The Nepali people have once more proved doomsayers wrong. By turning out in overwhelming numbers to vote, Thursday’s election became a referendum for peace, justice and development.

Even in the hotspots where much violence was predicted, voting was peaceful and orderly. The turnout exceeded even the Election Commission’s most optimistic scenario. By Thursday afternoon as this paper went to press, over 75 percent of the electorate had cast their ballots in Morang and Sunsari. In Chitwan, the figure was 75 percent. Turnout in the far-west till about 3PM was 60 percent.

It was Kathmandu Valley where the turnout was lower, with only 55 percent till 3PM. By that time in rural Sindhuli, Parsa and Rautahat, 70 percent of the people had voted. There were electoral hotspots where trouble was expected, and here polls have been postponed.

Bullet to ballot

SOLDIER-STATESMAN: Prime Minister Koirala (right) casts his ballot in his hometown of Biratnagar on Thursday morning. The ageing Koirala has been worried about his legacy and had told his physicians: “Keep me alive till elections.” Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal (left) has his privacy invaded by media as he votes in Bharatpur. This is the first time he has voted since the 1980 referendum on the monarchy.
A NEW PAGE

For the past year, local and expat naysayers in Kathmandu insisted that there was no way elections could be held. Even till last week, these nobs of negativism were predicting the end of the Nepali elections were ahead.

Even if they are proved wrong, doomsayers don’t change into optimists overnight. And now that elections have been held, they are predicting chaos, anarchy, diatrabe, and death in the coming months. There is a danger that their cynicism will be a self-fulfilling prophecy, and it is now up to the elected representatives to prove them wrong.

What gives us hope has been the ability of widely opposed parties to come this far in the past two years. Given the fractionalism and self-interest of our leaders, this is something of a miracle. We expected a threshold of violence because one of the protagonists was till two years ago an underground guerrilla force.

No more do our date-expired politicians now have to invite the mandate of street protests. From now on their legitimacy comes from the people’s mandate. The Nepali people voted with enthusiasm and hope on Thursday, and their wish must be respected.

That is what democracy is all about, and that is what we are now able to restore.

But this democracy is fragile and the road ahead is a political minefield. The 601-member assembly will have to deal with serious issues like the abolition of monarchy, federalism, tackling the competing demands for ethnic representation that were put on hold for the polls, the future of Maoist combatants. Nepal’s status quo will not give up without a struggle and reformers will need unity and a sense of destiny. But over and beyond all the political issues that have to be resolved, the assembly has to catch up with last time on the economy and development.

The people have been waiting patiently for the politics to sort itself out and haven’t camouflaged too noisy for the peace dividend.

Ultimately, legitimacy doesn’t just come from the ballot. It comes from performance and delivery. And if they don’t see their lives improve even after these elections, the republic, they care about jobs, roads, health posts and schools.

Peace dividend.

Politics to sort itself out and haven’t clamoured too noisily for the development. The people have been waiting patiently for the polls, the future of Maoist combatants.

The Constituent Assembly is not just part and parcel of the peace process, it is also a restructuring exercise for the government. It also represents a return to pluralism and representative government after nine long years. This is why we have to urge the emerging, conflicting and complementary demands of communities will be discussed, instead of the frustrated accusation to burning tyres.

The Nepali spirit will see us through in the days ahead, including the vulnerable period over the next three weeks while the ballots are counted. The political parties that get the largest number of votes will take the lead in fashioning the new polity, but it must carry along all political forces including the Maoists in the running of the government and drafting the constitution.

The assembly has to be ratified within 21 days of the final results. The first task at hand will be the parties acting on their mandates to declare the country a republic. To be gracious, the historical kingship can be thanked for its role in the creation of the nation state 239 years ago.

As the constitution-making begins in earnest, the 601 framers must have a philosophical commitment to values included in the superseded 1990 constitution: multi-party pluralism, representative government, fundamental freedoms and human rights.

Looking beyond, a set of draft directive principles developed by the Interim Parliament (‘federalism’, ‘secularism’ and ‘inclusion’ included) will serve as the basis for the sovereign Constituent Assembly to begin work on developing a new Basic Law.

The 601-member assembly will have to deal with sensitive issues like the abolition of monarchy, federalism, and responsible democracies must rise above populism to develop a Basic Law.

The new government must make sure that the young and the old, the urban and rural, the people begin to enjoy the long delayed peace dividend, and it must make sure that the future development projects after a decade of waiting. The international community must help.

There is so much more that the needs to be done, to give the public confidence in state administration and respect for law.

We should not forget the need for accountability for the atrocities of the past, by whichever side. ‘The matter of ‘security reforms’ must be addressed, bringing the Nepal Army even more firmly under civilian control.

The Maoist fighters in the cantons must be brought into the mainstream as a priority.

The Constituent Assembly, must start with a philosophical demand for a new Basic Law, and the immediate hope of those who voted yesterday is that the elections will widen the political space, help mend the tattered social fabric, and trigger economic development.

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The international community must help.
My brother, a young engineer, didn’t want to miss voting in the constituent assembly elections. Like thousands of others, he left Kathmandu for his village in Dhanusa on Monday by night bus.

The journey till Dhalkebar was uneventful. But the Pahadi bus-driver refused to risk antagonising Jwala Singh, the renegade Maoist who has called for a Madhes banda. He dumped his passengers at dawn on Tuesday morning in the middle of nowhere.

The determined engineer travelled from Dhalkebar to Mahendranagar in one of the diesel tempos, banished from Kathmandu ten years ago for being too polluting, but which now form the backbone of public transport in the Tarai. Even the tempo-driver didn’t want to risk driving into Janakpur. Ramnavami pilgrims and voters heading home had to take rickshaws to reach the capital of Mithila at four times the going rate.

This campaign has seen the expected level of campaign and poll violence. Assuming the elections are declared a success by Jimmy Carter and his co-observers, another question which is likely to emerge immediately afterwards is whether things will change fast enough in this country to address the aspirations of youngsters like my brother. If they don’t, it wouldn’t take long for the euphoria to turn into ennui and then explode into yet another upheaval.

It would be presumptuous to predict poll outcomes so early. But one doesn’t need to be a psephologist to forecast the composition of the assembly. In all probability, it will be a hung-house dominated by the Big Three—NC, UML and Maoists—though not necessarily in that order. Once a place has been found to sit the 600+ member assembly under one roof, the first agenda before the house will be to elect a chair and formulate rules and procedures for its own operation. Republicans in the country are hoping that the sessions will begin by announcing the abolition of monarchy through a unanimous decision or at least a voice vote. That appears highly unlikely. All kinds of delaying tactics will be employed by monarchists in every mainstream party to buy time.

The second order of business will have to be government formation. Their relative strength in the assembly notwithstanding, parties are bound by their previous agreements to form a coalition government. There is only one change that may happen, the leader of the largest party may get to be presumptuous to predict poll outcomes so early. But one doesn’t need to be a psephologist to forecast the composition of the assembly. In all probability, it will be a hung-house dominated by the Big Three—NC, UML and Maoists—though not necessarily in that order. Once a place has been found to sit the 600+ member assembly under one roof, the first agenda before the house will be to elect a chair and formulate rules and procedures for its own operation. Republicans in the country are hoping that the sessions will begin by announcing the abolition of monarchy through a unanimous decision or at least a voice vote. That appears highly unlikely. All kinds of delaying tactics will be employed by monarchists in every mainstream party to buy time.

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Baby queen?

It looks like there is little that can save the Nepali monarchy now. The seven parties have agreed that the first order of business for the constituent assembly is to declare Nepal a republic.

Though he now seems more reconciled with the idea of a kingless Nepal, it was prime minister Koirala who last year made one of the weirder suggestions for the monarchy’s future: the baby king formula.

Recent opinion polls (see ‘Pre-poll poll, #386’ indicate that, despite everything, as much as half the people in the country are in favour of a symbolic monarchy in Nepal. The only problem is what to do with the present king, who even staunch monarchists like Surya Bahadur Thapa can’t stomach.

Mindful of this, the PM proposed that the crown be taken out of Gyanendra’s hands, passed over his son Paras (who due to his own antics is also not deemed king material) and go directly to his grandson, seven-year-old Prince Ghazan, who lusted after the throne but were not in line. More recently it has been a public stunt intended to boost the mass appeal of ailing dynasties.

Take the UK’s ruling house of Windsor. For example, they have lost the pomp and circumstance of yesteryear. As the Gunwhistle’s favourite prince Harry will happily admit, royals are not saints; they are normal people who have to keep up an image of spotless national role models in the age of mass media and paparazzi.

Prince Charles, Harry’s dad, is personally my favourite UK royal but for many people he is the most objectionable. So in Britain, too, it has been suggested that the crown should skip a generation, and Charles firstborn, prince William should be the next King of England.

The rationale seems to be that such a move would give the monarchy a makeover. It would make the institution appear younger, more hip and ‘in touch’ with modern Britain.

Prince William is still fresh and doesn’t have a messy, uneasily past like his father, thus the party line is that the moral rectitude of the institution will be safeguarded (in England kings are not gods but they are head of the church).

Would youthful kings make monarchy any more relevant?

Kings used to lead their armies into battle. They conquered enemies, founded cities, and if they were displeased with their subjects, they were displeased with their subjects. Gyanendra’s ancestor Prithbi Narayan Shah ruled it for 239 years.

But would appointing a baby king (or baby queen if one takes the proposal of princess Sruti’s daughter seriously) really be the first move on its agenda, preceding even the work on drafting a new constitution.

The third amendment to the interim constitution in December 2007 declared Nepal a federal republic, but only take effect when the measure is approved by the constituent assembly.

The move put the monarchy in suspended animation and removed him as the head of state, stripped him even of his ceremonial role, his command over the army and immunity from prosecution.


dean rai

Will this election finally consign Nepal’s monarchy to the history books?

Unceremoniously removed monarchy

When the constituent assembly finally sits, making Nepal a republic is supposed to be the first item on its agenda, preceding even the work on drafting a new constitution.

The third amendment to the interim constitution in December 2007 declared Nepal a federal republic, but only take effect when the measure is approved by the constituent assembly.

The move put the monarchy in suspended animation and removed him as the head of state, stripped him even of his ceremonial role, his command over the army and immunity from prosecution.

Turning Nepal secular was taken as the first order of business for the constituent assembly to declare Nepal a republic. Many of the respondents want to retain a symbolic monarchy and 65 percent were against secularisation, (See: ‘Pre-poll poll’, #386)

However, Gyanendra’s popularity is very low and few respondents want him to remain king. If the royalist parties have a popular candidate to replace Gyanendra, he says, “Throughout history monarchies have been abolished either through revolution or negotiation. But the royalist parties will not accept a referendum because they know people still believe in the monarchy. The interim parliament cannot decide the fate of the monarchy and the third amendment was unconstitutional.”

Sharma says that monarchy is an essential symbol of national identity and that the NC and the monarchists within the mainstream parties. After the legislation goes through parliament, the king will probably be served notice to vacate the palace. He is not expected to resist.

“Any move against the monarchy will not only be unconstitutional but also anti-people this time,” says Koirala.

After that question is out of the way, the parties are expected to be minded in debate about whether to adopt a prime ministerial or presidential system, and whether to have regional or ethnic federalism. Nepal Bar Association president, Shiswakanta Maitali doesn’t expect much debate on the republic within the house. “There will be royalists in the assembly, but they will be too few to get a constitutional monarchy by through,” he predicts.

RPP (Nepal) is the only party out of 54 favouring a constitutional monarchy. RPP and the Rastra Jana Party are fence-sitting.

For his part, king Gyanendra has taken note of the poll results. He told the Japanese newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun in his last interview in February that the assembly would not be reflecting the view of a majority of Nepalis if it abolished the monarchy. “Most people find great meaning in the institution of the monarchy. Every cloud has a silver lining. Let us hope,” he had said.

However, unless there is either a spontaneous uprising in support of the monarchy or a military coup, it does look like the sun is setting on the Shah dynasty that forged Nepal and ruled it for 239 years.
Marketing democracy

The politicians may as well admit that campaigning is a form of marketing

This makes every candidate chase every possible voter. Marketing in a democracy is thus an inherently inclusive process, making candidates reach out to voters of all ethnicities and economic classes.

Promises: When interacting with voters, candidates make promises like bringing drinking water, roads or electricity to a village, fighting for Dalit rights or revisiting the Constitution’s key points. All this is akin to a cream marketer’s promise to your teenage daughter that she’ll have glowing skin if she uses his product.

Information: Campaign-trail exchanges with wide swathes of voting-age population create a plethora of information. Voters talk to one another. They use the media and listen to the grapevines. They gather information from and about the candidates. And the candidates themselves learn how to tailor their messages to different segments of population.

Choice: More exchanges and information put the voters in a position in which they can make an informed choice, weighing up what most appeals to them on various sides. They are then free to make up their mind in ways they see fit without coercion. Marketing of candidates and their ideas expands the range of choices available to voters.

Engagement: If candidates share information about themselves credibly, they can count on engaging the voters with their political aspirations. But all that sharing of information and provision of choices will be little use if voters find no reason to engage in the democratic process. So marketing helps candidates find ways to engage voters, as they must consider them like customers who have to be made happy.

Consumption: Voters cast their votes to the candidates of their choice, and follow the election results. They will be consuming the consequences of their choices for some time to come.

Our politicians understandably recall at the idea that campaigning is marketing. But given marketing’s obvious benefits, the sooner our politicians embraced it to address persistent problems and make better policies, the more openly the public would be empowered to make decisions on issues that affect it.

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Rivalry

Kashiram Dangi in Nepal, 13 April

Rolpa—Despite the People’s War having ended two years ago and talks about integrating them into a national army, relations between the People’s Liberation Army and the Nepal Army still remain frosty.

Relations got worse last year when an M-16 rifle disappeared from inside the Nepal Army’s Gorah battalion compound in Libang, just one day before minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara was due to visit Rolpa. Both the Maoists and the Nepal Army searched for the missing rifle and in the end, Maoist district workers Current and Ganga Sunar were accused of taking the weapon.

Army sources, three people were caught who claimed to have transferred the weapon to Maoist hands. Maoist in-charge Dipendra Pun claims that all allegations are false.

According to army sources, three people were caught who claimed to have transferred the weapon to Maoist hands. Maoist in-charge Dipendra Pun claims that all allegations are false. He says, “If we did take the weapon, then why aren’t we being charged?”

The Maoists believe that there was a conspiracy to kill Mahara, who was visiting to inaugurate the 11th district council. On the same day the army lost one of its weapons, the Maoists also lost a weapon from their cantonment in Dahawan.

The two armies are also competing in humanitarian work. After the signing of the peace agreement, the Nepal Army gathered in Libang Bajar to conduct a cleaning campaign. They not only cleaned the pavements and roads but even the public toilets. They have also started to build a library.

Immediately after, the VCL also conducted their own cleaning campaign in the same place that the army had cleaned. Seeing this new dimension to the rivalry between the two sides that fought each other during the war has left the people of Rolpa amazed.

The Maoists claim that the Army only started doing these things after seeing what the Maoists were doing: building roads, gardens, sports fields, drinking water supplies and libraries. But the army’s Colonel Ananda Singh Bhatta disagrees: “We’ve been doing humanitarian work for years.”

The army has been providing drinking water supplies to villages around their barracks, built a library. They have also started to build a sports field and even conducted a health camp for the sick. Colonel Bhatta says, “The Nepal Army is the people’s army. Whatever it does, it does for the good of the country.”

The meeting decided that even in remote parts of west Nepal, Locals in Karnali have high expectations from the CA polls. Some expect new roads, others easier access to electricity, water and phone lines, but they understand that their voices will only be heard if they choose a capable candidate.

Most women do not know what the CA poll is or what it is for. Some believe it is like a magic wand that will make sickness and food scarcity vanish.

Balkumari Mahata, chairman of Lalani Co-operatives in Jumla says, “I have started convincing women to vote for the party that has taken women’s issues and is likely to see them through.”

Investment

Bijay Chhimire in Kantipur, 9 April

Pokhara’s young entrepreneurs are hoping for a more investment-friendly environment after the constituent assembly polls. They’re enthusiastic about the elections and are planning new promotions to launch after they are done.

Nepal’s private sector may be small but is raring to invest, especially in the country’s water resources, cement and housing industries. Many have bought land and raw materials for cement and housing industries. Many have bought land and raw materials for cement and housing industries. Many have bought land and raw materials for cement and housing industries. Many have bought land and raw materials for cement and housing industries. Many have bought land and raw materials for cement and housing industries. Many have bought land and raw materials for cement and housing industries. Many have bought land and raw materials for cement and housing industries.

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There was doubt among the business community whether the elections would happen or not.
Investors were afraid of the political instability and many were already thinking of relocating or investing abroad. But now all these insecurities have vanished.

The rebuilding of the nation can only be strengthened by financial development. All of the party manifestoes are agreed on this. The people believe that once the election for a new constitution is over, there will be development.

Inspiration

Himal Khabarpatrika, 14-28 March

Compared to the many who come to Kathmandu for higher education and completely forget their roots, Taplejung’s Dalu Sherpa is different. Sherpa received a Master’s degree from Kathmandu’s Tribhuvan University, returned to her village, and is now the associate Nepali lecturer at Myanglung’s Pathibhara Campus. She says she chose to study Nepali because she wanted to prove that even janajatis can study the subject. She is thrilled to be the first woman lecturer in Taplejung district.

She paid her way through university by working as an orphanage in-charge in Kathmandu. Her passion is social service. Sherpa wants to work in empowering women in education. “If they are educated, Nepali women can achieve so much more, so the government needs to put education on top of its list of priorities,” she says.

She did not care for the money and easy life in the city. Instead she has become an inspiration to those who want to come back and do something for their village.

BOMB POLITICS: Ram Prasad Mainali claimed that his group of the Nepal Defence Army was responsible for the bomb blast on 29 March at a mosque in Biratnagar killing two worshippers. He has said that his group will start a civil war if Nepal doesn’t go back to being a Hindu state.

King Gyanendra, 9 April.
From early morning long lines of people streamed towards voting centres all over the country. Some even arrived at 6AM to beat the crowds and the heat.

“There is a lot of enthusiasm for these polls,” said polling officer Suresh Ghimire in Lalitpur’s Jawalakhel.

More than 17.6 million Nepalis were eligible to vote and the guess is that there was a 70 percent turnout—the highest in any election in Nepal.

Voting was suspended in only ten of the 20,888 polling centres in an election which for the first time was carried out in a mixed system. There was a direct ballot for candidates and a proportional representation ballot for parties.

There were 9,600 candidates vying for 575 seats in the 601-member assembly. Some 234,000 polling staff and 135,000 police were deployed. More than 60,000 election observers, 1,000 of them from abroad, came to inspect polling.

The election probably marks the end of the road for Nepal’s monarchy and the final stage of the peace process that has brought the Maoists out of the jungles and into mainstream politics.

The results of the direct elections will be clear in a few days, but the PR ballot will be known only in two weeks.
opes as Nepalis vote

(Localwise from left)

Local Swoyambhu residents file their votes for the proportional representation and first-past-the-post ballots (pink and blue voting booths respectively).

Seventy eight-year-old Shukal Giri from Biratnagar-5 raises his hand in elation after successfully casting his vote at Janapath Higher Secondary School. He had waited for five hours in line.

Election commissioner Bhoj Raj Pokhrel (left) and UNMIN chief Ian Martin (right) observe voting at Darbar High School, Jamal.

Senior Maoist leader Ram Bahadur Thapa (Badal) votes for the first time in his life in Chitwan.

Mohan Kumar Maharjan stood in line with his voter list number from 5AM at the polling station in Kirtipur to be the first one to vote on election day.
“We are used to the bombs. This is our chance to be heard.”

Madhesi voters defy threats and prove everyone wrong
A s voters patiently waited in line at Jawalakhel polling station, Laxman Singh Khatika, who calls himself the cleaner of Nepal, was speaking animatedly to a small crowd gathered outside the booths.

“Look at these foreign observers,” he said, “what they see is only the surface, they don’t know anything about our country.”

Perhaps some of the foreign observers could be laid open to the charge of being parachutists. There are a few who just arrived on Tuesday and are due to fly out again on Friday morning.

For 2,100 polling stations around the country, there are more than 60,000 observers (of whom nearly 1,000 are foreign), but on election day there were moments when stations in the capital lacked the presence of even one observer.

“Three observers came and left very quickly,” said a polling officer at Kumari Kaji. Election observation in Lalitpur did not seem the most coordinated of operations. While the polling stations at Kumari Kaji, Satalobar and the Ashok Stupa had no observers present when Nepali Times visited, the one at Jawalakhel had seen observers from at least 10 organisations within a span of just three hours, including Jimmy Carter’s entourage.

Two UN observers made a brief appearance at the station at about 7.30 AM to take some pictures and a short interview with polling officers. They declined to make any comments but told us that they were in a hurry to get to other stations.

One observer from the National Election Observation Committee said that she was allowed to choose one polling station to monitor from the three districts assigned to her. The number of stations to visit is up to the discretion of the observer.

While some, mostly international observers, were travelling in cars and jeeps, others had to do the rounds on foot. Rim Prasad Sharma and Kamal Kumar Neupane said they had a lot of stations to visit, and so couldn’t stay for too long at each one.

In most cases, the observers would usually stay for up to half an hour. Some took notes and made video recordings inside the voting stations, whereas others preferred a more circumspect strategy, and peered in from outside.

Although they are not supposed to intervene in the process in any way, some gave this directive some leeway in the interpretation. At Jawalakhel, gentlemanly observers from a local NGO were leading the elderly and women with children to the front of the queue, which caused some confusion among polling officers.

At least in Lalitpur, there seemed to be no major mishaps. When asked how they thought the process was going, all the observers replied “no problems.”

We can’t say there weren’t a few small hitches. At the Jawalakhel polling station, voting started 20 minutes late as officers were still having breakfast at 7 AM. In several booths, more than one person was voting at once.

But Nepal is Nepal. This is the first election for nine years. And at least up till polling day events went much smoother than anticipated.
Making every vote count

Vote counting will be prolonged, but this time it will be foolproof

The ballots for the first-past-the-post and proportional representation systems will be counted simultaneously at each district capital. In remote areas the Home Ministry will use helicopters to deliver ballot boxes.

Each ballot paper will be opened, and its vote noted and marked by five people. Any ballot paper that is missing a signature or appears tampered with in any way will be disregarded. In addition to the counters, one helper, a supervisor and a returning officer will be present during the counting.

The returning officer will announce the name of the candidate with the most number of votes as elected. For the PR system, the officer will note the number of votes obtained by each candidate and fill in a chart. The returning officer will then have to set it up. But human rights activists criticised the bill as being inconsistent with international humanitarian laws ratified by Nepal. It had no provisions for reparations, methods of appointing commissioners, and they were worried there were provisions for amnesty.

Although they sent these
and justice

Post-election integration

One of the thorniest issues the elected constituent assembly will have to tackle is the one of integrating the Maoist PLA with the Nepal Army. Military expert Indrajit Rai is also a PR candidate in Maoist list. He spoke to Nepal Times this week about the process.

SHEERE NG

Suddenly Nepal’s expatriate population has doubled with foreign election observers, journalists and diplomats. And all this is happening in the middle of the tourist season. Hotels are packed, Thamel is crammed.

Many long-term foreign residents of Kathmandu have been part of Nepal’s recent history, and have seen it all. They love Nepal, which is why they stuck it out through thick and thin. Living in Nepal they have gotten used to life being more unpredictable than in their own countries. Many have also had the time to form their own views about the complicated world of Nepali politics.

Although they couldn’t vote on Thursday like their Nepali neighbours, they are hopeful about the future. “The election is good for democracy but dangerous for peace,” says Michael Craig Brown, owner of a software development company, Sustainable Solutions, says the country needs a different kind of revolution. “True solutions, says the country needs a development company, Sustainable Solutions, says the country needs a different kind of revolution. “True solutions, says the country needs a development company, Sustainable Solutions, says the country needs a different kind of revolution. “True solutions, says the country needs a development company, Sustainable Solutions, says the country needs a different kind of revolution. “True solutions, says the country needs a development company, Sustainable Solutions, says the country needs a different kind of revolution. But the army says it won’t accept “politically active individuals”.

It is not up to the army chiefs to decide whether the PLA should be integrated with the Nepal Army or not. It is the job of the technical committee to decide. The army is under the government, and it is their duty to accept government decisions. If top Maoists can now be political leaders, why can’t the PLA be in a national army? They are Nepali citizens too and deserve basic rights and respectable livelihoods in Nepal.

Expats are as uncertain about the aftermath of elections as Nepalis

Kiran Panday

And justice

Home away from home

Comments to the Ministry right after the draft bill was published, very little has changed in the bill. “They changed it here, a word there, just to appease us” says Jitendra Bobhak of the rights group, Nepal Slum Forum. After much lobbying, a clause to hold consultations with the victims was added and two of the five proposed consultations were held in Palpa and Dhankuta last year.

But the Nepal office of the International Center of Transitional Justice (ICTJ) says poor and illiterate farmers were not included in the consultations, confidentiality and security of the victims were not guaranteed, and the attendance was only via invitation.

A recent study by the ICTJ shows that a majority of victims wanted investigations into human rights abuses and to establish an accurate historical record of the conflict, to ensure that similar events don’t occur again.

“If we can start investigating high-profile cases that would help build confidence and it can be a step towards healing,” says advocate Mandira Sharma.

There are preconditions to a truth and reconciliation commission: it can’t be rushed, the conflict must be completely over, there must be a strong political commitment to reconciliation and an environment in which victims can testify without fear.

For those who lost relatives during the war, the elections represent a slim hope that this time their voices will be heard.
WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Last week saw several sudden fluctuations in the weather, showing that spring is in full swing. Kathmandu has already received almost half its monthly rainfall quota. A strong westerly wind is likely to begin by the weekend. The satellite picture from Wednesday evening shows a new westerly front approaching the western Himalayas. There is currently a low pressure system over Tibet, but South Asia is starting to warm up. The Bay of Bengal is still calm. Temperatures will not rise much in Kathmandu for now, as the westerly front is preventing the hot southern winds from coming in. Expect light rain during the weekend.

WEEKEND EVENTS

EXHIBITIONS

Collection One paintings by Amir and Anup Chitrakar, until 10 May, at the Saturday Café, Boudha. 9851096626

EVENTS

Dreams a film by Akira Kurosawa, presented by Cine-Sarkika, 14 April, 5.30 PM at the Royal Theatre, Gokarna. 4469696

Weekly human rights film screenings with Silent Water a film by Sabika Sumar at the Sama Theatre, Gorkha, 5PM on 13 March. 4469696

Tanjric Dance of Nepal presented by Kala Mandapa, every Tuesday, 7PM at Hotel Nepal and every Saturday at Patan Museum.

Toastmasters a communication and leadership program, organised by Kailhmandu Toastmasters club every Wednesday 6PM at Industrial Enterprise Development Institute (IEDI) building, Trisureswar. 4288847

MUSIC

24th Yala Maya Classic with Bijaya Kumar Shrestha and Babu Lal Shrestha, 14 April, 5PM at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. 55971777

Classical vocal and instrumental concert presented by SoulMusic Group, 6.30-8.30 PM at Hotel Vaja, Rs 400. 4271545

Rudra night fusion and classical Nepali music by Shyam Nepali and friends, every Friday, 7PM at Le Meridien, Gokarna. 4451212

Sufi music by Hemanta Rana, every Friday at 7.30 PM at Dhaba Restaurant and Bar, Thapathali.

Rudra night fusion and classical Nepali music by Shyam Nepali and friends, every Friday, 7PM at Le Meridien, Gokarna. 4451212

Sufi music by Hemanta Rana, every Friday at 7.30 PM at Dhaba Restaurant and Bar, Thapathali.

DINING

New Year’s Eve with a live performance by Ciney Gurung and a BBQ dinner at the Shambala Garden Café, 7-10PM on 12 April, at Hotel Shangri-La, Rs 899 net. 4412999

The Kaiser Café open now at the Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika’s Group of Hotels, open from 9AM-10PM. 4253451

Steak escape with Kathmandu’s premier steak available for lunch and dinner at the Old Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 441818

Jothan Jalan Restaurant with a new Italian menu, Kupondole. 5544872

Bourbon Room Restro-bar now open for lunch and dinner with a over 100 cocktails, Lal Darbar.

Cocktails and grooves with jazz by Inner Groove at Fusion-the bar at Dwarika’s, every Wednesday, at Dwarika’s Hotel.

Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs at the Ashi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.

Continental and Chinese cuisine and complimentary fresh brewed coffee after every meal a Zest Restaurant and Bar, Pulchok.

Illy espresso coffee at the Galleria cafe, every Friday espresso coffee after every meal a Zest Restaurant and Bar, Pulchok.

International buffet at the Sunrise Café, and Russian specialties at Chimney, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999

Salmon promotion with salmon delicacies at the Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency, from 7PM onwards. 4489381

Jazz in Patan with coffee, food, drinks and dessert at the New Orleans Cafe, Jawalakhel. 11.30 AM-10PM. 5522708

Saturday special barbeque, seekha, momos, dal-bhat at The Tea House Inn, Windy Hills, Nagarkot every Saturday. 994120848.

Diet-icious brunch at Kakori, Soaltee Crown Plaza, roll the dice to the number of the day and get 50% discount on an individual meal, Saturdays and Sundays, 12.30-3.30 PM. 4279299

Scrumptious wood fired pizzas, cocktails and specially coffees at Roadhouse, Bhaktapur 4226887. Pulchok 5521755 and Thamel 4260187. 4260187.

Stars night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-la with Live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs. 666.00 nett. per person, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999

Kebabs and curries at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841226019

Calcutta’s rolls, biryani, kebabs Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 974100735

Lavazza coffee Italy’s favourite coffee at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4706612.

Little Britain coffee shop fresh organic coffee, homemade cakes, WiFi internet, open all day, everyday. 4469237

Pizza from the wood fired oven at Jaya, Thamel. 4229519

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors(at)nepalitimes.com
In Nepal, long-lived monarchy fades from view
The New York Times, 3 April

Whether Nepal will keep some sort of monarchy or scrap it altogether will be formally decided when the country votes next Thursday for a special assembly to rewrite the Constitution. But as far as the monarchy is concerned, the vote seems largely a formality. It is already being rubbed out of daily life.

A new national anthem makes no reference of allegiance to the king. He no longer heads the army. Pictures of Gyanendra, which once hung in every government office, now gather cobwebs in dank warehouses. The word "Royal" has been dropped from the name of the national airline. Several palaces have been taken over by the government.

A public opinion poll conducted three months ago by a private firm called Interdisciplinary Analysts found Gyanendra’s personal ratings to be lower than those of the country’s main political leaders: 2, on a 1-to-10 scale.

Even so, 49 percent of Nepalese said they favoured retaining the institution of the monarchy, according to the same poll, which surveyed some 3,000 Nepalese. Critics questioned the poll results, describing the polling firm as pro-palace.

A glimpse into the king’s own wishes came from Tika Dhamala, a retired army general and the king’s former aide-de-camp. Politicians had misunderstood and maligned the king, he said. Nepalese, whom he called ‘innocent’ and wedded to tradition, were not prepared for the instability of a Nepal without a king. “I’m feeling very uneasy,” he said. “Our society is not in a position to accept a complete type of republic.”

The wild card is the extent to which the king has loyalists in the Nepalese Army, and if they will act to save the monarchy.

Nepal’s divisive king faces the boot
Kathmandu AFP, 7 April

King Gyanendra of Nepal will be the last ruler from his centuries-old dynasty if the Himalayan nation—as expected—abolishes the world’s only Hindu monarchy after landmark elections this week.

Maoist leader Prachanda said at the weekend that Gyanendra, 61, can remain in the country as an “ordinary citizen” if he wishes. But while it seems the king has all but already been booted out, staunch royalists have warned of a violent backlash.

“If the Maoists can take up arms and come to power, Hindus will also take up arms. It will be worse than the Maoists’ war and many people will be killed,” royal aide Major General Bharat Keshar Simha said in a recent interview.

The move to turn Nepal into a republic would be the final humiliation for Gyanendra, already stripped of his political powers and job as head of the army. The government has passed legislation turning Nepal into a secular state, while the new national anthem contains no mention of the king and many of his properties have been seized by the state.

“People have a hatred for the king... but they’re not totally against the monarchy.”

Rebirth of Nepal
The Times of India, 10 April

Indians must be ready to welcome a new secular republic in her neighbourhood this month. Nepal, India’s best friend and so far her closest civilizational ally, is set to be reborn as a different nation.

The writing on the wall was clear—an uncomfortable nation was yearning for a change which would see a new regime of rulers through a different mode.

Though abolition of monarchy is almost a foregone conclusion after the elections, the main question being asked is whether the Maoists, who have tasted power after a bloody 12-year militancy, will accept the verdict of the people?

The verdict of the people of Nepal should be supreme and needs to be supported.

India’s interests lie in ensuring that Nepal remains in the hands of Nepalese patriotic people and doesn’t fall prey to the western powers or the Chinese influences that would de-Nepalise the Himalayan nation to serve their strategic goals.
Breaking News: Donkey voted for Duck

Good thing E-Day has come and gone. With the broken limbs, fractured skulls, perforated abdomen and dislocated hips this campaign inflicted on party faithful across the political spectrum, it has been a hospital bharo karyakram. Nursing homes throughout the land have no room for normal patients.

Strange, because Nepal has also got the highest per capita number of elections observers observing our elections. Besides the farangs we also have our national ones with rhyming acronyms like GEOC and NEOC. Then there is DEAN and NEMA, which are fairly wholesome acronyms compared with the ngos we already have: INSECT, HERPES and FUCKOFEN. But, as is customary in Nepal, the election monitoring groups have already bifurcated, and one hears there are now NEOC (Krantikari) and NEOC (Prajatnatrik).

We had indelible ink donated by the Koreans, the ballot boxes from Japan, and the Tiang Xian multifunction pad from the People’s Republic of China (email: shuli58@163.com).

One suggestion to the EC for the next time round, please also spell out the names of the parties besides their symbols. Not everyone in Nepal is illiterate, you know. It wasn’t just the Ass who was flummoxed by the pink and blue ballot papers on Thursday. It was a toss-up between Duck and Pigeon, but now it can be told that the donkey voted for Duck.

And in samanupatik, the Ass’s swastika went to Radio of Takashi Miyahara because under him one can be sure that Nepal will have a shinkansen between Kathmandu and Pokhara, whereas the Fearsome One just wants a chhoti line to Lumbini.

It’s not just the Indians who command our destiny. The royal palace has been known in the past to slip in a few karods here and there to like-minded Indian politicos at their election time. Now it looks like the Indians are returning the favour. Laloo Prasad has helped out a fellow Yadav in our own tarai, and Bijay the Defector apparently crossed over recently to collect his own five million smackeroos.

The way things are going in the tarai, it looks like Amresh Bhai is doing so unexpectedly well that it surprised even his mentors who have now called him off to allow the real favourite, Mahanta Thakur, to win. And in return Girja has assured our man a seat in his nomination quota.

Even if the Maoist-UML talmel fell through at least the kangreis and madaris are scratching each other’s backsides. The reason the UML-Maoist candidate exchange fell through, it seems, had nothing to do with lack of interest. It was because Comrade Awesome forgot his mobile at home that day and Comrade Mukuray was trying to call him over and over again from Rautahat to agree on a mutual candidate list. MKN thought PKD was snubbing him and wasn’t interested in the give-and-take. When they did talk to each other, it was too late. By that time, Awesome was so impressed with the crowds cheering him on in his ahm sabhas that he felt he didn’t need to be allowed to win after all.

Meanwhile down in Chitwan, Comrade Cloud’s main enemy doesn’t seem to be the UML or the NC but fellow baddies who want to stab him in the back. Given the epidemic of maoabbides defecting to the maobaddies just proves what even this Ass suspected: that they were in bed together all along. Like rats jumping off a sinking ship, monarchists are now badmouthing Lord Vishnu. Even the vice-chairman was letting off steam the other day complaining that there would still be a monarchy only if kingji had listened to him and not stepped down on 24 April, 2006.

Makes you think: with enemies like that who needs friends? You know the Tibetans protesting in Kathmandu have been overstaying in Nepal when their slogan at Gairidhara outside the Chinese embassy last week was “China Chor Desh Chhod.”

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