussion are: taking turns chairing the joint party, co-chairing the party, or a joint coalition leading the party.

Meanwhile, confusion reigns over the powers of the new provincial assemblies, where their capitals should be, and where they should be housed.

For many, the bargaining for power in the merged communist parties and the wrangling in the provinces is a sign of things to come, and what lies in store for Nepali politics in the now-year.
NEPAL’S #1 EXPORT: PEOPLE

There is one aspect of Nepal’s socio-economic condition that touches almost every aspect of life just about everywhere. A Nepal family today, it is migration. There is no other more dominating indictment of governance failures and criminal neglect over the last 25 years. This is a flagrant abdication by the political leadership of its primary responsibility of protecting its citizens.

Human beings have historically been Nepal’s Number One export. Substandard farmers fled indebtedness during the last two centuries to settle in Assam, Darjeeling and Bihar. And young Nepali men started being recruited into British Gurkha regiments even before the Anglo-Nepal War ended in 1816, a process that continues to this day. Then there were the hundreds of thousands of young Nepali women trafficked first into India and now to the Gulf countries, duped into prostitution and abused by employers.

Ironically it has been since the restoration of democracy in 1990 that the export of manpower to the Gulf and South Asian countries took off—largely because recruiters had political patronage and subsidized the relocation of the porters with a cut of the profits they made from fleecing young Nepalis.

More than 4 million Nepalis went abroad in search of work last 26 years, nearly all of them paid a hefty fee to manpower middlemen. And this number does not even include the unknown millions who have migrated to India seasonally for work.

The most searing condemnation of the inactivity and disinterest of the Nepali government to guarantee safe migration is Amnesty International’s report released earlier this year, Turning People into Profits: Abusive Recruitment, Trafficking and Forced Labour of Nepali Migrant Workers.

Every page of this report is a stinging account of state collusion in directly debasing its own people, it should outrage us.

This month Amnesty published the results of its survey of Nepali migrant workers that revealed 88% of them were forced to pay prohibitive high fees to recruiters to get them jobs overseas, and most were violently robbed as a result. Amnesty said such “country-wide exploitation... was flourishing under an often indifferent government.” That is being polite: It is flourishing under greedy governments that have sucked the blood of citizens in direct partnership with middlemen, consigning many to a life of debt bondage.

We carry a report this week on the exponential rise in the number of Nepali migrants in Japan who use loopholes left open to source cheap labour. Nepalis pay recruiters exorbitant amounts to fix them up with student visas, which is actually for employment. Even a Japan government scheme for trainees is used by middlemen to sell visas. 

After decades of actively encouraging its young men and women to leave for work abroad because it absolved the government from ensuring self-reliance and growth to create jobs at home, 2018 should be when a new federal government under a new, inclusive Constitution starts creating conditions for Nepalis to work and live in Nepal. The $6.1 billion Nepalis are supposed to have earned from overseas remittance goes mostly into food and education for families left behind. It pays for the country’s imports — mainly petroleum, and now electricity. We are paying for oil with our sweat.

ONLINE PACKAGES

NEPAL IN JAPAN

Nepalis are negligible in Japan’s sprawling immigrant magnate. A new generation of young and educated migrant workers has sensibly abandoned the one positive image of Nepal among the Japanese. Worldwide it has a new influx of migrants and the families has brought new challenges.

Check out page 14/15.

TO BEAN OR NOT TO BEAN

Coffee beans with premium single origin labels is creating waves among coffee lovers around the world, thanks to the demand for the best Arabica coffee. It is finding niche from places like the emotions of the Arab coffee roasters we explored the practices and standards of the coffee.

Check out page 9.

WHAT’S TRENDING

Dancing to freedom by Spenning Shah

Loud music is the fuel for these bears using performance bears to make a living being bumbled in 1973. The Mumbai show that these bears have been rescued from their owners last week in Gaur. They may be in a much better place you can still go out and view the rescue of these bears that captivate.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Put back what you pour out by Suneet Mehta

Kathmandu Valley water table is falling fast as demand for water increased. But Suneet Mehta and Standard Oil of New York think that it is not too late. The story will be read and shared on social media.

State of confusion?

In a democracy, people are sometimes laden by pay to influence decision makers and even media. In Kathmandu, people still blame an election, emails and a tip-off to do what is for their good but heritage preservation. Indian rural news was not the news of the hour.

Most commented

On Queen’s pond

If you think that the Queen’s pond is a bed of gold, you are dead wrong. But London Fashion Week needed a coffee shop. We will build it. Mary Beard, Suneet Mehta. We need to find out what made the Queen’s pond sit so long.

Most visited online page

QUOTE

We’s the tidings of America’s people, the tidings of the people. The people of America, the people of the free world. The people of the world who are free.

—Charles B. Schenck (1880-1919)

TWEETS

Neal Times @NealTimes

EDITORIAL: Who wake down thought a Never-ending Graffiti and wake to work in the early morning? http://Neal.com/photos/2017/01/05/never-ending-graffiti/

Umesh Apa @UmeshApa

Kathmandu is a newsworthy mayor to the people. I hate to say this, it is not that you are a hero. It is the people who think your work is important. My heart goes out to you.

Himanshu Iranian @Dhondh

The separation between ethnicity and identity is a difficult line to cross. Everyone is entitled to be who they are and live where they want in Nepal. I am proud of my roots, but the line has to be drawn somewhere. It is important to remember that.

Garima Halla @GarimaHall1

I am a little confused because I am not sure who to follow. I could follow some of the most influential and inspiring people in the world. Today I am a woman of many talents.

The Kathmandu Mayor’s resignation announcement last week took a turn for the worse. But it’s not that I wasn’t prepared for it. It’s just that I wasn’t prepared.

Weekly internet #1: Neal Times

Weekly internet #1: With just the current overwhelming of the internet is that is the political climate.

Total votes: 132

Unpopular

1 Upvoted by 2

Weekly internet #2: Neal Times

Weekly internet #2: With just the current overwhelming of the internet is that is the political climate.

Will have more political influence than this?

Total votes: 237

Unpopular

1 Upvoted by 2

Weekly internet #3: Neal Times

Weekly internet #3: With just the current overwhelming of the internet is that is the political climate.

We will have more political influence than this?

Total votes: 237

Unpopular

1 Upvoted by 2

Weekly internet #4: Neal Times

Weekly internet #4: With just the current overwhelming of the internet is that is the political climate.

We will have more political influence than this?

Total votes: 237

Unpopular

1 Upvoted by 2

Weekly internet #5: Neal Times

Weekly internet #5: With just the current overwhelming of the internet is that is the political climate.

We will have more political influence than this?

Total votes: 237

Unpopular

1 Upvoted by 2

Weekly internet #6: Neal Times

Weekly internet #6: With just the current overwhelming of the internet is that is the political climate.

We will have more political influence than this?

Total votes: 237

Unpopular

1 Upvoted by 2

Weekly internet #7: Neal Times

Weekly internet #7: With just the current overwhelming of the internet is that is the political climate.

We will have more political influence than this?

Total votes: 237

Unpopular

1 Upvoted by 2

Weekly internet #8: Neal Times

Weekly internet #8: With just the current overwhelming of the internet is that is the political climate.
NEW YEAR
NEW DISCOVERIES

MAY YOUR NEW YEAR BE FILLED WITH NEW SIGHTS, NEW TASTES, NEW SOUNDS AND NEW FEELINGS TO DISCOVER.
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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER
A stable Nepal in 2018?

But parliamentary elections under a fairly good Constitution alone will not bring about stability

The elections to National Parliament and Federal Assemblies are expected to be a decade of political instability in Nepal as well as a successful transition to democratic politics after the negotiated peace agreement with the insurgent Maoists in 2006.

The election results show that both left parties of the UML and Maoists Centre will be the major stakeholders of the government for the term of new Parliament. Over the past two years, I have been interviewing several political leaders across party lines about the effectiveness of power sharing to create stable political in Nepal. Most leaders in that cohort have been involved in politics much before the insurgency and experienced many changes in Nepal in a relatively short period of time.

In November 2006, the Maoists and the Seven Party Alliance came to the negotiating table in New Delhi for difference reasons. However, the talks themselves created an atmosphere of trust and ambition for both which meant there were inherent flaws in the three important peace initiatives: the 12-Point understanding in New Delhi, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Interim Constitution. These flaws influenced inter-party dynamics and pushed the subsequent peace process towards mistrust and instability.

The subsequent rise of identity groups led to an increase in new actors in the political arena, and this participation led to an increase in demands for more inclusion. The main mechanism to include the groups was the Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system. This was a good tool to include identity groups even though it may have been tokenism. Still, there was a need to adjust the methods of PR elections, which actually had improved by the time this month’s elections were held. The Election Commission wisely asked the parties to review their lists and submit it to the EC as a closed one, which left little space for parties to manipulate the list after results. The electorate still isn’t aware of the candidates in the PR list, and this may need to be streamlined.

The frequent conflicts in the ideology of the political parties are part of the problem that leaders focus mainly on the current situation and short-term solutions especially at election time. The charge of ideology makes it difficult for the constituents to understand their goals and ambitions which is crucial for their accountability.

Continuous change of alliances, prime ministers and oppositions are indicators of the short term time horizon which makes leaders focus on the current political situation, especially via-wia inclusiveness. The rise to identity groups led to compromises which resulted in making more political participation possible. The Huntington Theory (1968) on political stability implies that if political participation rises the ‘complexity, autonomy, adaptability, and coherence of society’s political institutions must also increase’. In Nepal, political institutions created during and through the peace process have not reached the stage with which they can create political stability. The 2013 Constitution is certainly a milestone, but political parties have yet to institutionalize internal democracy, parliamentary elections under a fairly good Constitution along will not bring about stability.

Yvonne Wiestangt says that a stable democracy with rules of law needs to create incentives to honour limits on the behaviour of the government. The last two elections brought unexpected results, and they were more or less peaceful due to the belief of the pro-political alliance that they would win. If the results this time do not meet the expectations of the leaders, there could still be much instability.

Yvonne Pande is a graduate from US in Conflict Peace and Development.
Towards 700% growth

Federal Nepal is an opportunity to start growing your business in 2018

Many commentators have pointed to the expensive recent elections for seven provincial assemblies, the declarations of seven federal states and the search for potential capitals as money wasted. However, we can also look at it as offering an opportunity for all businesses to attain seven-fold growth. As you read this column,

supermarket chains, branded restaurants, tea and coffee shops, car rentals, hospitals and schools must already be having internal discussions and planning to open franchised outlets in the seven provinces. This also means that franchising 601 classes will be in higher demand and will be part of the new curriculum at all business schools that generate the required human resources for the 700% growth.

Politicians have always stated their desire to decentralise power that was concentrated in Kathmandu. For business, it means an opportunity to really grow, hire, take loans, acquire land and other assets, and make a bigger profit. The objective like standardisation, quality control, digitisation, integration, team building, inspections and management of supply chains will have a whole new meaning to those businesses and will have to hire the people who know how to do them.

The governor of the Rastra Bank has even further and asked all commercial banks to expand branches to all 753 village government offices just as bankers were just beginning to discuss ‘branchless banking.

For national media companies the challenge will be to strike the right balance between local, national and international content. How much autonomy should the seven editors get and how much advertisement and circulation revenue can be raised locally? For many airlines there will be a boom in business as they open new routes as the volume of people travelling between provinces bypassing Kathmandu increases exponentially.

Real estate agents and lawyers who do rent contracts and land sale papers will have to have seven teams on the ground all over Nepal.

For those who have not yet decided to expand their businesses you can be sure that land prices, rent, time to connect power and water lines are all going to go up. Think of all the people you will need to hire. The early bird will get the worm. If you arrive late you may not be hiring the best in the area and may have to pay more to bring people from the ‘outside’. Federal Nepal is an opportunity to grow your business no matter what product or service you sell. For those who love to promote and use local products, there is an opportunity to scale up the manufacture of everything local and Nepali. From Patra dhaka cloth to Lokta paper, all could see huge demands if those governments planned it well.

Nepal’s law says you have to buy Nepali products if the price difference is less than 15% over the import.

Depending on who you believe and who you wish to quote, the estimated cost of establishing the federal governments and local governments and the needed infrastructure is about $8 billion. The operational cost for the first three years will be $1 billion a year. The silver lining, we are told, is that the number of government offices all over Nepal are estimated to go down from 3,500 to just 2,000 as a result of the restructuring. I recall a visit to Nigeria when they were moving the capital to Abuja.

Due to lack of housing for civil servants, many had to share rooms. There was an HIV epidemic in the Nigerian bureaucracy.

If we provide the same level of facilities for the political leadership that we have seen in Kathmandu since Nepal became a republic, the seven chief ministers and their cabinet will need a lot of vehicles, luxury bungalows, and an army of support staff. Some day they will retire and will want free housing. This could be a great opportunity to restore the old palaces, like Shital Niwas, all over Nepal that are in a dilapidated state today. The fort at Sindhuli Gosti, the palace at Gokhha, the governor’s complex at Palpa could all soon have new VIP residents.

Federalism need not be an expensive luxury but a catalyst for growth.

Anil Chitrakar
President of Siddharta Group
Ryan Chang

The blind in Nepal face not only a health disability but also an economic one, however, massage therapists of Seeing Hands Nepal are turning heads—and sees muscles—with their winning model of social entrepreneurship. Consistently ranked #1 among “Things to do in Kathmandu” by TripAdvisor and featured in Lonely Planet, Seeing Hands Nepal is now a self-sustaining venture. Income generated from its first two Kathmandu clinics in Patan and Thamel were used recently to open a third clinic at Bouddha.

Owner of Seeing Hands, Chiran Poudel, says the secret is that blind massage therapists have a heightened sense of touch and can be more focused on the body’s pressure spots: “The eyes cannot see, but the rest of our four other senses are more active.” Seeing Hands started out as a project in 2005 with just four blind students, including Poudel. British couple Bob and Susan Ainsley tutored the students on professional massage techniques and practical therapy.

The clinic visually impaired students straight out of high school to help them find a secure career. Profits from the clinics are pooled into a fund to help new students. Poudel says, “I am happiest when therapists graduate and work at the clinics, because I am reassured that more blind people are getting the jobs they need.”

During the peak season, trekkers with blistered heels and aching muscles seek out Seeing Hands in Thamel. Satisfied customers Lawrence and Katia from Australia were on their way to Everest Base Camp last week and stopped by Seeing Hands before setting out. They found the visually impaired therapists easy to converse with, and shared jokes to ease the tension. Lawrence says, “Everyone is blind but has an incredible demonstration of ability; it’s a good service even though it’s more expensive.” Therapist Ram, who treated the Australian couple, even correctly guessed Lawrence’s weight purely by feeling with his hands. “Some clients don’t even notice that I’m visually impaired,” he says.

Thirteen therapists are now employed in Seeing Hands clinics in Kathmandu, many of them from poor rural backgrounds. They previously worked in vocatinal jobs such as making candles and incense sticks. Having been born blind to a family with 13 siblings, Poudel blames the lack of education in Nepal for the social stigma blind people suffer because they are seen as a burden to family and society. The 2015 Constitutions sets out to end the discrimination, and makes it mandatory to provide facilities and education for people with disabilities, but many new laws and budgetary reforms haven’t been implemented.

Of the estimated 300,000 visually impaired women in Nepal only 134 are employed, according to the Nepal Blind Association. Seeing Hands therapist Lati is from Tanahu and says she enjoys talking with her customers who are from all over the world. “I didn’t have much money before, but my life is changed now,” she adds.

Having previously worked as a disc jockey for a radio station, Lati says a regular source of income means she feels less of a burden to her family. “My mother and father supported me through college, but now I send money back and my parents are very happy for me,” she says.

www.seeinghandsnepal.org
Riding coffee’s Third Wave

Something is brewing in Nepal as the coffee fad morphs into a culture

Coffee connoisseurs are treating the Third Wave of the beverage: moving beyond the coffee-shop culture epitomised by Starbucks to one that values knowledge of the cherries and beans from the plant to the cup, served up via independent cafes. Like craft beers and boutique hotels, specialty coffee is sweeping the world. In Nepal, however, the Nepal Tea and Coffee Development Board continues to label all coffee ‘Himalayan Specialty’ without first doing a proper quality check, which is confusing for consumers and risks leaving local producers shut out of global markets. But an increasing number of growers in Nepal are waking up to smell the coffee.

“I am continuously hunting for the best coffee origins in Nepal,” says Q-grader Nima Tensing Sherpa of Lekhi Coffee Estate, who believes producing Specialty-grade beans is the only future for Nepal’s coffee industry. “The potential is there, but the perspective of farmers towards coffee needs upgrading because they are the first one handling the cherries.”

Nepal’s geographic and climatic conditions are ideal for growing the finest quality coffee beans: shade-grown hills situated between 1,000m and 2,000m with both ample sunlight and rain. Farmers have been quick to recognise the potential of this global beverage: 32,146 of them in 41 districts are now growing coffee.

Producing Specialty-grade coffee starts with selectively picking the red cherries, then storing the green beans away from moisture. Experts like Raj Kumar Bajrangi of Himalayan Arabica Coffee, which has been Specialty-certified, says currently there are weaknesses all along the supply chain.

Bajrangi is Nepal’s first Q-grader, certified by the Specialty Coffee Association of America to rank Specialty Arabica coffee, and says that without more such growers and laboratories to quality test them, Nepal’s coffee will continue struggling for consistency. The effects of climate change have added another complication to that quest.

According to Sanat Raj Thapa, roaster and brewer of Coffee Time: “If the whole process of producing and packaging of Nepali coffee was done with more scientific research and stricter standards, not only international but domestic markets would be able to enjoy its own product.”

This does concede that it will take time for local consumers, used to instant coffee heavy on milk and sugar, to appreciate the Specialty coffee flavour. Coffee culture is still young in Nepal though the country counts more than 1,200 cafes today. Converting the nation of tea devotees to coffee lovers is a major challenge, which would have obvious impact on the tea industry. Another hurdle is making local producers’ coffee a burgeoning black market in lower-quality coffee.
The story of specialty coffee starts at the farm and goes through a lengthy process - watch the journey your beans take to reach your cup.
Friday Happy Hours
Celebrate the last week of 2017 with a boisterous, warm cocktails, delicious mains served by Chef Gail’s Lounge & Bar and a special talk by Yifei Mallmann from Smart Parks.
29 December, 6pm onwards, Naas Community, Pushkar, (91) 5335209

Critical Mass KTM
Cyclo fans get ready for a short ride around the streets of Kathmandu to mark the presence and be a part of global movement of cyclists. 29 December, 5:30pm onwards, Dakshinapur Durbur Square

Circus Kathmandu
A circus show followed by buffet dinner and live music awaits you to treat you the year together.
30 December, 6 to 9pm, Mallick, Jomsonath, KTM. For tickets: 9811113999, 9861713095, Times concept show

Katha Ghera
A nonstop show of traditional and interlaced folk theatre to talk about your life stories, emotions, feelings, and watch them being enacted on the spot.
30 December, 5 to 9pm, HOME Café & Bar, Jomsonath, 9447236059

Jazz Funk and Soul
One Fred and Mike, an instrumental project directed by jazz musician Marcus Dangre, will be playing swing jazz, fusion jazz, Latin and samba from artists like Herb Alpert, Oscar Peterson and John Coltrane along with their original compositions.
30 December, 5pm onwards, Place Restaurant and Bar, Seven Club Nepal, (01) 4499073

Raagmani at Radiisson
Kathmandu sounds at a set to perform at Radiisson Hotel for New Year’s Eve. Free flow of snacks dinner and alcohol for your festive appetites.
31 December, Radisson Hotel, Lamospati, (01) 4411878

SXC Alumini Day
All the Alumini are welcome to reminisce wonderful college moments and catch up with old pals.
30 December, 12pm onwards, St. Xavier College, Main Road, KTM, Rs. 500 (for dinner), (01) 4244816, For registration: sxc.sju@gmail.com

Free Health Camp
Get your general health check done by the doctors for free of the two days camp.
30 and 31 December, 8am to 2pm, Pulchowk Health Care and Diagnostics, Mithila Chowk, For registration: (01) 4663141

Kathmandu

Boksi
101 opens its door for art enthusiasts money full moon.
2 January, 4 to 9pm, Kato. (015) 227867, kunthodra, kato @tmb上百e.com

MISS MOTIVATION
KRIPA JOSHI

Joy is portable. Bring it with you.

The Greatest Showman
An American period musical drama, directed by Michael Gracey, starring Hugh Jackman, Zac Efron, Michelle Williams, Rebecca Ferguson, and Zendaya. Inspired by the story of Barnum & Bailey Circus. Started the film takes the spectators to the mesmerizing world of show business. The songs of the film are produced by Academy Award winners Benj Pasek and Justin Paul (La La Land), and we are certain to take you on a musical trip.

The art of Kathmandu on 5 January

Music and Dining

Yak and Yeti
Dine at the Sunrise Restaurant, overlooking expansive and beautifully landscaped gardens and pools, on the Eve of New Year. 31 December, 5:30 to 10:30pm, Hotel Yak and Yeti, Durbar Marg, (01) 4499959, yakandyeti@yahoo.com

Chez Caroline
Full set of vegetarian and non-vegetarian menu including Truffles in Courchevel at the finest restaurant for your delightful titbits. 29 December to 15 January, Blue Lagoon, Boudhanath, (01) 5036660-99, (01) 4419364, chezcaroline@blueplanet.com.np

Raagmani at Radisson
Kathmandu sounds at a set to perform at Radisson Hotel for New Year’s Eve. Free flow of snacks dinner and alcohol for your festive appetites.
31 December, Radisson Hotel, Lamospati, (01) 4411878

Bajeko Sekuwa
Ordering you barbeque items and live music for New Year’s Eve.
31 December, 5pm onwards, Bhaktapur, 016718840, info@bajeko.com.np

Staying in Peace
The dinner is available at the hotel for New Year’s Eve.
31 December, 6 to 9pm, Kapsele Heights, Rs. 2990, For more details: 9804730772

Air Quality Index

KATHMANDU: 22-23 December

Weather forecast
Kathmandu valley will remain cloudy and rain is likely in some parts of the valley on Monday. Hard frost is likely to be widespread with temperatures dropping to sub-zero levels in some parts.

Greenhouse gases:
CO2: 415.5 ppm, CH4: 1647.0 ppbv, N2O: 321.4 ppbv, O3: 814.0 ppbv, SF6: 1059.2 ppbv, CF4: 781.0 ppbv, PFC: 37.6 ppbv, HCFC: 47.0 ppbv, CFC: 8.5 ppbv

Afghanistan Base Camp
Fly to Annapurna Base Camp or take a heli-tour to Pokhara with Summit Air, a special New Year offer for an extraordinary experience.
29 December to 2 January, 89,999 (perpd), 84,500 (permm), 86,470944, (01) 4155281, info@summitair.com.np

Patalenab Vineyard Resort
Cubitts hosts the hours to 2018 away from the hustle and bustle, with campfire, barbeque and musical poetry performance by Mr. K.Bu, a contemporary folk ensemble band. Chitwan, Rs. 75,000 (per couple), (01) 4276277, 9841670590, www.patalenab.com

Fairfield by Marriott
Audi's gala dinner at Rs. 12,000 (single) and Rs. 15,000 (couple) to make this New Year exciting with a selection of international cuisine. Hosted by Momad, Indira Sadak, (01) 427527

Gokarna Resort
For a full package of New Year’s countdown entertainment, dinner, and drink stay over at the Outpost, Gokarna Home Resort, Birgunj, Rs. 69,999 (single), Rs. 22,999 (double), For more details: (01) 489212

Shoju-La
Enjoy New Year’s Eve at Village Resort in Prithvi. New Year’s Day brunch at The Last Horizon Cafe, Kathmandu — make your choice.
Shoju-La Village Resort, Pokhara Hotel (Shoju-La), Lunch, Rs. 200, For more details: 945299995822272

Rupakot Resort
Chill out and celebrate New Year’s Eve with Kathmandu 94.3 FM at the Rupakot Resort, Chitwan.
Rupakot Resort, NRCP, (01) 2236900, (01) 469027, info@rupakotresort.com

Country Villa
Rise and shine with the beautiful sun after an exciting new year celebration at the hotel.
Hotel Country Villa, Nagarkot, Rs. 15,999 (single), Rs. 11,999 (double). For Reservation: (01) 4700635/7/8/912702866

Om Adhaya Resort
Boasting in Kalikotnath, Manakha, Lame, and fine music at the resort everything you need in a New Year’s retrieval package.
31 December to 2 January, Yolnag, Palong, (01) 4352176/472084570, 9815157328

Events

The dispute over whether to elect the Upper House under the single transferable vote or the majority system has not only de-locked the formation of the federal government in Kathmandu but also the provincial ones here.

Just like in the Centre, the Chief Minister of a state needs to be elected within 30 days after the Election Commission (EC) publishes the final results of provincial polls. But the EC is waiting for the President to verify an ordinance on which the UML has objections.

Even after parties forge a consensus on how to form the Upper House, the formation of federal governments will still not be smooth sailing. Because Nepal has never practiced federal governance before, setting up provincial governments in motion is likely to be punctuated by major bickering.

Unlike in other provinces, there is not much discord over where the provincial capital will be for Province 4. Political parties have almost agreed on Pokhara, despite some mild protest from neighbouring Lekhnath municipality.

Pokhara may be the undisputed capital city of Province 4, but it lacks physical infrastructure for the 60-member state assembly hall, ministries and the Chief Minister’s residence. Although a resolution on turning Nepal into a federal state was passed a decade ago by the Constituent Assembly, no government has ever allocated a budget to build the necessary infrastructure.

“We now have to utilise the buildings constructed for other purposes,” says Laxman Aryal, the Western Regional Administrator – a position that will be turned into provincial Chief Secretary. “Most of these buildings are old and decrepit, but we do not have time and money to renovate them.”

A team headed by Aryal recently examined all government buildings in Pokhara to find out which of them is suitable for Province 4 government departments. The committee has chosen the Town Development Training Centre’s office for the state assembly, and the District Development Committee building for the Chief Minister’s office. The committee has also found out buildings for several ministries, but renovating them could cost up to Rs 280 million.
Here is a list of the year’s best barrowing a slew of films that were yet to be shown (in our part of the world) award contenders traditionally released late in the year to stay in the consciousness for the Academy Awards.

**Best of 2017**

**Star Wars: The Last Jedi**

Hands down the most anticipated movie of the year, this Star Wars film delivers everything required of it plus more: the exciting, adorable wookiee, the speedy robots you wish were your pets, an intriguing conflict between young man who struggles with his power, and a young woman whose courage and spunk seems to know no bounds. Star Wars also surprises break at visual beauty, brought on board by Rian Johnson - an author that pays attention to detail.

**Murder on the Orient Express**

While this may not be a new spin on the classic, recent screen realization of Agatha Christie’s novel murder mystery is a fine thing dressing and narrative strength as ensemble piece, the great British detective. The film, while not as amusing as the other three already mentioned, is still destined to be a classic with its cast including the great Michelle Pfeiffer, Judi Dench, Daisy Ridley (from the new Star Wars trilogy), and Johnny Depp.

**The Handmaid’s Tale**

A ten-part series based on Margaret Atwood’s intense novel from 1985, starring Elisabeth Moss is as good as it gets. Stark in its depictions of a post-apocalyptic world where women are used as breeding cattle, May’s character of Offred, i.e., belonging to Fred, is truly priceless and a woman who defies all imposed regulations to keep herself alive under dehumanizing oppression without ever losing her sense of humour and her sense of self.

Watch trailer online [nepaltimes.com](http://nepaltimes.com)

**Get Out**

Jordan Peele’s comedy-horror about white hypocrisies and the commodification of black skin is a hilarious, terrifying indictment of the way the world still sees and treats people of African descent. This is a great horror movie, and a clear-cut scary comedy - not to be missed.

**Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets**

Luc Besson’s latest sci-fi film is just that - a beautiful, albeit somewhat ambitious, dream.

**Ofelia**

Nettle now produces brilliant and original feature material. But with Ofelia, premiering this year at the Cannes Film Festival, the streaming services hit a new high. The story about a young Korean girl and her pig Ofia, a special giant hipster-dinosaur can eat, is a both a tender story of love between person and pet as well as a scathing criticism of people who think that being human means being at the top of the food chain. This is an essential viewing for anyone who mourns the loss of original material in cinema.

And since the very best this year wasn’t in the cinema:

**Baskin in the Sun**

CPI Maoist Central chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal (left) meets with CPI-UML chair KP Oli to discuss on government formation at the latter’s residence in Balkot on Wednesday.

**Concrete Heritage**

Kathmandu: Metropolis City Mayor Bijay Sundar Shukla inspects Rato Pokhari on Tuesday after heritage conservationists published the gate in the morning protesting the use of concrete in reconstruction. The Dept of Archaeology on Wednesday ordered the reconstruction stopped.

**Key Note**

Koha Nagarkot of JCA Nepal hands over the key to a newly constructed building of the Fulpingrei Nepal Police Office in Kohata to Police Chief of Frontier 4, Assistant Inspector General Kamal Singh Barn on Tuesday.

**Ritual Purification**

Priests perform the annual ritual bathing of Sera Mochhidranath in Janakpur on Tuesday.

**Gardening for Hi-Men**

Pledges unkept

Janardan Baral in Naya Patrika, 26 December

Only 6.5% of the total amount of earthquake relief aid promised during an international pledging conference in Kathmandu in July 2015 has been received. Donors pledged a total of $3.3 billion ($4.5 billion) of which the government has only received $0.28 billion, says the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA).

Of the big donors, the government has only received $0.63 billion from the World Bank, $0.4 billion from Japan, $0.37 billion from International Monetary Fund, $0.28 billion from EU and $0.28 billion from ADB. None of the money promised by 12 countries has come in, although a few of them have signed agreements with the government.

The government is yet to sign an agreement with the Saudi Fund which committed $3 billion, Canada which had pledged $1.5 billion and Sweden which had promised $1 billion. There has not been a follow-up agreement with Austria and Turkey, which also promised help.

According to the NRA, Nepal has signed agreements worth $3.06 billion for reconstruction, which is 75% of the total pledged. But many countries included their regular grants as well as relief in the committed amount, which brings the actual pledged amount to $3.43 billion. To date, only $0.75 billion has been spent on reconstruction.

“They made announcements of generous pledges after the earthquake, but we never heard from them again, we will have to follow-up with them,” says NRA Chief Yubashri Shrestha, who acknowledges that there are spending bottlenecks. Even if Nepal receives all the committed money, there will be a shortfall of $4.5 billion. “We may have to call another donor conference next year to cover the shortfall,” adds Shrestha.

Likewise Norway has released only $0.9 billion of the promised $1.5 billion, Korea Rs 274 million of the announced $1 billion and Switzerland Rs 770 million of the Rs 2.50 billion pledged.
From Chitwan to Chiyoda

The number of Nepalis exploiting immigration loopholes to work in Japan is rising exponentially

KUNDA DIXIT
in TOKYO

The number of Nepalis in Japan has increased ten-fold in the last ten years, and as the number crosses the 70,000 mark Nepal already ranks sixth among countries with the most migrants here.

The recent spurt in influx is the result of a loophole in Japanese immigration law which is prone to abuse, encourages exploitation and human trafficking, and has tarnished the once-positive image of Nepalis among the Japanese.

“The Japanese government doesn’t want to open the main door for unskilled labour migration, so Nepalis are allowed to come in through the back door to fulfill the need for cheap labour to make up for Japan’s shrinking workforce,” explains Manato Tamaki, professor at Tokyo’s Sophia University.

In the ’Cook Era’ of migration in the early 2000s, Nepalis feeling conflict back home flocked to Japan on skilled labour visas that allowed restaurants to hire chefs. The number of undocumented Nepalis has now fallen, but the current “Third Wave” of migration includes Nepalis on student, cook, dependent and trainee visas.

Nepalis prefer Japan because unlike Korea, there is no need to pass a language test, earnings are higher and cooks on skilled labour visas can bring families. Students and dependents are also allowed to work 28 hours a week which can earn them more than $1,000 a month. In some cases, the wives earn even more than their underpaid husbands who are cooks in Indian or Nepali restaurants.

Vietnamese and Nepalis now make up the biggest number serving on student visas, with only 164 in 2003 to 18,000 in 2015 alone (see graph). Japan is now the top foreign destination ahead of even Australia, India and the US for Nepali students. A student visa is not so much about studies but employment, and education consultancies in Kathmandu charge upwards of Rs 1.5 million to fix a visa.

There are now more than 1,500 Nepali restaurants all over Japan (more than the total number of Thai restaurants) and Nepalis are also owners of many of the 4,000 Indian restaurants as well. Each can bring 3-4 cooks, so opening a restaurant has become a lucrative avenue for visa peddlers. A labour recruiter will charge anywhere up to Rs 2 million for a Japanese cook visa.

The Shin-Osaka ward in Tokyo used to be called Little Korea, today it is known as Little Kathmandu. Some 15,000 Nepalis live here, and the streets are lined with Nepali restaurants with names like Nanglo and Aangan. A recent afternoon, students pack the Sakoa Nepali restaurant at lunch time for the all-you-can-eat 500 yen dal bhakti. They eat quickly to go back to class.

Some evenings, it is a different story. Nepali young people have started becoming a nuisance, often arrested for drunken behaviour, vandalism, and harassing women. Japanese law enforcement agencies have even brought in Nepali-speaking police to help local beneficiaries like Shizuka to carry young Nepali troublemakers.

Japanese employers have always preferred Nepalis because of their hard work and honesty, but there is a new generation of Nepali migrants, some of whom are misbehaving and giving the community a bad reputation,” admits Tika Malli of Nepali news portal, Samudratatt.

Dipak Balsak Nepal has been working as a chef at an Indian restaurant and as a cook in a sushi bar, and is so worried about Nepalis’ image that he mobilizes local communities in clean up campaigns not just in Tokyo, but also Chitwan — a process he calls sending “social
NEPALIS IN NUMBERS

The sharpest increase among Nepali migrants in recent years is in the student and dependent visa categories.

Map of Japan (left) showing prefectures with more than 1,000 Nepali migrant workers. The biggest growth is in Okayama, where new migrant workers prefer to land first because of labor shortage from the nuclear crisis. (Caption continued on next page...)

CLIMBING UP IN LIFE: (Left) Illustration (right) shows the growing population of Nepalis in Japan (Up). He has also been the chair at Okayama University, and is working to restore the reputation of Nepal in Japan.

60,000
50,000
40,000
30,000
20,000
10,000
0

Remittances from Japan

2016
2015
2014
2013
2012
2011
2010
2009
2008
2007
2006
2005
2004
2003
2002
2001
2000

Student
Dependent
Skilled labour
Others

RETURNING MY DEBT TO NEPAL

A young Singh who came to Japan in 2011 to support his wife and two daughters back home in Biratnagar in the south of Nepal. After being hospitalised with 19 years in Japan, he came back to Nepal. He couldn’t find a job and had amassed Rs 2.2 million in debt to pay for medical fees, so he returned to Japan.

Nepal: “I couldn’t believe what I was seeing in a nightmare or a reality,” Amruta said this week in Khandahar, where she is waiting for word from the court in Japan on the case of her husband’s death. The Nepal Embassy in Tokyo did not help to save the body to home to Japan, but instead helping them threatened. She was upset for the people who helped her, I would never be able to bring my husband’s ashes back for cremation here. I want no one to get into touch with me.”

Here in Tokyo, Takata told us: “The body was the evidence, we had to prevent it from being cremated, now we are waiting for the final report. Even dead people have human rights.”

Thousands of Nepalese have made it good in Japan, and send money home to take care of families, but there are many horror stories like this. Amruta Topaila and others played a critical role in the trial of Gokads Manik, a bitterly accused of the murder and robbery of a Japanese woman in Tokyo in 1993. Manik spent 15 years in jail in Tokyo, while the justice for Gokads pressure group made up of activists and human rights lawyers pursued the case. (Go online for details)

Togashi and his colleague Arzu Hashmi took turns visiting Manik in jail regularly and praying for him every time, in order to keep his spirits up. Defense lawyers prevented new UNHCR evidence to prove Manik’s innocence in the crime, he was finally released in 2013 and granted compensation.

Manik, now 50, was in Tokyo last month to thank all the people who helped him, and met an international lawyer named Togashi. “My freedom would not have been possible without you. Thank you and promise to dedicate my life to help other Nepali women like me, their families back in Nepal can be saved.”

Asked what makes him devote his life to helping Nepalis in trouble in Japan, Arzu Topaila said: “As a senior guide in Nepal I come to admire the dignity and honesty of the Nepali people, they were always generous and showed respect to strangers like me, I am just returning my debt to Nepal.”

With additional reporting by Soni Anuke
To forget or not to forget

Wartime victims are still bearing the brunt of the conflict. Can provincial government redress for wartime crimes?

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA
KANCHANPUR

Ram Lal Dangopa lost his mother and older brother 15 years ago during the conflict. As a child he carried out the funeral rituals of his mother, but there was no cremation for his brother who was never found.

“I may have carried out the final rites for my brother if we had got justice for his death, but it never came,” said Dangopa, now 27, who lives in Sukhaphanta in the western Terai.

He did not vote in any of the elections this year because he says he has lost faith in politics and any political parties. He reckons nothing can compensate for what he went through.

Local Maoist guerrillas charged his mother with spying for the Army and butchered her in their front courtyard. His brother was disappeared.

However, Dangopa’s wife, Pushpa Chaudhary holds a different view. She voted for the same political party responsible for the murder of her mother-in-law and brother-in-law.

Chaudhary says: “We cannot forget the pain of losing family members, but I voted for the Maoists thinking that they will change and not repeat such deeds and do something for victims like us.”

When asked about the family’s expectation from the new provincial government, she replied: “We need to have jobs and our children need good education to feel the existence of government here.”

Chandra Kedar was just 16 and had two children, one a toddler, when she lost her husband in 2002. A group of Maoists dragged her husband out of the house in Shikhottaka municipality, took him to a nearby river and killed him.

Her life turned upside down. She did not vote for the Maoists in the last elections, but she is ready to accept a Province 7 government led by the Left Alliance of which the Maoists are a part.

Almost 18 years after losing her husband, she is hopeful that the new government will finally provide some relief for her family. She says Maoists are already in the government, so there is no alternative but to accept them.

WAR WIDOW: Pavitra Chaudhary’s husband was killed during the conflict, but his wife’s vote in the new provincial government will address her concerns.

Pavitra Chaudhary was also widowed during the insurgency. She got Rs 1,000,000 compensation from the government, but the pain of bereavement never subsided.

“There is not a single day that I don’t miss my husband. It is impossible to forget him,” says Chaudhary who lives in Sukhaphanta municipality.

Like many other families who suffered during the war, she too wishes that her children have free education and job opportunities after the formation of the new government in Province 7.

Provinces 6 and Province 7 have one of the most war affected districts, with Banka and Bardia also having the highest number of people disappeared by the security forces. Both provincial governments here are likely to be led by the Maoists.

Wartime victims in these provinces don’t have much hope that they will get truth and justice. They just want to be compensated so their lives will be easier, their children get free education and jobs so they do not have to migrate.

Kemal Nirman, That of the human rights group INSEC, Kanchanpur told us: “We have few national bodies to sort out the issue of transitional justice. The provincial government should take it up for faster justice delivery and relief to the victims.”

A member of the Province 7 assembly Tara Lama Tamang is doubtful whether the upcoming provincial government can actually focus on development.

“I am worried that the provincial assembly will not be able to rise above the administrative matters and pay for its cost given its size,” says Tamang of UML, who was elected from Constituency 1 (A) in Kanchanpur.

The provincial assembly in Province 7 will have 53 members, 32 are directly elected and 21 from the PR list. Another assembly member Jagat Bahadur from Arisham says: “The foremost task of the provincial government will be to provide justice to wartime victims by providing jobs for conflict widows and free education for their children. We also need to address jobs and medical treatment.”

However, given that the UML shares power with the Maoists in most provinces of the far west it is not likely that conflict victims and their families will receive truth, justice and compensation any time soon.
Thinking and acting locally
Federal Nepal is an opportunity to start growing your business in 2018

OM ASTHA RAI
in DHARAM

The Centre is yet to decide where to set up temporary headquarters of state governments, but people in Dhanain have already declared their city the capital of Province 3.

The iconic bust of the 19th century Nepali poet Bhanubhakta Acharya at the centre of this sub-metropolitan city that grew as a pension distribution centre for British-Indian Gurkha soldiers is draped in a banner that reads: ‘We welcome you to the capital of Province 3.

Nearly, beneath the Dhanain clock tower which is a replica of the one in Hong Kong’s Kowloon neighbourhood, a group of cross-party political cadres have been staging a sit-in, demanding that their 12-year-old city be officially declared the seat of the Province 1 government.

Aindra Sundar Bhusal, who was a Maoist candidate for mayor in June, sits cross-legged, constantly pruning and soaking every passerby to sign up for solidarity. He says: “Dhanain is the seat of the identity movement of Janajatis, and the federal government needs to respect it.”

Pradip Bhandari, a newly elected State Assembly member, adds: “Sentiment aside, Dhanain has all practical reasons to be the provincial headquarters: from geographical advantage to infrastructure needed for state assemblies, Chief Minister and ministers.”

The locals of Dhanain have been even more aggressive to have their city declared as the Province 1 capital. After carrying out rallies and shutting down the bazaar recently, they sent a delegation to Katmandu to lobby with leaders.

Unnati Ghimire, President of the Dhanain Chamber of Commerce and Industry, says: “Federalism will mean nothing to people living in the remote hills of eastern Nepal if Dhanain is not developed as the provincial capital.”

After Dhanain was chosen as the regional headquarters of the erstwhile Eastern Development Region during the Panchayat, the government invested billions to build nearly 400 office buildings.

Ghimire argues that the investment in infrastructure will be wasted if Dhanain is not chosen as the provincial capital.

Not to be left behind, political as well as business leaders from Bahrani and Birhatgar are also using their political clout to have their own cities declared as the capital of Province 1. Like the selection of the venue for the Olympics, each city has lined its advantages. While Bahrani claims to be on the main junction of Province 1, Birhatgar says it is already developed enough to be the provincial capital.

Kedar Karki, a State Assembly member elected from Morang, says: “If Birhatgar becomes the provincial capital, the Centre does not need to spend a single rupee on infrastructure. We have everything that the Province 1 government requires to function smoothly.”

Under the new Constitution, State Assemblies can decide for themselves where to locate their capitals. The Centre is allowed to choose temporary headquarters, where provincial MPs will be sworn in. However, the fact that citizens are already trying to outmaneuver each other to become provincial capitals signals how provincial politics will play out in 2018.

If 2017 was the year of elections (three phases of local and two phases of provincial parliamentary polls), 2018 is set to be the year of provincial politics where politicians from different parties will be united for common local causes (state headquarters and names) and cadres of a same party will be divided if they come from different cities.

CAPITOL: A banner draped around the statue of poet Bhanubhakta Acharya in Dhanain reads: ‘We Welcome You To The Capital of Province 3.

There are already some hints of what is to come. For example, the UML and NC cadres were at each other’s throats in elections earlier this month. Now, they have buried the hatchet and joined hands to have Dhanain declared as the Province 1 capital.

As Kathmandu looks obsessed about whether UML and Maoists will eventually unite, or who will become the new Prime Minister, people in Province 1 have found their own political drama much more thrilling. In every public sphere, they are discussing who will be their first Chief Minister. Sher Dhan Rai or Bhusal Acharya?

Acharya may be a UML stalwart in this region, but party Chief KP Oli values Rai more for saving their party organisation from falling apart in eastern hills after Ashok Rai formed his own party.

And a majority of directly elected provincial MPs of UML, now loyal to Oli, who will not support Acharya, who is close to Oli’s UML leader Jhal Nath Khanal.

What is now happening in Province 1 is a microcosm of how provincial politics will be played out in the new year multiplied by seven. The outcome will define Nepal’s experiment with federalism.

IN A GAME OF MIND OVER MATTER
WINNER IS THE ONE WHO NEVER GIVES UP.
Gobartan by the people

The Ass cannot fathom why everyone is in a tearing hurry to form a new government. What’s the rush? I am perfectly happy with Lame duck Lion Brave as the Great Holliman. At least with him (as with Trump!) what you see is what you get, whereas with the Lefties you never know what they have up their sleeves.

Sieve governments are prone to making blunders, not having one means we won’t be making any big faux pas (or that already plural?)

Rajendra Khatiwada

During the numerous Christmas parties in the past week, many of you, jum punch in hand, have asked the Ass if the political transition is indeed over. You were also interested to know what was holding up government formation.

My reply, as always when asked rhetorical questions, was: “Let me take your second question first. How should I know, I am an Ass, not an Analyst.”

If I was more sober, my reply may have been: “Actually we are in a transition within a transition while we wait for the party that won to grab defeat from the jaws of victory.” Aside from all that, this is nothing unique to Nepal. Look at Germany, they had elections four months ago and they are still stuck. So, relax, and let’s talk about something else.

No sooner had Comrade Oli had a chat with Comrade Upadhyay of the Fed-up Socialist Party (FSP), than Commandante Awam Nanda’s ancienet was up. That tête-à-tête was followed by a tit-for-tat as the Supreme Opportunists initiated discussions with Rajinder Bhai of the RJP (Bhare).

This is the thing with our revolutionaries — since they are always contemplating enabling class enemies in the back, they think the reactionsaries are also contemptuously contemplating the same thing. What we have with the Left Alliance is a cozy you-shut-my-back-I-shut-yours sort of relationship.

The media then obliged with screaming headlines that the Alliance was in tatters, thus trying to make it a self-fulfilling prophecy, and that this was due to masalization of a certain Uncooked Chieftain who dropped into town on a surprise visit while the Ambassadors were away.

As we go to press, we hear that the top leaders have directed their joint committee to revive re-unification talks. Which means that after a new constitution and three elections in a row, the rule of the game is still: we believe in government for the people, by the people, and for the people in government.