Big questions

What’s a constituent assembly? Who can we trust to run Nepal?

ANAGHA NEELAKANTAN

A nationwide opinion poll conducted last month by the research group Interdisciplinary Analysts shows that Nepalis still don’t have much faith in politicians. Respondents were also found to be surprisingly ill-informed about the constituent assembly elections.

As in previous polls, the largest proportion of those polled were undecided about which political party they would vote for if elections were held. This time, many also didn’t want to say who they’d vote for. Among those who had made up their minds, Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal is marginally more trusted than other leaders. Even so, support for the Maxis has eroded in the last six months.

As in a previous poll in October 2006, Nepalis are still divided on whether or not to keep the monarchy. Most of those who favour the monarchy want a ceremonial one but don’t like Gyanendra as king.

Close to two-thirds of the respondents want to be identified as Nepali and not by their ethnic group, and almost the same number say Nepali should be the only national language.

Nepalis care most about the rights to equality, property, freedom of expression and the right to information. Republicanism, federalism, and secularism may be the most-heard slogans from political groupings but they are lower down on the agenda. The fate of the monarchy is rated as the least pressing constitutional issue. Affirmative action for women and dalits, and autonomy are deemed more important.
Dignity for all

The UNDECIDED

The most believable reason for delaying the constituent assembly polls is not that the election commission hasn't been able to complete preparations. Nepal isn't too far behind because of fears that it will not be free and fair. It's because most Nepalis don't know what a constituent assembly is.

Recent opinion surveys have shown Nepalis to be overwhelmingly in favour of constituent assembly elections because for them it is subliminally synonymous with peace. But voters electing an assembly to draft a new constitution must know why they are voting and what the parties and candidates stand for.

This should be the job of the political parties, but they just haven't got around to voters. The latest GAPA poll published in this issue also proves just how far removed the parties and their leaders are from the people's aspirations. Most Nepalis don't care about what happens to the monarchy, they want their lives to improve. The leaders flog republicanism, secularism or ethnic federalism, but people care more about jobs, health, and education.

Most Nepalis are undecided about who they vote for in a future election. This should be a dire warning to the seven-plus- one alliances that they can win. As they are, the parties are preoccupied with petty turf battles. Last year, the people's foremost desire was peace. This year it is development, but they self-serviced polls burying endlessly over a division of the spoils.

The survey shows this disillusionment runs deep. The people are up in politics and fearful of taking to the streets to punish the parties with strikes, blockades and shutdowns. The gas lines, load-shedding and shortages have stretched the public's tolerance to breaking point. We may have sidelined the king, but we haven't got rid of this culture of cynically feeding on the people's misery to make a political point.

The tara is allowed to simmer so the parties can sit back and enjoy watching the Maoists roast in a fire they started. For their part, the comrades are so desperate to shift attention away from the madhyas' debacle they are working themselves into a frenzy demolishing royal statues. Simulated outrage, they should know, can work both ways.

Rhetoric about a New Nepal aside, this is the one real chance the state has to get the future of the country on track. A botched election, one that few people believe in and which is, for which few actually vote for, can lead to violent ethnic politics. Better to take time to educate voters, ensure it is free from intimidation than stage a hurried and fatally flawed poll.

State of the State

ENCELAGE of their own with which to threaten secession. Muslims are even worse off than most dalits, but they are making their claims in a more dignified manner than their better-placed counterparts on the margins.

Amidst all this, the Bahun-Chhetri-Newar ruling elite is the most sublime. It knows that the people on the periphery have less in common with each other than they do with the centre.

So what does hold us together? When ethnic autonomy is discussed, it is in Nepal, a language that evolved during the Gorkhals' military campaigns and was later standardised by the Ranas to serve as the court language. Ujendra Yadav of the Madhes Janarakshak Forum, speaks a more refined Nepali than does his beleaguered, Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula. Each time the Mahanta Thakur committee sits to negotiate with madhajans, dalits, Muslims, kamthrashtras, and the women, the lingua franca will be Nepali.

Occasional muttered complaints apart, nobody really objects to our not double-triangle either. It continues to flatter atop even those government buildings whose signboards 'Nepal' has been replaced with 'Nepali' in Rautilah, Bara, and Parsa. That the Nepali flag resembles the banner of Hanuman helps in a predominantly Hindu country, but also doesn't seem to offend Muslims Nepali. Radical monarchists who wave the flag to denounce democracy are almost always dismissed as losers too scared to openly carry the standard of the royal family.

Whenever you go in Nepal and whenever, through the Himalayan winter, midriff monsoon, and tarai summer, the food of choice for those who can afford it is dal-bhat. Perhaps we should have learned through these Mahendraarms books in school that this is our national cuisine. In fact, if the cow can be retained as the national animal in the interim statute, there's no reason a national food can't be named in the forthcoming constitutional amendment.

It probably isn't go to say so in a secular Nepal, but Pashupatinath continues to be the national deity even for many who don't take its omnipresence too seriously. Siddhattha was born in Lumbini and attained enlightenment in Bodhgaya, but that's a technically best ignored. For most Nepalis, the Buddha's birthplace is marked by the Ashoka pillar near Biharshawa and we are all extremely proud of it.

We also ignore the inconvenient fact that Everest is on the border and that its northern face lies in foreign territory and claim that the highest point on earth lies in Nepal. Sagarmatha will soon replace the king on Nepal currency. There was a time, not too ago, when the mountain was known as Sagarmatha. It was known as Sagarmatha. It was known as Sagarmatha. And in the latest IDA poll summarised the people electing an assembly to draft a new constitution must know, can work both ways.

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NOTHING FOR US
I write not as a political analyst, but as a frustrated Nepali who, day after day, sees blaming and finger-pointing, but no concrete action. So many fundamental issues need to be addressed to take our country out of political instability and poverty, yet the political parties have the same old answers: we weren’t consulted on this, people are doing whatever they please. There is banda after banda. And when is ‘democracy’ when parties demand to take action and blame them in part for the country’s woes. The eight parties have become this all-knowing, righteous body which terms anything it does not like unconstitutional. But even amongst them people have already faced the same charges they’re pressing against others now, such as corruption and misuse of power.

I know we are in a transitional phase, and that we citizens bear as much responsibility to make things work as the politicians do. But they give us nothing to work with or debate upon. What is their vision for a new Nepal? What do we do about education, unemployment, the economy, victims of the war, poverty? We want vision, strategies, and honestly. Merely erasing the word ‘royal’ from every phrase that ever existed won’t take care of our problems.

Sujala Pant, Thimphu

INCLUSION
It was amazing to see Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula take moral responsibility for the death of 29 people in the Tarai, but utter nonsense that they don’t see much progress this year on the past glory and do nothing about the future. Does he see this as a time of necessary transition.

PB Rana, email

LETTERS

Third World democratic and revolutionary movements? A New Nepal has kicked off with a bad start. Look at the endless petrol lines, the jaundiced cabinet, a well-meaning prime minister’s commitment to BP Koirala’s vision and democratic ideals sabotaged by some of his closest advisers, and a foreign aid community that is confused about which among Nepal’s thousands of ‘rights-based, inclusive democracy-practicing’ NGOs to support. The eight parties ought to pay attention to the mandate of Jana Andolan II, and start delivering on what currently sounds like a government commitment to the Nepalese people.

Surya B Prasai, email

Such a multitude of inequalities needs to be addressed that each group sees now as the time to stand up for its rights and summon others to support its cause. Hence bandas, to make a political statement, assert rights, gain recognition, and whip up support. The fact that it is an undemocratic method of political activity is never openly acknowledged. Others have, it is felt, made gains small and large by using undemocratic forces and methods. And so no one-blame it when a banda is called. Yet it is a form of terror—observe the banda or else. No leader has the right of any group to call a banda. It is not the Nepali way. It may be that, at some point in the future, a Truth and Reconciliation Committee will encourage us all to accept responsibility for accepting the culture of ‘banda’. There is a saying, ‘everything doesn’t prosper because men do evil, but because good men do nothing’. I look forward to the day when good men (and women) speak up against bandas and assert the rights of political parties to be heard without the threat of violence and terror. Until such time, true democracy will not be entrenched in the Nepali way of life and its politics.

Patrick Leathy, Kupondole

BAN BANDAS
Thank you for your Quoute of the Week from Pasang Sherpa, chairman of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (From the Nepali Press, #336), in which he threatened eight parties if the governmet did not address Jana Andolan demands. It made me ponder thus: since the Uprising in April 2006, observers of the political situation in Nepal have faced the same charges they’re evading. If only they’d listen to his sensible words of approval is on the leaflet?

B Paramendra, email

HEPATITIS VACCINE
Staff from Kathmandu Poly Clinic in Old Baneswor have been going door-to-door with a loudspeaker for the last few days getting residents of Dhobighat to sign up for a hepatitis B vaccination program. They visited our house and handed out a leaflet outlining the dangers of the disease and nine possible modes of transmission, including kissing, eating contaminated food, or by coming into contact with infected fleem or breath. I thought the illness could only be transmitted through blood or infected bodily fluids, and not by touching, eating, or kissing carriers. The Hepatitis B Foundation clearly states that the disease “is NOT transmitted casually. It cannot be spread through sneezing, coughing, hugging or eating food prepared by someone who is infected with hepatitis B.”

Is the Kathmandu Poly Clinic acting in accordance with the Foundation? It takes people up for a course of three shots at Rs 175 each, or making money by inflating the rate of hepatitis B. The World Health Organisation recommend, as their seal of approval is on the leaflet!

Mark Turin, Dhobighat

STAY FULL

Big Brunch small price

Too late for breakfast too early for lunch? ... indulge yourself with the TFC Big Brunch!!!

enjoy the highlights from our up-graded Saturday Brunch.

Satisfaction guaranteed. Exclusive buffet brunch spread with a free flow of Beer & 75% plus taxes per person.

Saturdays, 11:30am - 3:00pm, The Fun Cafe - Radisson Hotel Kathmandu.

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For reservations and further information, contact Radisson Hotel Kathmandu.
Apophis now

It's best to be prepared for the things that we do know will happen

Something else we need to worry about came up this week at a meeting of the world's top scientists in San Francisco. Apparently there is an asteroid named Apophis, a big chunk of space rock the size of a couple of soccer pitches, hurtling towards us at breakneck speed. Right now it's way out there in space, but there's a chance that it might hit us.

Scientists even know the date—13 April, 2036. That's not BS: so we have time to get all lathered up with worry, to waste reams of time wondering what to do, and perhaps start spending public money on fending off Apophis. Already there's talk of a space mission to divert or destroy our cosmic invader.

Now I don't take any of this seriously for a moment. The chances of Apophis smashing into us are pretty remote. We'll get hit by a big space rock at some point, but it could be another thousand years or so. Or it could be tomorrow, one we didn't see coming.

That got me thinking, always a dangerous thing. What throws our well made plans into mayhem, mocks our penchant to prepare? The unexpected, that's what. Just when you think you've come up with a cure for all the horrible diseases that plague developing countries, a new, mutated strain of, say, the common cold wreaks havoc. A consensus on climate change that leads to real reductions in greenhouse gases could be rendered insignificant by a big volcanic eruption somewhere. Or indeed, a spectral object smashing into Earth and blacking out the sun with plumes of dust.

Here in Nepal, everyone puts their energies into peace, driven along by international donors who seemed to believe that peace was an end, rather than a means. And what happens? All these pesky demands for inclusion, and the formerly warring parties laying down their arms and emerging waving into public space only to be greeted by outstretched palms and a long list of what's lacking. That's a recipe for political paralysis.

But Nepal needs to be wary about more than the current peace process. The unexpected lurks. To paraphrase the departed and toasting Kathmandu-based foreign diplomat also recently came down with hepatitis E.

Hepatitis: In most parts of the world, hepatitis E affects the poor, those who don't have access to safe drinking water.

But in Nepal, the virus attacks everyone, from prime minister to slums-dweller. Girija Prasad Koirala is showing symptoms of jaundice, and it is likely to be a hepatitis E infection caused by contaminated water. Five members of the cabinet have it, and the foreign minister was hospitalised for over a month. A senior Kathmandu-based foreign diplomat also recently came down with hepatitis E.

Hepatitis E is a neglected, viral illness spread primarily when drinking water is contaminated with faeces. The virus is transmitted faeco-orally and has the same symptoms as hepatitis A, usually completely clears in two weeks, the jaundice illness may last from about a week to a month and the jaundice usually completely clears in two to six months.

The other common hepatitis in Nepal, hepatitis A, is also transmitted faeco-orally and has the same symptoms as hepatitis E. But persons-to-person transmission of hepatitis E is only up to two percent, compared to over 50 percent with hepatitis A. This suggests that a larger dose (‘inoculum’ in medical parlance) may be necessary for the transmission of hepatitis E, in comparison to the A virus. Toget the E virus, you may have to drink an entire glass of

Buddha Basnyat—whom may prove that in case of the present outbreak the Bishnumati mains have massive sewage contamination.

The large inoculum theory is supported by the fact that tourists who are here for a short time and are very careful regarding drinking water usually suffer significantly less from hepatitis E than A, although this may also be changing as tourists obtain hepatitis A vaccine. There is no need to isolate the patient, washing hands with soap and water after going to the bathroom is adequate. The infection is not transmitted sexually or through blood, unlike viral hepatitis B, C, and D.

Hepatitis E seems to be more common in the urban than rural areas, probably due to worse water contamination from the sewers running alongside. Eating only food that is steam cooked and avoiding salads in restaurants and marriage parties help prevent not just hepatitis A and E but also typhoid. However, evidence so far seems to indicate water (more than food) in the spread of hepatitis E.

The treatment for this disease is symptomatic, that is, nothing in particular. There is no need for strict bed-rest. The appetite is usually so poor that more restrictions on food are not advisable. Alcohol is best avoided while the liver recovers.

Evidence suggests that the reservoir for the virus may be domestic swine or people with subclinical infection. The single most important preventative measure is clean drinking water. The good news is, a hepatitis E vaccine may soon be available, which may especially be important for women before pregnancy.

Hepatitis E: Prevention better than cure

- Drink only boiled water
- Eat hot foods, avoid salads when eating out

Symptoms: Nausea Loss of appetite Abdominal pain Tiredness Itching Fever

Buddha Basnyat, MD, is with the Nepal Health Research Council and is a consultant at Patan Hospital.

Until a vaccine is available, the only prevention against hepatitis E is safe drinking water

Clean drinking water is essential for prevention of this illness. Water just needs to be brought to a rolling boil, and if this is not possible, treated with chlorine tablets or liquid iodine. Clearly, the water pipes from the Bir Shamsher era that run under the streets of Kathmandu need to be replaced to avoid contamination from the sewers running alongside. Eating only food that is steam cooked and avoiding salads in restaurants and marriage parties help prevent not just hepatitis A and E but also typhoid. However, evidence so far seems to indicate water (more than food) in the spread of hepatitis E.

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New Delhi - The Indian newspapers are now relegating the political news to the inside pages, and headquarters business developments insted. In the last month, Tata took over Corus, Indian-born Arun Sarin's Vodafone's now owns Hutch, and Aditya Birla Group's Hindalco bought up Canadian firm Novelis for over $8 billion plus.

More and more Indian firms are on the lookout for global acquisitions, and in the last year, investments by Indian firms outside India has surpassed Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India. And this is the same country which, during its 'license raj' days of the 70s and 80s made access to foreign capital so difficult that Indians flocked to Nepal in the 90s to sell gold bars of 99.9 percent purity. The gold bars are available from the bank's Kamladi and New Road branches, and the country's sovereignty.

New Delhi - The same Old Nepal
This is no time for unreconstructed 'nationalist capitalism'

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Bad intentions  
Brahm Baniya in Kantipur, 22 February

The king’s Democracy Day address has created waves—the eight parties consider it unreasonable and there are protests on the streets. The king is not satisfied with the recent political developments and used the address to convey that to the people. The interim constitution has given all his powers to the council of ministers and also removed him as the head of state.

The address is proof that the king is looking for a people’s decision will not be in favour of the king. It is clear that the Nepali monarchy is to be decided through the constituent assembly elections. It is evident that the Nepali people are making their own constitution and have a say about their country’s future. The future of the monarchy will be decided by the first meeting of the constituent assembly. Since the ultimate future of the monarchy provision, which states the future of the monarchy to be decided by the first meeting of the constituent assembly, is a bold declaration. While the Maoists say that Nepali needs to be declared a democratic republic, leaders like Nilambar Acharya suggest that the king be removed from Narayanhiti palace, that his title be taken away, and that restrictions be put on him so he does not go out making unapproved public speeches. The interim constitution has a provision, which states the future of the monarchy will be decided by the first meeting of the constituent assembly. Since the ultimate future of the king lies with the people, the government must think of an alternative way to take action against him in the interim.

It’s the story of communist leaders all over the world—they just don’t trust people. There are numerous fighters in the Maoist army who have undergone rigorous training, yet Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal recently chose his son, Prakash Dahal, as his security commander, responsible for coordinating his personal security. It is understood that Prakash has not gone through the war training necessary for such a position. Dahal has more than half-a-dozen PLA fighters as bodyguards and they carry modern weapons like M16s, Colt Commandos, etc. These fighters accompany Dahal to public meetings and informal gatherings. Maoist second-in-command Baburam Bhattarai has no intention of appearing to be less important than Dahal, and has three guards armed with M16s standing beside him, and another one watching his back. This kind of security is unnecessary, and we have to ask Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula when this drama is going to end. Don’t the Maoists say that they are the leaders of the people and that the people protect their leaders? So was all the security drama and paraphernalia in Tundikhel last week during Dahal’s allegedly first public appearance in 25 years necessary? There were PLA fighters and volunteers all over Tundikhel and throughout his speech Dahal had Prakash on his left and another bodyguard to his right. Is the chairman paranoid or does he really believe he is that unsafe?

Army ‘Maoists’

On the occasion of the 12th anniversary of the ‘People’s War’, former royal army generals have come out and said that had it not been for the people’s war, we would not have had democracy. Retired General and nominated Maoist MP Kumar Paulung asks, “If peaceful protests were effective, then why did real change not come after the 1951, 1980 and 1990 movements?” He said that the state needed a real challenge in order to change, and the Maoists provided just that by taking up arms. Retired General Khaledendra Pant said, “The people’s war taught Nepal that nothing would happen if we kept quiet, which is why Nepalis were willing to lay down their lives.”

Military expert Indrajit Rai agrees, “The Maoists established their base through the armed conflict, and they were the first to raise and address issues relating to women,Dalit, and Janajati.” Asked what he thought about integrating the People’s Liberation Army into the Nepali Army, Rai replied, “The 251-year
old army structure needs to be changed to make the army better.” He added that the old army is loyal to one person alone, which is why its future should be in the hands of those who believe in democracy. “This has to be taken into consideration during army recruitment, training, enlistment, and promotion,” Rai said.

Former SSP Chuda Bahadur Shrestha said that back in 1996 he was one of the very few people who said that the insurgency was not a law and order problem, but a necessary revolution.

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Party gossip

Jana Aastha, 21 February

Chief of Army Staff Rukmangat Katwal recently sent out a circular directing all army barracks, divisional headquarters, battalion, brigades, and companies to organise parties to celebrate Army Day on Shivaratri. Although the Rs 60 per diem was not increased this year, the circular said that all personnel should be fed on Army Day. Army officers in Kathmandu said the circular made it easier to enjoy the big party that was organised at the army HQ after the events were over in Tundikhel. Many army officers were seen merrily drinking away—in uniform, which is against army rules. Only a few royalists were at the party this year. Our source in the Nepal Army told us that the royal secretaries were not invited. Jana Aastha asked royal secretary Phaniraj Pathak why he was not present at the party. “The army does not invite us anymore,” he told us. But palace army secretary Tika Dhanaula and ADCs were seen partying till late with the army officers. Rukmangat Katwal also invited UNMIN head Ian Martin, Biswo Kanta Mainali of the Nepal Bar Association, and journalist Madhab Rimal. A heated discussion broke out between these three when Rimal said to Martin, “We are not satisfied with your work, because not all Maoist weapons have been locked down.” In response to this Martin reportedly said, “You are close to the prime minister, why don’t you go and tell him exactly that?” When it looked like the discussion was getting nasty, even like the UML, why would they like us? They are capitalists, so it is only normal they feel that way.” He added that American support for the monarchy was genuine, because it helps keep Nepal a puppet state and a good place from which to keep an eye on China and India.

Gajurel said that the Maoists recently arrested in Kashmir were not Nepali. “Just because they are Maoists does not mean they are our people,” he said. Gajurel will meet Chinese foreign affairs officers during his time in New Delhi and will make a diplomatic visit to China very soon.
As the euphoria of the April Up the same things they always have

The Kathmandu-based research group Interdisciplinary Analysts (IDA) has conducted four public opinion surveys since December 2004. This one was conducted between 22 December-13 January among 2,011 respondents in 21 districts. The composition of the respondents is weighted to reflect national figures for caste, ethnicity, and geography.

More people have now heard of the constituent assembly elections (70 percent) than in earlier polls, but of those who have, only a third claim that they know what it means. When tested, only a quarter of these had a correct understanding of what the polls are for. Broken down, this means that just over five percent of respondents knew accurately what a constituent assembly is.

In addition, over 42 percent of respondents are uncertain about whether the elections can be free and fair, and one in five is convinced it is not possible. Close to half of those surveyed say the electoral process should be proportional.

Despite misgivings, over half of the respondents believe elections to the constituent assembly are essential as it is the only way to ensure ‘lasting peace’. Only 22 percent of those see it as a necessity for formulating a new constitution, and 30 percent of all respondents believe the assembly should determine the fate of the monarchy.

Some political trends identified in Himalmedia, IDA, and NDI polls in recent years are intensified in this one. The August 2006 NDI poll showed 18 percent of those surveyed were not sure for whom they would vote. That figure in IDA’s latest poll is up to 27 percent, with an additional 24 percent not wanting to tell. About the same low double-digit percentages say they would vote for the Maoists, the NC, and the UML as was reported in IDA’s last poll in September 2006. Nepali voters seem to trust the Maoists as much, or as little as, the other parties. But
the popularity of all the parties has fallen since September, as the euphoria over People Power II evaporates and the promised changes recede. Nepalis want the 7+1 parties to deliver on three main issues: peace, development, and livelihood.

The future of the monarchy continues to be contentious, with Nepalis divided 50-50 about retaining or dismantling it. A Annapurna Post / Image Channel poll last week corroborates this polarisation.

Two in five respondents believe a referendum is the best way to determine the fate of the monarchy. Forty-one percent in support of a monarchy want it to be constitutional, just under half that would want a ceremonial monarchy and just under a quarter want an active king.

Surprisingly, the 1 February 2005 takeover is less of a reason for the erosion of the respect for monarchy than the royal massacre of June 2001, or the disposition of the current king. Those who believe Nepal should remain a kingdom and those who want a Hindu state (at 52 percent, three times the number who believe in securitism), cite 'tradition' as the main reason. Two-fifths of those who believe the monarchy has no role cite its 'feudal exploitative' nature, and a quarter say it did not develop the country.

Because the interviews were done in December, the results of the poll perhaps do not reflect recent developments in the madhesi and pan-janajati movement. In response to one question, 43 percent say Nepal should be a federal rather than a unitary state. But this must be read in light of another finding that two-thirds of the respondents have never heard about the federal system.

How do you like to identify yourself?

How important are these constitutional issues to you, 10 being very important, 1 not important, and 5 not particularly important or unimportant?

Rate your feelings toward some leaders, 10 being very important, 1 not important, and 5 not particularly important or unimportant.
NEW YORK - A diverse group of Nepalis gathered to mark ‘democracy day’ on 19 February. Madhu Raman Acharya, Nepal’s ambassador to the US and permanent representative at Nepal’s mission to the United Nations in New York, and his wife Geeta hosted the event at the popular Yak Restaurant in Jackson Heights, Queens.

“Quite the statement, wasn’t it?” he says, ushering us in. The ambassador maintains a neutral reputation here in New York, but some still view him sceptically as he was appointed to this office just days before the king’s planned attendance at the UN General Assembly in 2005. He is presumably well liked by his bosses back home too—he once said that he “does what [he is] told to do.”

Although many had complained at another Nepali gathering last year that Falgun can’t be considered ‘democracy day’, the variety and number of people who accepted Acharya’s invitation was remarkable. The frill looking man wearing old sneakers, pajamas and a long sweater is Shail Upadhy, who is as close as a Nepali has come to being a celebrity in New York. The retired UN official has long been a resident of New York and is famous here for his colourful and eccentric fashion designing, At New York Fashion Week earlier this month, he was at ease, always in the front row, mingling with top designers and models, and speaking to journalists curious about his polka dot suits.

Here, though, he’s just an elderly retired Nepal diplomat. “I want to listen to what these guys are saying, I heard them mention Girja Prasad Koirala,” he says, pointing towards a heated debate between political activist Paramendra and another pro-democracy Nepal. (The prime minister is one of Shail ji’s less favourite uncles.)

Paramendra, the full-time blogger behind the DFN site, is no longer lauded for his pro-democracy work, but taken to task for his recent radical posts on the madhesi issue. “I rang him the very next morning and told him to take those words back. Who the hell is he to say that and divide the country?”, fumes devoted NC cadre Anand Bista of the Nepalese Democratic Youth Council in the US. I find out later that the conversation has taken a nasty turn, with Paramendra being told that had the discussion taken place in Nepal rather than New York, his teeth would not be so firmly in his mouth any more. No conversation gets very far here. Kamal Pande, another long-time resident, interrupts to ask us whether we didn’t think that a recent Nepali case study on how a local community has adapted to climate change,” he adds, “they really want to help us.”

A man dressed like a minister latches right on and says he’d give up his program to make Nepal a Hindu country again had been excellent. “The Indian guest speakers were great,” he adds, “They are in a race against time to understand their vulnerabilities to climate change and to adapt to its impacts.”

The owner of Yak Restaurant, Sonam Lama, will tell anyone who will listen that, contrary to reports on fursad.com, he is not a drug smuggler or a trafficker of people or involved in the Mongolian Heart illegal immigration controversy. Meanwhile, a young man from Queens whose mother, interrupts to ask us whether we didn’t think that a recent Nepali case study on how a local community has adapted to climate change,” he adds, “They are in a race against time to understand their vulnerabilities to climate change and to adapt to its impacts.”

About 100 experts from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the UN’s FAO and WHO, and participants from Africa and Asia will attend the event. “Communities in developing countries are already feeling the effects of climate change and are taking steps in response, based in part on their traditional knowledge of the environment,” says Saleemul Huq, head of the climate change group at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). “They are in a race against time to understand their vulnerabilities to climate change and to adapt to its impacts.”

The meeting in Dhaka will also include presentations on communities adapting to heat waves in mountainous areas of India, floods in Bangladesh and Nepal, drought in Kenya, soil salinity in Sri Lanka.
When Erkki and Leena Vihotoun advised the Vihotoun to abandon the training because television for Nepal was unrealistic. After the initial broadcasts, the operations moved to a new studio on the top floor of Singha Darbar in February 1986, and part of the operations still remain there. The Vihotoun tried from the beginning to make NTV into a true public service broadcaster with credible and independent news and a mix of development information, education, and entertainment. But these were the years of the Panchayat, so news and current affairs soon became the propaganda tool of the government. Ironically, the restoration of democracy didn’t change things much, because elected governments did the same thing.

Technically, nothing prevented NTV from being the best television news in Asia,” says Erkki, “but the journalists were always under pressure to do ministerial appearances.” The

Despite the frustration, the husband and wife from Finland keep coming back to Nepal. They have friends here among the 200 tv professionals and journalists they have trained. Among them are people who are now leaders in Nepali broadcasting: Prakash Jung Karki of NTV2, Kiran Chitrakar in NTV, Robin Sharma at Radio Nepal, Rama Singh NTV News, freelance documentary maker Dhruva Bosnet, Laxman Upadhyay in the japanese channel NHK, noted video editor Rahindra Pandey and many others (see pic).

“We were 15 of us and they really motivated us and excited us about the medium,” recalls Robin Sharma, who is now deputy executive director of Radio Nepal, “Erkki and Leena said I had a great future in television but I landed up in radio instead.”

The Vihotouns are also responsible for the familiarity many Nepalis have with the cult Finnish cartoon series, the Moomins. Initially, when the couple convinced Nepali Television to dub and run the show, many were sceptical that balloon cartoon characters from a northern European country would have relevance to Nepal, but the series has been a hit.

“It think the reason is that the Moomins are a close-knit but troubled family: mother, father, children, relatives and many kinds of friends, and these are mountains in the countryside,” explains Leena. The family are green (in principle, not colour) and kind—there’s no shooting anyone—and there is always a gripping plot.

Looking at the development in media in the last 21 years, what suggestions do the Vihotouns have for the new interim government in Nepal? “Politicians would understand that the public media prospers best under democratic control,” says Erkki with conviction, “NTV and Radio Nepal should be under parliament, not under the government.”

The need is the same as it was back in 1986, say the Finnish trainers: a multi-partisan parliamentary council should govern broadcasting, but never meddle in its day-to-day affairs.

A few weeks after the Trisen incident, another rhino with a bullet wound was spotted at the Panchakanya Community Forest in Chitwan. It was obviously in great pain as it splashed across rivulets and into fields. In December, a rescue team from the park. Having lost much blood, and too tired to run anymore, the animal lay down on its side and died. Five days previously, a village in Nawalparasi was overpowered by the foul smell from the rotting carcass of a rhino electrocuted to death. Fourteen rhinos have died in Chitwan between July and December, most of which are believed to have been killed by poachers.

The Maoist insurgency and scaling back of army protection in the tarai national parks have contributed to an increase in poaching in the last six years, though most rhinos have been killed in the buffer zone, which is not patrolled by the military.

The ceasefire and restoration of democracy have actually been worse for the animals. When an elderly hunter died after arrest last year, several members of a local anti-poaching unit were accused of killing him and imprisoned, which affected the morale of national park staff. Then, the Home Ministry under the new seven-party government released 15 people detained for poaching, among them experienced hunters. The number of rhino killings suddenly shot up. The ministry released 50 more accused of poaching late last year. The media headlined these events, sparking uproar in the restored parliament, which then formed a House committee in December to probe the matter.

Despite this, the newly-appointed warden of the Chitwan National Park used his discretionary authority to recently deliver an unusual and unexpected verdict against King Pemba. “Yatche Lama and 16 of his accomplices. This group is likely to be released soon. Since the restoration of democracy, park staff who helped to put Yachie behind bars are themselves behind bars while this ring leader of rhino horn smugglers is about to walk free.

Significant rise in the Gulf region, where rhino horns are used for traditional and religious rituals, and in East Asia where the horn is believed to have aphrodisiac properties are the pull factors for smugglers. Poverty, corruption, and tax security in Nepal are additional factors that encourage these activities. These factors, coupled with our capacity to have controlled the horn smuggling situation for a long time all our rhinos will have disappeared. What can we do right now? Staying off the horns of rhinos—removing the motivation for killing them—has been successfully tried in Namibia and Zimbabwe. De-horning Nepali rhinos maybe the only way to save rhinos.

Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha, PhD, is a noted Nepal naturalist.
Name: Beauty  
Age: Five to six years  
This fluffy little mongrel was rescued from in front of the Veterinary Hospital at Teku. Due to a long-running skin problem, Beauty had to stay on at the centre for a long time—almost ten months. She is now all well and her skin is almost back to normal, but she has a bit of a throat problem that makes her bark sound more like a whine. Beauty is old and not very energetic, but she loves life and gets along very well with everyone. Frolicking with younger dogs is one of her favourite pastimes, and she is great friends with the centre’s only resident kitten. 

Name: Seti  
Age: One to one-and-a-half years  
Seti is a cross between a Japanese Spitz and a mongrel, and one of the most adorable dogs at the centre. KAT staff say that Seti seems to have been abandoned by her owners. When she first came in five months ago, she was suffering terribly from mange and eczema, and barely had any fur. Today, she’s fully recovered and looks startlingly like a beautiful mixed Lab. Seti is an energetic little dog, always up for a tussle with a snowball. Just as energetic as Nova, Seti loves other dogs and likes nothing more than to play with them. Seti is often seen teasing the older dogs and nipping at their ankles in an effort to make them chase after her.

Name: Nova  
Age: Five months  
Nova, a little dynamo, has been at the centre for a month-and-a-half. Currently the only puppy at the centre, Nova is an energetic little dog, always up for a tussle with a snowball. Just as energetic as Nova, Seti loves other dogs and likes nothing more than to play with them. Seti is often seen teasing the older dogs and nipping at their ankles in an effort to make them chase after her. Nova has yet to go to a foreign family, but the centre will give her to anyone who can take good, proper care of her. Nova has yet to go to a foreign family, but the centre will give her to anyone who can take good, proper care of her.

Name: Blackie  
Age: Two to two-and-a-half years  
Blackie is an enigma. With a scar down her side that will never grow fur, Blackie looks like a battle-weary streetfighter. BC Jha, a veterinarian at KAT, speculates that the scar could be the result of Blackie having been attacked with boiling water. When she was rescued from Thamel, Blackie had no fur at all, and it took almost a year-and-a-half for her to recover completely at the centre. Blackie is an active dog, and very alert and watchful, though sometimes temperamental.

The Kathmandu Animal Treatment (KAT) Centre, a non-profit organisation, sterilises street dogs in an effort to reduce their numbers. It also treats the dogs for illnesses before releasing them back. Sometimes, though, the dogs have more serious problems such as severe mange, and the centre keeps them on for more than the standard couple of weeks. If they stay for long enough, these dogs often get habituated to living with people and can no longer be released back onto the streets. That’s when KAT puts them up for adoption.}

**PRANAYA SJR RANA**

There are approximately 30,000 strays in Kathmandu, and this number is rapidly increasing. Street dogs are usually abandoned mongrels, often ill and feral. They are afflicted with rabies, open wounds festering with maggots, skin problems, and infectious diseases. These dogs roam the streets, foraging for food among garbage heaps, and often congregating near butcher shops, only to be kicked or cut by the owners.

The true owners of Kathmandu’s streets are not the motorists or bus drivers. It’s our dogs. There are approximately 30,000 strays in Kathmandu, and this number is rapidly increasing. Street dogs are usually abandoned mongrels, often ill and feral. They are afflicted with rabies, open wounds festering with maggots, skin problems, and infectious diseases. These dogs roam the streets, foraging for food among garbage heaps, and often congregating near butcher shops, only to be kicked or cut by the owners.

If you’re looking for a dog, adoption from the centre is a great alternative to the usual high-maintenance, snooty, pure-bred options. Our featured dogs may not be pure-breds, but they can stand up to a lot. And they’re a lot cuter too.

All the dogs listed here live at the KAT centre in Budanilkantha. You’re rewarded for being an adoptive dog-owner—KAT will provide free medical care for a year. Prospective owners should note that all dogs, whether male or female, have been immunised against rabies, and are spayed or neutered.

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Khagendra Sharma, the manager of the centre, tells us a recent story about Charlie, who was being treated for severe mange. Charlie was adopted by a taxi-driver from Budanilkantha who took a great fancy to him, and the former stray is today a healthy, happy little dog.
New city old joys
A new book of walks around the Valley is the perfect antidote to Kathmandu ennui

Buddha has stood there for 2,000 years. ‘There is the Bungamati Square, just from the lively Annapokhari. Who quarried the stone, who carved him, who put him there, what has he witnessed?’ These are not questions we normally stop to consider as we rush about our daily lives. But it is exactly the kind of pause John Child encourages in his new book, Streets of Silver, Streets of Gold: Ten Easy Walks among the Gods, Livingstone Books, 2006, published by Himal Books.

The book’s title might more appropriately have been ‘of Kathmandu Valley’, since the author takes you on walks that range from Swoyambhunath to Bhaktapur, in addition to the bylanes of Kathmandu itself. This excellent guide is written by a person who clearly loves the Valley and knows a lot about its history, its people, and its places. His passion is infectious.

The walks are not long, SNAGging treks, but strolls through the past alive in the present, through the spiritual ramshackle in the everyday. Child alternates between the minutiae in front of you and more thorough informational digestions. It is a good balance.

He does not overburden the reader with information, but does a commendable job of giving the average person an initial taste, or perhaps a reminder, of the political and cultural history of the Valley and of the different but intertwined religious practices.

But the walks are not just tours of the curious and the notable, though there is plenty of that—an exquisite Shiva and Parvati in the sensual Uma Maha Devi, just next to Nayo Chen. The largest lingam in the country is on the banks of the Bagmati. The first house in the Valley other than the palaces to have glass windows is near Kel Tov, and there is a 6th century stele granting tax relief to local villagers behind the Jaisidewal temple. After a few outings, you begin to get a sense of the larger mosaic that is the Valley. The contours of the previous eras emerge through the concrete, asphalt, and exhaust. It is not an endless sleep of houses and shops in front of you, but open land. You can imagine the space that actually existed between places that now seem to differ only in name. The author untangles the layers of history from modern sprawl and brings your attention to the faint outlines of the old Rana estates, the original settlements, or the anonymous idol, but focuses on the bodhisattva of compassion, worn smooth by millions of hands of worshippers. Kathmandu and its environs can be overwhelming, especially to a visitor, but this guide teases out the apparent chaos, giving it back a sense of reference, both physical and intellectual.

I did some of these walks alone, some with local Newari friends, and some with tourists on a short stay. For me the context of the great effort on the part of a local scholar to have known interminably over the years—there is always something more to learn here. My local friends here delighted in walking lanes they would not normally use. While much of the religion and culture was innate to them, they now looked at details they had never considered, like the scars of Shams-ud-din Ilyas’s invasion or the sadness of a forgotten hiti, its water choked. For the tourists, the walks help give a little deeper context to what can appear like confusion to the western mind.

There aren’t many weaknesses in this book. There have been a lot of places that have been our terrains, and there is always something more to learn about them.

As with every guide, a book like this is only useful if you actually use it. I did some of these walks regularly, which added to its utility. I will happily be returning to the Jaisidewal temple.

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EXHIBITIONS
- Public art show by BFA students from Lalitkala Campus, Rainnapark to Ason area, 22 February from 10AM-5PM.
- In Search of Zhang-Zhung a presentation of images by Thomas Kelly and Carol Dunham, 23 February, 6.30 PM at the Indigo Gallery, Rs 500 for entrance.
- Sound of Love an exhibition of paintings by Ragini Upadhyaya-Greta at The Art Shop, Durbar Marg, every weekend until 25 February, 11AM-6PM. 9841444848
- Ek Raat an exhibition of paintings based on BP Koirala’s short story, at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, 24 February-11 March, 11AM-6PM. 4216048

EVENTS
- Ek Raat a play based on BP Koirala’s short story, performed by Saranam, 23 February at 5.30 PM at the Birendra International Convention Centre.
- Yura Chaflal Shrinkhala on the action plan for constituent assembly and youth participation, 23 February from 3-5PM at Martin Chautari. 4107999
- Vipassana talk program and interaction, 24 February, 1PM at Mind Body Library, Trivuperser. 4279791
- Sala S try-out classes at the Sala Dance Academy, Bhat Bhaneni, on 24 February, beginner classes start on 25 February. 4420191

Spirited Away a film by Hayao Miyazaki presented by the Kathmandu Film Society, 25 February at 6.30 PM at the Nepal Tourism Board.

New methods to learn a foreign language talk program and interaction, 26 February at 1PM at Mind Body Library, Trivuperser. 4279791

Mangalbare Discussion Series on the development of the internet at Martin Chautari, 27 February at 5PM. 4236050

Film@Chautari show and discussion of Rakesh Sharma’s Final Solution at Martin Chautari. 1 March at 3PM. 4242043

Building a Bridge over the Cultural Gap CSEKN monthly lecture on 2 March, 9.30 AM at the Shanker Hotel.

Civic Concerns an effort to assess youth concerns and share views and ideas, 10 March, 10.30 AM-5.30 PM at PIC, Heritage Plaza, Rs 100 for registration. 4107999

Toastmasters communication and leadership program, every Wednesday 6PM at the Institute of Environmental Management, Trivuperser.

MUSIC
- Fusion and classical Nepali music by Rudra live at the Courtyard, Le Meridien, Gokarna every Friday, 7PM onwards, Rs 800. 4451216
- Open Mic Night at Va’lla Café, Thamel every Friday, BPM
- Gain ep (Gandharbas) perform at every lunch and dinner, Club Himalaya Nagarkot. 6680080

DINING
- Walk and lunch every Saturday until 31 March at the Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 9841371927
- Light nouveau snacks and elaborate cordon bleu meals at La Soor, Pulchowk, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166
- Continental cuisine and wine by the fire place at Kityo’s, Thamel. 4250440
- Shop Talk Drink and dine at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Radisson Hotel.
- Café Bahal at Kathmandu Guest House. 4700632.
- Smorgasbord lunch at Park Village Resort, every Saturday. 4375280
- Gyakok lunch and dinner at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, minimum of four guests at Rs 450 per person, two hours order in advance.
- Retro brunch barbecue with the Crossfire Band at The Poolside, Le Meridien, Gokarna from 12 noon-4PM. Rs 1,000 inclusive of swimming and complimentary drink. 4451216
- International Brunch weekends 11AM-3PM for Rs 499 per person (Rs 299 for children) at Hotel Himalaya. 5523900
- Te Tibetan delicacies at Nepal’s first noodle bar, Bluebird Mall Food Court.
- Calcutta’s rolls, biryani, kebabs at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court, 9741000735
- Japanese Food at the Coffee Shop at Hotel Shangri-la, 12-3PM. Rs 499 for person. 4412999
- Pizza from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4425219
- Some Like It Hot live music from Side B every Friday at Fusion—the bar at Dwarika’s. Rs 799 includes BBQ dinner. 4478488
- Soul Warmers Inner Groove live at Fusion—the bar at Dwarika’s. Rs 599 includes a Fusion platter and cocktail. 4478488
- Woodfired Pizzas at Roadhouse Café, Thamel, 4267268, Bhaktapur 4425287, Pulchowk 5521725
- AKA Pizza at Moksh, delivery available. 5526212
- Momo and Sekuwa Revolution Saturday at the Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 6680048
- Cocktails and Mocktails Daily happy hour, 4-7PM at Kathmandu Revolving Restaurant, Ratna Plaza, New Road

GETAWAYS
- Weekend package at the Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort and Spa, two nights three days at Rs 8,888 and one night two days at Rs 4,444. 4451216
- Sun and Fun Three days and two nights package at Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara. Rs 7,499. 4412999

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com
NO STINKING WAY: Protestors walk past the rubbish heap in Bhrikuti Mandap, raising slogans against King Gyanendra after his Democracy Day address on Monday.

NEITHER HERE NOR THERE: Fifty urban refugees from seven countries including Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan sit-in in front of Singha Darbar demanding exit permits so they can leave Nepal for a third country. Some have been here for as long as three years.

GAOL!: Supporters of the Mahendra Police Club cheer on Wednesday as their team equalises with Manang Marsyangdi in a Shahid Smarak San Miguel A Division League match that ended in a 2-2 draw.

Cheeni lai marnu's dhakka. Dabur honey ra doodh le zabardast energy pakka.

Yes, make Dabur Honey an essential part of your daily diet and see a marked difference in your overall health within days. Just switching from sugar to Dabur Honey ensures multiple benefits for you and your entire family. For starters, unbelievable energy, a perfect figure and total fitness. So go ahead, push sugar out of your life and switch to the healthier alternative today, Dabur Honey.

CHEENI HOMA, DABUR HONEY, HEALTHY CHA, TASTY CHA.

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Politics of garbage

Pretty soon this is going to be known as the land of shortages: gas, diesel, water, electricity, and brains. The only thing we have an abundance of seems to be filth.

The garbage piling up on the streets is just the outward manifestation of the rot within. The Ministry of Local Development gives Okharpauwa Rs 8 million for letting their idyllic village be Kathmandu’s dumping ground. Trouble is that Nuwakote Maoists aren’t in the committee that controls the money and they want a part of the action. So they forced the closure of the landfill site. Typical ass-first thinking, if I may say so myself. Extrapolate this to the national level for a preview of things to come once the comrades are in the interim government.

The mother of all tussles has begun over the new government. The madhesis and Maoists are snarling at each other like hyenas over the juicy ministries that are up for grabs. The Ass has learnt from reliable moles that the Maoists are gunning (as it were) for one of the deputy prime ministerships but Girija Koirala is dead (pardon the pun) against it since this would put the Maoists a heartbeat away from the most powerful position that Nepal has ever known. Although with Amik and Sitaula doing their every bidding, and getting UNMIN’s wink at not storing 2,000 assault rifles in containers, why would the comrades want more portfolios anyway?

Koirala is under pressure to hand over the deputy prime ministership to a madhesi to placate the tarai. If that happens, the Maoists are sure to want either home or defence. They are also insisting that Comrade Prabhat get education to push her version of reading, riting and rithmetic: ‘A is for ambush, B is for bomb’ and ‘three grenades plus two grenades is equal to five grenades’ plus a detailed curriculum vitae of the Great Awe-inspiring Leader.

Just goes to show that the leaders of the eight parties are now behaving like the Dictator they replaced. With loadshedding at six hours a day they decreed that government buildings throughout the country illuminate themselves for three straight nights on the occasion of Loktantra Day. Wonder which hapless districts had to spend three nights in darkness so that Kathmandu’s edifices could celebrate the anniversary of the day we overthrew the Rana yoke.

Then Comrade Prachanda Pratapi Bhuwan autographs a flag that is being taken to the top of Mt Everest by Nepali climbers. Nothing wrong with that, right? Wrong. The flag wasn’t the national flag but the CPN-M banner and the Sherpas are climbing from the Maoist side of the mountain. Greetings from the land where Mac is alive and kicking to the land where Mao rests in a mausoleum.

So Sujata tried to get an appointment with Badamaharani Sonia in New Delhi to press home her point that the Reds are taking over Nepal and to get blessings for giving Sitaula the boot. Unfortunately Sonia was too busy showing around Romano Prodi from her maiti and couldn’t squeeze her in. So the First Daughter had to fall back on Plan B and meet Sheila Dixit instead. Meanwhile Kingji has sent the Kamaksha Baba from Gauhal to his latest embassy to Delhi, knowing that the godman is also guru of several cabinet ministers there.

The Ass took a few puffs from the chillums of the Bhole Babas at Pashupati on Friday and was still badly hung over the next morning which is why he did a double take when he saw the headline in the papers: ‘King Gyanendra Gets Stoned On Shivaratri’. Wot?