The deal-breaker

The date for local elections is now set in stone: 13 May to be held at once all over the country. But the path to voting booths is a political minefield.

The five-party governing coalition is split right down the middle between the supporters and opponents of the American-funded Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) project. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba’s Nepali Congress (NC) and the JSP are for it, while the Maoist Centre and the Unified Socialist are against.

But neither side has the numbers if the MCC’s ratification is put to the vote in Parliament. Both would need the UML, which has been playing coy in the opposition even though its leader K P Oli had backed it when he was prime minister. The MCC looks set to either a deal-maker or deal-breaker.

“There are no permanent foes and permanent friends in politics, and this is most evident at election time. And the MCC is now all mixed up with domestic election politics, and geo-strategic rivalry between the United States and China.

Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Madhav Nepal of the Unified Socialists, are both splinters of the erstwhile Nepal Communist Party and are unsure of their electoral prospects if the coalition breaks. But if it does they can whip up the MCC as an election issue against Deuba and Oli.

The MCC is divided about an electoral alliance with coalition partners. Prime Minister Deuba wants to pass the MCC and hold the coalition together, but powerful NC figures want to contest elections on their own. The opposition UML has a strong local base, but will not be opposed to an alliance if it can garner more seats.

The Americans are piling on the pressure, saying they will wait till the 28 February cutoff date for House ratification, failing which they will pull out. Dahal and Nepal on the other hand, seem to be under Beijing’s spell and believe the MCC as a US strategic means to their own Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and would lead to a loss of sovereignty.

The media leak this weak of a letter to the MCC in September co-signed by Deuba and Dahal has put the Maoist leader in hot water. Dahal was assuring Washington that he would work for a consensus in the coalition, all the while opposing the MCC at home. Parliament needs to sit for a ratification vote, but Speaker Agni Subedi, probably at the behest of his Maoist boss, once more pushed back a Parliament session scheduled for 9 February.

This gives Deuba more time to cobble together numbers in the House for ratification before the American deadline. If Dahal and Nepal do not go along, he will have to get the UML on board – and that means the collapse of the coalition.

The MCC has therefore now become a bargaining chip for both the UML and the Maoist-Unified Socialists to use against Deuba. But the prime minister knows that Dahal and Nepal need an electoral alliance with him more than he needs them. The Maoists are said not to even have enough candidates to field in local government elections in May.

The $500 million MCC will be used primarily to upgrade transmission lines to distribute electricity from existing and new hydropower plants, and also connect to a high-capacity line to Gorkha so Nepal can sell surplus monsoon electricity to India.

Even without the MCC, Nepal needs the transmission lines since there is a danger that much of the grid capacity of 3,000MW by 2025 could go to waste if there is no network to evacuate the power.
Necla Keith

Debates and discussions around the world have focused on the role that women play in society, particularly in leadership positions. Women have made significant strides in recent years, breaking down barriers and achieving success in various fields. However, there remains a long way to go before gender equality is fully realized.

It is crucial for society to support and empower women, providing them with the necessary tools and opportunities to thrive. Women should be encouraged to pursue their goals and dreams, regardless of gender stereotypes or societal expectations. By fostering an environment that values and celebrates female leadership, we can create a more inclusive and equitable world for all.

The ongoing conversation around gender equality is a vital step towards achieving this goal. It requires the collective effort of individuals, communities, and governments worldwide. By working together, we can build a future where women are empowered to reach their full potential and contribute to the betterment of society as a whole.
TIME TO MEET AGAIN
HAPPY VALENTINE’S DAY

TURKISH AIRLINES
Um Hong-gil’s Project Impossible

Famous Korean climber’s next goal after summiting the world’s highest peaks is to build schools across Nepal

Sonia Awale

After conquering the 16 highest peaks in 2007, Um Hong-gil kept his promise to the mountain gods and has declared that his life to humanitarian cause through his Um Hong-gil Human Foundation. Initially, he did not know where to begin. After a lifetime looking up at peaks, for the first time he turned his gaze to those living below him. “I realized the reason for inter-generational poverty was lack of quality education,” says the mountaineer turned philanthropist who calls Nepal his second home. Besides his world record, Um Hong-gil also has the unfortunate distinction of being one of the most accident-prone climbers. Yet he loves the mountain and climbing never wavered. In fact, having survived all those near-death experiences, Um Hong-gil is convinced the gods saved him for a reason: to give back to the people of the mountains.

Turkish-Zach King production

Turkish Airlines has launched a new short film produced with filmmaker and Eminent Zach King. First in the Gate, a fast-paced four-minute clip featuring King competing with his cousin, J.C. Carroll, for a window seat on their flight. Directed by Jadon Gauthier of Wonderflex Entertainment and King himself, it took four days of filming at Istanbul airport with a crew of 50 people.

“We are passionate about providing a platform to showcase and support the work of forward-thinking creators like Zach King,” says Turkish Airlines Chairman Ahmet Bolat. “This partnership is a nod to our spirit of collaboration, and an exciting asset that captures the grandeur of our beautiful hub, Istanbul Airport and the essence of the Turkish Airlines brand, in a creative and entertaining way.”

With the dynamic camera movement, creative and visual effects, and a dose of comedy, the film captures Istanbul’s ultramodern airport facilities, architecture, and the carrier’s expansive business lounge offerings. With its smooth cinematic style, the film is the second collaborative project between Turkish Airlines and King, the first being a safety video for the carrier in 2016. Charmed by Istanbul’s uniqueness, the meeting point of East and West, the mix of historic and cosmopolitan, King chose the filming location like his previous projects. King’s love for filmmaking began at an early age, and he quickly rose to fame after publishing some short videos featuring ‘digital magic’ through YouTube in the early 2000s.

Jagadamba exports

Jagadamba Steel has indicated the third country export to the first time from Nepal following high demand for its high-quality rods and sheets in Southeast and West Asian countries, as well as South Africa.

Buses for CETV

The European Union-funded ‘Sharebuses’ project managed by the British Council has provided nine buses to the Council for technical education and vocational training.

NIBL Fixed Deposit

Nepal Investment Bank (NIBL) and Jagadamba Chho Fixed Deposit Account mark its 30th anniversary. Customers can deposit INR 1,000 to INR 30,000 and the amount will multiply by 110 in 20 years. Customers can open multiple Jagadamba Chho accounts and have a waiver on the insurance charge on each deposit. Accounts can also be extended up to 90% of the cumulative balance of the fixed deposit account.
Watch video of Um Hong-gil and how he has shifted his goal from mountaineering after climbing all the world’s 16 highest mountains, to helping Nepali children get an education. Given an honorary Nepali citizenship, the Korean climber says Nepalis are family and this is his second home.

For the native of a country where the highest peak is less than 2,000m, Um Hong-gil says he never set out to climb all the world’s highest peaks. But growing up among Korea’s mountains was his inspiration. Born in South Jeongseon in 1960, at the age of three, his parents took him to Uijoong in Gyeonggi Province where they set up a small shop at the entrance of Mangwood Temple at Mt Debong.

From an early age, he was a natural born hiker, walking up and down every day to get to his school which was one hour away. He watched weekend hikers climbing Mt Debong, and this sparked an early interest in mountaineering.

The fact that there was a crag only 10 minutes away from home added to his growing fascination with rock climbing. By 14, he had started training professionally on rock, ice and mixed climbing.

“I was specifically raised by the mountains, maybe that is why I have always felt at ease among them,” says the climber, who looks much younger than his 61 years.

During his mandatory Korean military service, Um Hong-gil trained with an underwater demolition team in the Navy. The physical and mental strength required to dive deep for long periods was useful for his future mountaineering career.

By the time he was 25, Um Hong-gil turned his eyes to the Himalayas — not just the range, but Mt Everest. Without any experience at high altitude, he admits it was a foolhardy thing to try to climb the difficult southwest face of Everest in winter as his very first Himalayan climb. Predictably, this 1985 attempt failed.

Um Hong-gil retreated, but was undeterred. He returned the next year with a better understanding (and more respect) for the Himalayas. But once again, he had to abort the expedition when his guide Surdip Dori was killed.

It was only in his third attempt in 1988 that he summited Mt Everest via the South Pillar. He made it to the top two more times, from both the North and South sides.

There would be many more failed expeditions and tragedies before Um Hong-gil could achieve his own record in 2007. He attempted Annapurna I five times before he finally reached the summit in 1999. It is a testimony to the tenacity of the man that he kept his eyes on the prize despite so many failures. During his third expedition in the spring of 1997, a Nepal guide fell into a crevasse and died right before his eyes.

A year later on his fourth attempt on Annapurna, at 7,600m, his Nepali climbing partner slipped. Um Hong-gil quickly arrested his fall, but his rope wrapped around his right ankle, twisting it. He fainted, and on regaining consciousness found his legs pointing backward.

It took the injured climber three days to descend to Base Camp. He got metal implants for his right foot, and the surgeon told him his mountaineering career was over.

But within 10 months, he was back on the Annapurna to finish the job with the metal implant making a wound everytime he moved.

We asked Um Hong-gil if he would have got more recognition if he was a Westerner, a sentiment echoed by Nimol Puri in his 2003 Netflix documentary 14 Peaks. “I never climbed for fame or recognition,” he replied mediately at a meet-up with Nepali Times last week. He also does not want to compare his feet with Nima Puri’s account of the world’s 14 highest peaks in six months.

“What we used to do was analog climbing, there was more chance of things going wrong,” he says. “These days it is digital climbing, with better equipment, more accurate weather forecasting, helicopters. More chance of success.”

As promised to the mountain gods and with a mind made up about building schools in remote Nepal, he visited Pangboche, the home of Surdip Dori, his Sherpa companion who died on Everest in 1980. This was the first of the 16 schools he was building to commemorate his 16 climbs. Since then he has built 17 ‘Human Schools’ and is working on his 18th and 19th in Tappejung and Rasuwa. It has been one school a year, and in the beginning they were concentrated in the mountains.

But with advice from the Nepal government, he has now spread, out to other parts of the country to benefit nearly 5,500 students. When asked why it was Nepal he chose to focus his humanitarian work, given his global experiences, Um Hong-gil says: “This is where I gained the most but also where I lost a lot. I want to give back to Nepal as much as I can.”

The Foundation does not only construct school buildings, but also supports staff with training, science laboratories, computers and libraries. The schools also focus on developing a reading culture among students, and have extracurricular including art and exchange programs to provide exposure to the young minds.

After the 2015 earthquake, the Korean alpinist led a Red Cross Korea team in Nepal for rescue and relief. And a year later, the foundation set up a fully equipped hospital in Khimbu. It is also taking care of four Sherpa families who lost their sole breadwinners in an avalanche that struck a Korean expedition on Gorej Himal in 2019, as well as 39 children of Nepal’s porters and guides who have died on mountains.

In 2019, Um Hong-gil was granted honorary Nepali citizenship for his dedication to the country, and committed to educating children here.

He says: “I will contribute to the education of Nepali children for the rest of my time. I have just begun. I’m not stopping anytime soon.”

For the Venetian fine wines from Vesper Family. The Vesper House P Ltd.

Valentine’s Day
Kathmandu Triennale 2077
Nepal’s biggest art festival returns with focus on inclusivity, diversity and local identity

Ashish Dhakal

Artists, collective groups and from over 40 other nations, including the Philippines, Hari, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Burma and France. Initially slated for 2020, this will be the fourth edition of the Kathmandu International Art Festival, as it was known previously, and second in the Triennale format. It is curated by Artistic Director Ganesh Khetu and co-curator Sheshlaha Shrestha and grantee Min Gunung. And led by its founder Sangeeta Thapa and director Shreesh Adhikary.

The artists will display a diverse range of media from photography, paintings to installations, and the themes include displacement, migration, the refugee conflict, textile practices and identity.

The curatorial concept of the Triennale is rooted in acknowledging the local and indigenous multiplicity of Nepal, moving away from an Eurocentric canon of art history and appreciation. The name of the event, Kathmandu Triennale 2077 is itself a significant shift.

“Originally we had planned to call it Kathmandu Triennale 2020, but then the pandemic hit,” explains Sheshlaha Shrestha. “That called for a reorientation and rebranding. We risked confusing people outside the country, but it was a step towards reclaiming our place in the art world.”

The Gregorian year 2020 is 2077 in the Bikram Sambat calendar that is officially used in Nepal. It is also a little playful, since 2077 is still half a century off in the Gregorian calendar.

“That was intentional,” Shrestha says. “It adds a futuristic element to the show. We wanted to consider time not just as a linear concept.”

Min Gunung adds that the Triennale is not just an exhibition, but also a research project with long and detailed behind-the-scenes preparation which began in 2019. So, even though the Triennale is taking place in 2022, the number 2077 more closely symbolises the confluence of past, present and future that has shaped it.

“It was a strategic decision,” Gunung adds. “Beginning also to the real beginning of the preparation has helped create a unique identity of the Kathmandu Triennale.”

Founder Sangeeta Thapa who also established Siddhartha Art Gallery describes the two years of pandemic that re-ruled the Triennale as “a wrinkle in time.”

“Time stood still, the Triennale stood still. It was important to acknowledge the stillness, the global suffering,” she says.

So the title stayed. In addition to looking back, the curators also continued the inclusive and diverse practices that have shaped the Triennale since its beginnings in 2009.

Nepal and Nepali artists, especially those who hail from indigenous communities, are often left out of the global discourses. The Triennale aims to celebrate the diverse backgrounds, explore interconnectivity between communities, while rejecting colonial inspired excarnation of the Himalayas as a mythical utopia.

The Triennale will have bilingual curatorial cards, and reach out to schools and people from different disciplines.

Workshops, discussions, talks and tours are integral components of the Triennale, and it will blend virtual and physical events. Online programs will take place from 11-28 February before the physical venues open on 1 March 2022.

The online programs will be very discursive and will focus on contextualising the exhibitions, sharing narratives, presenting publications and thoughts by contributors who have worked on the “Triennale,” says Bajupahary.

The first three days of March will feature programs at Patan Museum, the Baghpat Shah Bhikhan, Nepal Art Council, Tamang Museum and Siddhartha Art Gallery.

“We will try to go live on social media so that more people can join,” she adds, “but we also want to maintain the physical exhibition. There will nonetheless also be a 3D documentation of the exhibitions.”

Kathmandu Triennale 2077 promises to feature a healthy art ecology and is a non-commercial, non-profit exhibition which is free of charge and open to all.

The Triennale is presented by Siddhartha Art Foundation and Nepal’s Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation, and supported by its partner institution Para Site in Hong Kong, where the preparatory exhibition Garden of Six Seasons was presented in 2020.

The Kathmandu Triennale 2077 is also taking place at a time when Nepal is preparing to inaugurate its pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia in April (see opposite). A selection will also travel to Sarv弁 Contemporaries in Berlin in June. We have planned to make a travel exhibition before the pandemic, partnering with institutions all over the world," Gunung recalls. “It is very lucky and encouraging that Berlin is happening now.”

Kathmandu Triennale 2077
11 February to 1 March

For more information: kathmandutiennale.org

Shishil Bikram Shah’s Nepal Museum, 2001
Nepal is set to make its debut at the 58th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia with a pavilion titled "Tales of Metallic Raindrops - Dispersed Threads - Twisted Shangri-La". Curated by Hit Man Gurung and Geshema Rabzhandrup, it will feature the work of Ang Tserin Sherpa. The project is co-organized by Nepal's Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, the Nepal Academy of Fine Arts and the Siddhartha Arts Foundation, with support from the Rubin Museum of Art in New York.

"There is a lot of projection onto Nepal internationally, and often our own voices are not taken into account," Sherpa told *Nepali Times* last week. "The Nepal Pavilion will make ownership of our own voice and identity." The pavilion will focus on the contradictory conceptualization of Nepal and the Himalayan region, brought about by the fetishisation of a spiritual highland.

The multimedia installation will feature Sherpa in collaboration with Nepali artists to expose the shared experiences of loss and displacement beneath the Shangri-La of bliss and longevity.

International understanding of Nepali art remains plagued by a Western conceptualization of the Himalayan region, Sherpa says. "A pervasive, romanticised vision that frames Nepal as static, pure and untouched by time and modernity. We need to create a space to reflect and re-evaluate these biases."

The Himalayan is often portrayed in exotic myths that masks its complexities and diversity. Nepal's communities are portrayed as wise but primitive, poor but rich in spiritual wisdom. "While it has been encouraging and inspiring to see the art scene thrive in Nepal at present," says co-curator Rajabhandari, "there is still a disconnect in dynamics between the global art world and Nepal. Venice can be a platform to mediate that lack of communication."

Ang Tserin Sherpa was born in Kathmandu and trained in Thangka painting by his father Master Urgen Dorje. Influenced by his own experience in the Himalayan diaspora and the nomadic history of its peoples, Sherpa's unique voice has grown to feature a rich vocabulary of Buddhist iconography paired with pop-cultural references, to reflect the interplay and tension between what is sacred and secular, traditional and contemporary.

This is related also to the increasing commodification of traditional art whereby works are being reappropriated as more objects to be marketed and showcased. "These are our histories," says Sherpa. "We cannot rely on others to uphold and preserve our culture, our history when we ourselves overlook and forget them."

To renegotiate and recontextualize this trend is a larger theme with Sherpa's work at the Biennale.

The application process for Nepal's pavilion at the Biennale began in June 2021, and was pushed forward by seed money from the Rubin Museum in New York. But it was not until November that the work finally began.

"To Nepal there is no proper support system for artists to get international exposure," Sherpa adds. "But this is not a one-time thing. Funding is still an issue but hopefully this initiative can inspire a new and exciting era of art from Nepal."

The Nepal Pavilion will provide artists with an international platform to showcase their work while positioning the country to contribute to a broader narrative on contemporary art that moves away from a Eurocentric art history and discourses," he said. "First founded in 1899, La Biennale di Venezia is one of the most evocative art exhibitions in the world. The Nepal Pavilion will be presented at Arsenale Project Space One, located on Fondamenta S. Anna in the area between the Arsenale and Giardini - the two main venues of the Biennale, which will run from 2 April to 27 November."
**Events**

**Kathmandu Triennale**
Attend the online launch of the 6th Kathmandu Triennale International Art Festival and view various contemporary art works and films from around the world. The event can be viewed live on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/kathmandutriennale and read more on pages 6-7.

**TEDxJomal**
Participate in the TEDx event on the theme ‘Explore & Dream’ and listen to inspiring speakers share their views and ideas on 17 February. For more, contact, Russian House.

**Hiking**
Take part in the six-hour hike organized by Let’s Crew Up Nepal from Sussan Lake to Bhagsuara this weekend and help pick up waste for recycling.

**Fundraising Event**
Join ‘An Open Heart’ health charity fundraising event for the Thakurgaon Primary Health Care Hospital organized by 1344 Nepal. Call to register on 17 February, 9:45a.m onwards, (01) 4737986.

**Sanskrit class**

**Dining**

**Momotaro Restaurant**
Enjoy a sumptuous Japanese meal at Momotaro. Jishu mish and the mouthwatering otto box.
Sanjana Chowk, Lalitpur (01) 5577885

**Bungalow Bar and Kitchen**
Spoil your taste with authentic Thali and other Asian cuisines. The Foil Box, Pous or Turkish dishes as the food at their restaraunt are a must.
Mauli Danda, (01) 4906600

**Valentine’s Day Menu**
1955 Suites and Restaurant is a heritage boutique suites with garden dining. It offers a special Valentine’s day menu and is sure to take your Valentine’s Day celebration to another level.
Kathmandu, (01) 640565

**Anatolia**
Anatolia’s Indian and Turkish dishes are packed with an assortment of spices and flavors. From mint curdy to the Baklava, the dishes will leave you wanting for more.
Phone (01) 420997.

**Meze by Roadhouse**
Meze’s menu boasts a wide variety of international cuisine, a great view of the palace museum and a perfect atmosphere to enjoy food with loved ones.
Miracle Park, Dobhar Mang (01) 4220680

**Online Archives**

**NHDP Virtual Tour**
Learn about historic paintings through Nepal’s heritage documentation project’s records of the most endangered historic and cultural monuments. Go to https://tunanw.es.nrs.unh.kathmandu.de/

**Nepal Picture Library**
Browse through archived photographs of different stages of Nepal’s history at the Nepal Picture Library at https://www.nepalpicturelibrary.org/.

**Netflix on YouTube**
Watch documentaries. Netflix has released a free-on YouTube for educational purposes. We May The Force Be With You: Our Planet might be a good place to start.

**Boardgame Arena**
A hit board game by Playboard games, online, brush up old skills or learn new ones with the thousands of games available at https://www.boardgamearena.com/.

**Hotel Country Villa**
The hotel offers the best view of the Himalayas and mountain range while enjoying famous Indian and international delicacies.
Aadish Road, Nagarkot, (01) 416815.

**The Old Inn**
Located in picturesque Bandipur, The Old Inn offers a panoramic view of Annapurna range from each of its rooms. Book for your stay at the most cozy bed and breakfast now.
Bandipur (01) 56010

**Bookclub**
Bookclub likes reading beyond the page and connects readers to talk about authors where they speak about their work. The BBC Radio 4 podcast can be found on Sticher.

**Weekend Weather**

Air Quality Index

0

0

Kathmandu

KTM

Kathmandu from 11:16PM 2022-02-17

**Getaway**

**Shangri-La**
Head to the old Shangri-La Village Resort, nestled in the heart of Patan, and relax with the outdoor yoga pergola, massage in Inner View Spa and a cup of tea at Sanctuary Garden. (01) 4455022.

**Namo Buddha Resort**
The traditional Nepalese style resort is perched on a hilltop with an amazing view of the Himalayas. The peaceful, tranquil environment is a perfect place for short hikes.
Namo Buddha, Madan, (01) 4770082.

**OUR PICK**

After taking the off-road jeep high in Capilpur, enjoy a snooze at the Ten Thousand, a day of relaxation for the ultimate in pampering in Sattal range. Enjoy the sunset and rejuvenate with the spa treatments provided.
Ten Thousand, (01) 4203000.

**κολιδ-19 γιορτάζουμε Εύαισθητο και συνενεργό λαχανόκοτο**

## Serious About Beer

**BREWED FROM 100% GERMAN**
**Malted Barley, Yeast, Hops and Water**
Vignettes from war

Two women on opposite sides of Nepal’s Maoist insurgency draw on memories of conflict.

I received an offer to work at an English newspaper, the size of which was much larger than the one I had previously worked for. The newspaper offered more freedom in terms of choosing the type of content to write about, and I accepted the offer.

When I joined the newspaper, I was initially assigned to cover stories related to politics and social issues. However, I soon realized that I had a greater interest in reporting on human rights abuses and the plight of marginalized communities.

I decided to focus on covering issues related to the Maoist insurgency, as it was a topic that was not covered extensively by the mainstream media. I began to interview victims of violence and human rights abuses, and my reporting soon gained the attention of the government and international organizations.

I continued to report on the situation in Nepal, and my articles soon became a source of inspiration for many people who were living in areas affected by violence. My reporting helped raise awareness about the issues facing the people of Nepal, and I received numerous awards for my work.

Looking back, I am proud of the work I did, and I am grateful to the people who trusted me with their stories. I believe that through journalism, we can make a difference and bring about positive change in the world.
Forbidden to remember the dead

Film-maker recalls the military’s attempt to censor documentary on the 2001 killings in Kalkot

Mohan Mainali

I was 16 December 2002, and my documentary ‘Living of Juggmara’ was being screened at the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF 2002). The hall at the Russian Cultural Centre in Kathmandu was packed, and the audience had overflowed into the aisles. As director, I should have been sitting on the front row. But I had another job that day: to stand next to the projectionist and at exactly 10 minutes 47 seconds, mute the film for 30 seconds.

As directed by the military censor, this was to prevent the audience from hearing the narration: ‘A few days after the Magalang attack, the army arrived at the airstrip and opened fire. Thirty-five people were shot dead. Among them were two children, labourers from other parts of Nepal, including 17 young men from Juggmara.’

As a film-maker, I had never been trained to mute the sound track during a public screening. My eyes were glued not on the screen but on the digital time counter on the VHS player.

A year earlier, the Maoists had broken off peace talks and conducted simultaneous raids on army bases across the country. The government declared an emergency, and for the first time mobilized the Royal Nepal Army against the Maoists. Till then it was the police that was fighting the rebels.

Today, we know from many countries that crackdowns on the press in elected democracies can be more draconian than in authoritarian regimes. Twenty years ago, I faced proof of it in that dark auditorium. I was then with the Centre for Investigative Journalism Nepal (CIN). Freed from day-to-day journalism, the job allowed me to look at the conflict in perspective, put the daily death tolls into context, and examine the human side of the war, and its impact on ordinary people.

I was following the Koteda massacre in Kalkot. News reports were sketchy and contradictory. State media said ‘many terrorists’ had been killed at the under-construction airstrip. Another news item buried in the inside pages said that among the ‘terrorists’ were 17 men from Juggmara in Dhading district. An RSS report quoted MPs Prem Bahadur Singh from Kalkot and Rajendra Pandey from Dhading as informing the house that the dead were labourers constructing the airstrip.

My journalist antennas perk up. I heard from reporter Shukap, Khasha that a family in Juggmara had conducted a funeral of one of the dead even though he had not received his body from the Army. As a film-maker, I felt this could be a way to portray the cruelty and statelessness of war. But there was an insurgency going on, and filming would be difficult and costly. I approached renowned documentary maker Dhana Barat, who had made the film ‘KABILA’ (Blood-soaked Terai) and we had worked together in many parts of Nepal.

Rajendra Dahal, editor at Himal Khaborpatra, offered to publish the story. In Juggmara, I met 10 of the 17 families who had lost their men in a massacre 80km at the other end of Nepal in Koteda. The story came out in Himal, and Nepal Times translated it in the issue #109 of 4-15 August 2002 (accompanying, left and above). This was a rare exposé of a
is the colour of spring

For most of my childhood, an old photograph hung on the wall of my grandparents’ living room in Kathmandu. It was of our great grandfather, at least that’s what we were told.

It was only after it was taken down that I found out that the man in it was Joseph Stalin. My great-grandfather, a staunch Communist in those days, had idealised Stalin because he believed that Communism was the path to a just society.

The discovery that he had been Stalin staring down at us all these years concealed neatly with my own political awakening. For most of the early days of the war, and living in Kathmandu, I had been shielded from it all.

There had been only whispers back then: two police officers killed in an ambush, seven villagers suspected of being Maoists shot dead. After 2001, the conflict exploded into everyone’s consciousness, including mine, with more frequent, unavoidable waves of attacks, higher death tolls, and crackdowns on rights. A stronghold of the Maoists, Rolpa and Rukum were at the epicentre of the war. Between 1996-2006, it witnessed some of the most brutal crackdowns by state forces. That just made it easier for the Maoists to recruit people.

There were many who were forcibly enlisted, but others wholeheartedly supported the cause believing that ‘a system that hinges on the barrel of a gun can only be smashed by the gun itself.” They shook hands before heading into battle, telling each other that they would meet in the next life if they were martyred,” recalls former guerrilla and journalist Manas Phuyal.

"I still wonder what kind of ideology made people face death so readily.

For many, the decision to join either side was triggered by a sense of revenge. Nirmal Bachendra Pan joined the police after the Maoists had murdered his father. Ganesh Khadka enlisted because he wanted to avenge his father’s death at the hands of the police.

Jwamaya Nepal was a member of a Maoist-affiliated Dhal organization from Rupala. She recalls: “While walking through the forest with her children for almost a month, hiding from the Army. There were times she had to split a corn cob in two, and give to her children, going hungry herself. After ten years, 17,000 deaths, more than 1,200 disappearances, thousands disabled and millions displaced, the conflict finally ended in 2006. The Maoists entered mainstream politics and two years later, Nepal became a Federation Republic. The Maoists have been in power four times since then, and

the country has gone through some historic political changes.

History of war is written by the victor. But what do you call a war that neither side won, and the people lost? A People’s War! A civil war! An armed revolution! An insurgency! Armed conflict! Or an insurgency?

In Rolpa and Rukum, I met people who fought and suffered on both sides. But what does all this mean today? 20 years after the conflict began, when the enemies are friends?

What if the people who bore the brunt of a conflict fought in this name? Many who willingly sacrificed their lives believed that they were doing it for a just, egalitarian society.

Cremated Lal, eno (a loyal party member, today resident: “if the war that was so close to being won can be dismissed, of what use is a revolution?”

Assisted by Ashok Mehrotra

the Kotbada massacre

Conflict-era crime

We started working on the video footage, and were convinced it would be an important documentation of the tragedy. We had to do it on a shoestring budget, and the film finally premiered at KIMFF 2004.

There was pin-drop silence during the screening. From time to time, I could hear sobbing in the dark. But I had to concentrate on the approaching 1047 on the VHS digital clock. At exactly 47 seconds, projecti

Collateral sorrow

Kotbada Massacre

In their film project, the Living of Jogimara, the Times magazine has introduced a documentary film-maker. The 30-minute documentary went on to be a hit, with two additional screenings during the festival. Many were surprised. Nachtin Thapa wrote in Himaal: “By trying to censor the film, we have been deprived, even of the right to cry for our own country?”

After KIMFF 2002, the Ministry of Communications imposed a censorship rule on all film festival screenings. Since then, there have been many governments that have come and gone in Nepal. But the state has not been able to resist its temptation from time to time to curb the freedom of expression.

Mohan Mainali is an author and documentary film-maker.
Another Ballantine’s

Come to think of it, it was quite a masterstroke that the Baddies launched their armed struggle in 1966 (just a day before Valentine’s Day). They drove home the message: ‘Make love … and war.’ And even: ‘All is fair in love and war.’

Because of this glorious revolutionary history, Valentine’s Day is now a main event on the Nepali calendar as yet another of the thousands of festivals and carnivalesque carnivals that this country celebrates every year, also exorcising the ghosts of St Valentine into the Hindut pantheon of 33 million gods. This year, we will mark International Day of Trust with the same omph and pomp that we reserve for other festivals – by going bar hopping in Janakpur.

(Ballantine’s is a registered trademark of the Chivas Regal Group which has no links to this column nor to the government which has no links to this column nor to the government which has no links to this column nor to the government which has no links to this column nor to the government which has no links to this column nor to the government.)

Ballantine’s Day is a timely reminder to Nepalis of this country’s abiding obsession with sowing wild oats, and tolerance of every possible curtail permutation and combination thereof. Our answer, without whose seminal contribution we could not be here to pen these lines today, left ample evidence of their fertile imaginations on wanted temples as proof of the outstanding and upright people we once were. Which is why it is a serious lapse for Nepal not to cash in on the erotica and eroticism depicted on monuments and other erections in our midst to promote tourism. Nepal Tourism Year 2023 was a flop because of the pandemic, but we could still meet the target of 2 million visitors in 2023 if we promoted sex tourism. Not like the Thais do it, of course, but by highlighting all the hanky panky painstakingly portrayed by our forebears on temple shrines as a labour of love.

This Ballantine’s Day on Monday let us honour for frightful 12-week masters of yore who were not bastards about putting up 4-3 four postcard sites. They didn’t ham and haw when it came to depicting the birds and bees, they went bee-hive. They didn’t waste time beating about the bush, they were in flagrant defiance.

And all this can be seen in the monumental and apocryphal depictions on the exterior roof struts of the Valley’s three Darbar Squares. Tourists should be told that a pair of powerful monoculars are all they need to unlock the secrets of Nepal’s ity editor (From Sanskrit: ‘edit’ = dirty, and ‘scribe’ = stuff).

Recent census results show a worrying decline in the number of Nepalis, which is why encouraging cosupination is a way to multiply the population. And it is good to see that the Baddies still have a love-hate relationship with their promiscuous coalition partners, and all this projection political handshaking is a start.

LOVE IS WHAT MAKES A SUBARU A SUBARU.