There is no other way to write the new constitution, protect the peace process and reduce foreign interference than for the political leadership to work together. Yet they can’t bring themselves to do it.

Individually, they all give speeches saying there is no alternative to consensus politics. But their actions say just the opposite. Even when antagonistic parties get together, like the NC and the Maoists, it is for selfish and partisan reasons. Threatening “to capture state power through a people’s rebellion” and a bloodbath will not take the process forward. Openly moving around with guns, refusing to rehabilitate those rejected in the cantonments, continuing to obstruct parliament, will not help.

The election of respected jurist Nilambar Acharya to the constitutional committee shows how negotiations and compromise can lead to a favourable outcome. The parties have proven that they can act responsibly and do the right thing. Acharya’s election will hopefully give momentum to the constitution-writing process, which has been pushed back five times.
The Maoists are not allowing the CA to function because they say they want to ensure ‘civilian supremacy’. The UML-led coalition is determined to resist what it considers a Maoist gameplay to establish totalitarian rule. The NC seems to be driven by only one agenda: ensuring that the daughter of the party boss gets to head the next government.

Part of the reason for all this posturing is that all three parties are trying to manage their internal rifts and contradictions. They have no one to blame but themselves, as they have boxed themselves in by radicalising their own cadres. They do not have to be in power to be in trouble, or in trouble to be out of power.

The tragedy, of course, is that as a result governance has come to a complete halt, the budget hasn’t been passed, the legislature is stalemated, and the national vacuum when Dahal decided to resign on point of principle. That has been the critical aspect. He would have accepted the PM’s leadership, sent two special committee, accepted the logjam on the composition of the House on Tuesday. Acharya was elected to head the CA’s powerful powerful.

The Maoists recognise that all their opponents would like to exacerbate the divide between the pragmatists and dogmatists, leadership and cadre, politicians and PLA, and the party and its ethnic fronts. But they also see other parties are in self-destruction mode because of factional feuds. The Maoist calculation is if they can stay together, even as others fragment, they will inevitably get back to power.

Plain Speaking

Pushant Jha

On Sunday, they set up a jumbo ‘shadow government’, with multiple departments, accommodating leaders from all factions, remoulding many of the war-time parallel structures. On Monday, they decided to boycott programs involving the prime minister, signalling that they would continue to challenge involvement in large political negotiations, the Maoists have focused on internal party work for the last few months. All leaders are involved in training programs across the country. They have divided up responsibilities about where to address mass meetings in coming weeks.

The Maoists’ recognition that all their opponents would like to exacerbate the divide between the pragmatists and dogmatists, leadership and cadre, politicians and PLA, and the party and its ethnic fronts. But they also see other parties are in self-destruction mode because of factional feuds. The Maoist calculation is if they can stay together, even as others fragment, they will inevitably get back to power.

The legitimacy of the government. On Tuesday, they broke the logjam on the composition of the special committee, accepted the PM’s leadership, sent two nomi nes and allowed it to meet. The move was geared to show their commitment to the larger peace process.

Through the week, the party leadership met with striking regularity to review current politics. They also found the time to reorganise their state committees.

Connect the dots and Maoist priorities start becoming clearer. The core aim is to keep the party intact, consolidate, and energise the cadre. Even as they have been involved in large political negotiations, the Maoists have focused on internal party work for the last few months. All leaders are involved in training programs across the country. They have divided up responsibilities about where to address mass meetings in coming weeks.

The Maoists’ recognition that all their opponents would like to exacerbate the divide between the pragmatists and dogmatists, leadership and cadre, politicians and PLA, and the party and its ethnic fronts. But they also see other parties are in self-destruction mode because of factional feuds. The Maoist calculation is if they can stay together, even as others fragment, they will inevitably get back to power.

The leaders may not like each other, but for this larger objective, pride is being swallowed and difficult compromises hatched. And the cadre is being indoctrinated with slogans of change and ‘civilian supremacy’. They are being told it is time for another struggle, and that success is near.

Success would mean leading the government again, or at the least, toppling this government, setting the PLA question at a convenient time in a way politically and financially advantageous to the party, writing a constitution which would appease their diverse ethnic base while creating a strong centre and leaving space for hegemonic rule, and going in for elections when victory is assured.

As this week’s events show, the Maoists appear to have adopted a three-pronged strategy.

The first is to mount a calibrated movement that doesn’t create international condemnation and a backlash. This is currently similar to the strategy they had adopted after withdrawing from the interim government in September 2007, leading to the postponement of the November elections. The idea is to generate pressure, show that they are relevant, encourage ethnic movements, but not cripple Kathmandu yet: to prevent the internationals, muddled with media from going on an offensive.

Simultaneously they will keep Mahatre in Nepal on tenterhooks. This involves gapping GPK’s and Jivanath Khanal’s ambitions at the same time, saying that the government’s ‘credibility remains in the dumps. They were delighted at the government’s discomfort on the VP issue. They are encouraging local actors and groups to oppose the security policy. And the Maoists’ own achievements (essentially Baburam Bhattarai) are highlighted to show up this government’s non-performance.

The third element is to reach out to India and ensure concerns in China, multi-party democracy, and security. The other more gullible internationals are being told: look, we have been deprived of leadership of the executive, legislature, and now key CA committees, but we continue to be responsible. If you want progress on the peace process, this government has to go.

Whether this strategy will succeed is difficult to tell. The Maoists have to reconcile two conflicting strategies of going in for a movement to enhance their bargaining power, yet projecting a responsible image to show their democratic credentials. Skeptics will see it as a continuation of Maoist duplicity.

The irony is that the Maoists are being successful in the NC and UML complicate the larger politics. Hostile generals lurk in the background. The Maoists know that India is not in a generous mood, and will judge the Maoists not on what they say, but specific actions.

Enjoy the Dasain and Tihar interlude, for the winter ahead will be politically turbulent.
The fallacy of supremacy

The exact constitutional status of Parmanand Jha is unclear. The CA elected him as Nepal’s first vice president. At an elaborate swearing-in ceremony in July 2008, President Ram Baran Yadav administered the oath of office in Nepali. Jha chose to translate the text and repeat it in Hindi. A year later, the Supreme Court has decided that Jha has to revere in Nepali only. No pragmatic politician complies willingly with the direction of the courts or commissions unless they are in a tight spot and are looking for legal respite. In a democracy, an elected official is not answerable to anybody save his own constituency. Jha is on solid ground here. Almost all Madhes-based parties have applauded his refusal to re-take the oath of office in Nepali.

Pahadi-dominated parties are furious. Jha has publicly challenged their linguistic superiority. But electoral calculations prevent them from publicly speaking out against the language rights of non-Nepali speakers. Hence, a purely political issue is being turned on its head when the law becomes merely a tool to give continuity to the status quo. It then becomes legal arbitrariness, which creates grounds for open defiance. The judges of the Supreme Court need to reflect whether their ruling about the legality of Jha’s oath was based on rule of law or rule by law. Legal opinion is divided among three political lines.

The political fallout of Jha’s decision remains to be seen. If Sudhakar Basnet, TNP and MJF (Democratic) were to stick to their election manifestos, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Khadka would have to quit. But if Madhesi parties in the anti-Maoist coalition were to sign on the dotted line, Mahathin Thakur and Bijaya Giri Jhakar may as well begin preparing to set up a new ‘nationalist’ party. One of the unintended consequences of the face-off between an elected vice president and a few nominated judges of the Supreme Court is that the Constituent Assembly can now discuss bases of popular sovereignty, of which the democratic form is parliamentary supremacy. The principle of constitutional supremacy flows from the belief that all politicians are fallible while most judges are angels. This often leads to judicial supremacy. Under communist or military rule, judges as well as parliamentarians are expected to be subservient to either the politicians or the junta. Now, ‘rule by law’ is interpreted to mean the right of the rules to do as they please.

The CA needs to assert itself and tell the courts to leave politics to politicians. The best place to debate which language the vice president should take his oath in is the CA. It’s good to have experts on top, but a priesthood of judges at the top of the constitutional hierarchy is fundamentally flawed in a democratic republic of multiple minorities.

HINDI

I fail to understand why Prashant Jha (‘Swearing in Hindi’ #466) because it only serves to stoke ethnic hatred. The crux of the issue is that the language of Nepal which also only a Pahadi language. Why can’t I fail to understand why Prashant Parmanand Jha’s mother tongue is Hindi, Jha chose to swear in Hindi? ’Swearing in Hindi” #466), I think the writer, along with our vice president, is yet to see the big picture. The crux of the issue is that president, is yet to see the big picture.

Maithili, not Hindi, yet no one has failed to understand why Prashant Parmanand Jha’s mother tongue is Hindi, Jha chose to swear in Hindi? ’Swearing in Hindi” #466), I think the writer, along with our vice president, is yet to see the big picture. The crux of the issue is that president, is yet to see the big picture.

Rajendra, email

I am saddened to read this article (‘Swearing in Hindi’ #466) because it only serves to stoke ethnic hatred. I think the writer, along with our vice president, is yet to see the big picture. The crux of the issue is that president, is yet to see the big picture.

DBN Murthy, Lalitpur

GHOOS

Complaints about the Maoists’ unofficial fund raising are probably valid but I have found personally that for the two years that they ran the government, I was rarely asked for a bribe at some of the ministries. Now that the UML is back, so are the bribes.

Name withheld, email

A CLIMATE FOR CHANGE

I appreciate Nirvana Chaudhary’s comment (‘A climate for change’, #466) about the impact of global warming in Nepal. But, as grim as things may be, Nepal is in a unique position to serve as a great example of a nation that celebrates sustainability. In fact we’ve already come a long way. We’ve learned to use cow dung to make gas, to use hydroelectricity and solar power plants in place of coal-powered electric plants, and we have a fairly well developed public transportation system for a developing country.

If we stopped burning tyres, government vehicles and adulterating fuel, and restored forests and found better ways to operate brick factories, Nepal would be one of the greenest nations in the world.

Sushil Bogati, USA

WOMEN IN RED

Enjoyed Mallika’s Aryal’s ‘Reinventing TJ’ (#466). The idea of women standing in front of Singh Darbar in red to force political and social change is a good one. We must take advantage of this opportunity to transform the patriarchy in Nepal that motivates festivals like TJ, where women are forced to fast for their husbands but not the other way around.

Mona, UK

CORRECTIONS

Due to an editorial error, the front page picture (#463) was wrongly identified. It is actually an aerial shot of Bhairab Sin Bisket.

Photo credits for front page pictures (#466) were missing. The top photo of Mt Taboche was taken by Alton Byers of The Mountain Institute and the bottom image of Male was by Kunda Dixit.

In ‘A climate for change’ (#466) the cash for trash program is run by Eco Everest Expedition and the Beat the GLOF Action Event was organised by the Sherpa student group Sherew Sherpa. This event took place on 18-19 June 2009.

LETTERS

Nepali Times welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and include your name and position. While pseudonyms are accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with ‘letter to the editor’ in the subject line.

Email: letters@nepalitimes.com
Fax: 977-1-5620103
Mail: Letters, Nepal Times, GPO Box 7291, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Researchers have discovered that potatoes have been sprayed with toxic organochlorine insecticide endosulfan at the point of purchase to give them a polished look while button mushrooms are sprayed, then packaged to keep them looking pristine. The vegetables most likely to be over-treated are tomatoes, brinjal, cucumbers and bitter gourd.

Official government figures show the legal impact of pesticides had fallen from a high of 744,485 kg in 2002 to 338,365 kg in 2006. But imports rose steeply in 2007/2008 to spike at 762,000 kg.

About 319 types of pesticides have been registered for use under the Pesticides Act (1991) and Pesticides Rules (1993). Lindane, phosphamidon, organomercury fungicides, BHC and the dirty dozen – the Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) which the 2004 Stockholm Convention listed for global elimination – are all banned. But some still seep over the porous border, particularly DDT, which continues to be available in India for a ‘grace period’ to tackle malaria.

The Nepal Agricultural and Research Council’s numerous departments are housed in what was once an impressively elegant set of buildings near Satdobato. Now they are simply rotting away. The highly educated and concerned scientists working there wait for funding but are powerless. “This needs to be a top government priority,” says chief entomologist Shree Baba Pradhan. “We have strong rules and regulations. But implementation is the problem.”

It’s not just the health of farm workers and consumers that is at stake. Pests are slowly building up resistance, and indiscriminately used pesticides accelerate this problem.

This is all good news for traders who can then sell more products. “They are thriving,” says Pameru. “They are highly influential in the farming communities and lure farmers into using more pesticides. The government should close them down.”

Nepal has traditional ways of growing vegetables, but farmers find it difficult to go back to the old ways. The Council has new technology to tackle malaria. The Council also wants to look into the effects of Nepali-style cooking on chemicals. Jagdish Bhakta Shrestha, pesticide inspector at the Pesticide Registration and Management Division, says a lack of training and technology means Nepal is “a little bit behind” in terms of introducing bio and botanical pesticides, integrated pest management (IPM) systems and organic farming, but is beginning to collaborate with Indian organisations.

He admits that little can be done to bring those farmers that are knowingly breaking the law to task. Pesticide inspectors work through the district development offices in 75 districts but all they can do is try to convince farmers to change their ways. Nevertheless he claims it is a high priority because it concerns public health.

Says Shrestha: “We lack the resources to do full inspections and monitoring, which is vital.”

Where to go organic in the Kathmandu Valley

Organic Village outlets in Baluwatar (441443) and Bakhundole (5528486).

The Organic Cafe and Salad Bar in Thamel (4215726, 9841286055)

Organic Food Market every Wednesday and Sunday.

The Summit Hotel in Sanepa (5521810) Email summit@wink.com.np or check www.summit-nepal.com

When government scientist Ran Pameru goes to the vegetable market to hunt for vegetables that are “infested with insects”.

That, he says, is the only way to guarantee that the produce hasn’t been treated as much as 25 times the recommended dose of pesticides. Children and mothers are particularly vulnerable to pesticides, which are known to impair children’s development and damage the immune system.

Desperate to increase yields, commercial vegetable farmers in places such as the Kathmandu Valley, Chitwan and Kabhre are drenching their produce with chemicals. They believe the recommended doses simply don’t deal with pests effectively, and they can get a higher price for more aesthetically pleasing vegetables.

Farmers also use banned or out-of-date chemicals brought over the open border with India by unscrupulous traders. Often farmers dip green vegetables, especially broad leaf mustard, tomatoes and brinjal (aubergine) in malathion or mancozeb solution just before (aubergine) in malathion or mancozeb solution just before tomatoes and brinjal, especially broad leaf mustard, are likely to be over-treated are tomatoes, brinjal, cucumbers and bitter gourd.

Ten ways to limit the effects of pesticides

1. Wash your vegetables several times in water or soak them for several hours. This will reduce the levels of some pesticides but will not eliminate them.

2. Look for the imperfect fruit or vegetable. If it’s been nibbled at or still contains some insects it’s clearly not full of pesticides.

3. Buy organic fruit and vegetables where possible (see box opposite).

4. Try growing your own. It’s remarkable how much you can grow in a small kitchen garden or even pots.

5. Only eat produce that is in season: growers are unlikely to be able to afford to treat vegetables with a lot of chemicals. Failing

6. Buy local. Ideally from small growers who are thrifty, in season and making sure it’s Nepali as Indian imports may be worse. As much as 70% of the cultivated area of the country employs organic farming methods because farming is on such a small scale. Peeling also reduces exposure but valuable nutrients are often lost in the process.

7. Fruit and vegetables with tough skins, like carrots, should be scrubbed with a brush to remove any pesticide residue.

8. Produce like apples and cucumbers should be peeled because the wax-laden skins tend to hold more pesticides than other produce. Leafy vegetables like lettuce and spinach should be stripped of their outer leaves, which tend to collect most of the pesticide residue, and the rest should be washed carefully.
Economy calls

WorldLink Communications launched its ‘India Call Card’ last week. Customers can now call anywhere in India for just Rs 2 per minute. Calling cards worth Rs 250, Rs 500 and Rs 1000 are available in the market.

Money management

Standard Chartered Bank Nepal signed a memorandum of understanding with Beed Invest on 2 September to introduce portfolio management services to its customers.

Sumptuous

Barek Bawarchi introduced the authentic taste of Dhaka Biryani in Hyatt Regency’s ‘Dhaka Biryani’ in Nepal. The Hornet CB600F was first introduced to the Honda range in 1998 and is still touted as the most stylish and advanced bike around.

New branch

Kamana Bikash Bank opened a new branch in Srijana Chok, Kathmandu last week. The bank will open another branch in Chitwan in the near future.

Easy pay

Kumari Bank and Education Consultancy Association of Nepal (ECAN) signed a memorandum to help students register for standardised tests. Students can now pay online for these tests.

Conservation

In an attempt to preserve the country’s cultural heritage, Kumari Bank signed a four-year agreement with local organisation Sinha Swan Khad and handed over Rs 50,000 along with 300 t-shirts.

Hiring hows

Don’t expect to get what you want if you’re not really looking

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Playing truant

Khagendra Panta in Naya Patrika, 1 September

The interim constitution clearly states that if any CA member is absent from 10 consecutive meetings without giving notice to the assembly, he or she will be expelled. To date, a total of 57 CA meetings have taken place. Despite constant reminders from the CA Chairman Subash Nembang, most senior politicians are guilty of having neglected the parliamentary duties for which they were elected. Attendance is negligible on the part of most:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CA member</th>
<th>Number of days present</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girja Prasad Koirala (NC)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushpa Kamal Dahal (CPN-Maoist)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhav Kumar Nepal (UML)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jhala Nath Khanal (UML)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sher Bahadur Deuba (NC)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bijay Kumar Gachhadar (M/JF-Democratic)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahant Thakur (TMLP)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upendra Yadav (M/JF)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajendra Mahato (Saddhawana)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baburam Bhattarai (CPN-Maoist)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ram Bahadur Thapa (CPN-Maoist)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from these leaders, a dozen more CA members risk being expelled from the assembly. Constitutionally speaking, they already have been.

Peace expenditure

Rameshwor Bohora in Himal Khabarpatrika, 1-16 September

The government and the Maoists signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in November 2006, marking the formal beginning of the peace process. The process has not brought much hope to the people, although over Rs 58 billion has already been spent in the last three years. Peace is expensive.

A huge portion of the peace fund comes from donors. The peace ministry alone has spent about Rs 18.97 billion if we include this year’s budget. Other expenditure is as follows:
- Reconstruction of demolished infrastructure: Rs 20.5 billion
- United Nations Mission in Nepal: Rs 13.19 billion
- Considerable sums have also been spent on constitution writing and inclusion:
  - United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): Rs 1.8 billion
  - United States Agency for International Development (USAID): Rs 2.14 billion
  - Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC): Rs 2.73 billion
  - European Union (EU): Rs 510 million
  - Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA): Rs 470 million
  - Germany: Rs 190 million

Jha’s justice

Letter to the Editor in Nagarkot, 2 September

Vice President Parmanand Jha made a mockery of the rule of law by defying the SC order. He continues to object to the court order and retaken the oath to the Constitution. His act is tantamount to contempt of court. He should resign.

Mao, Inc.

Madhav Banat in Nepal, 31 August 6 September

Multi-purpose cooperatives, poultry-farming, pig-rearing and media outlets are among the ventures. Maoist cadres have invested in to successfully generate income and become self-reliant. The Maoist party is the first in Nepal to have invested in business through affiliated groups such as the YCL and student groups.

Maoist leaders themselves have invested in a range of ventures. It is difficult to obtain particulars of such investments. The reason for this is the party’s long-standing rejection of the notion of private property. Accordingly, the assets of all party members belong to the party itself, and no leader or cadre is allowed to invest for personal profit. However, it is rumoured that despite the sanction, many party members have invested secretly in business. The possibility has stirred up debate within the party.

The question of investment by party leaders was raised at the last central committee meeting. A committee was formed under the leadership of Mohan Baidya for the express purpose of investigating the matter. The 15-point code of conduct that was made public thereafter states it thus: “If central committee members are found guilty of corruption or are using the party’s name to secretly raise funds, it will be treated as a serious crime and dealt with severely.” It is not difficult to conclude that such a blunt statement can only be the result of actual misconducts on the part of leaders or cadres. What is more, when the investigative committee allowed a grace period of 15 days for party members to declare their assets, more than 250 cases were lodged with the committee by party members at all levels. Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal included. This shows that secret investments are rife within the party.

According to sources, the Maoists have invested over Rs 50 million in Biratnagar FM alone, almost Rs 50 million on a fleet of over 300 cars, and about Rs 45 million in the party headquarters in Kathmandu. The party has also invested Rs 40 million in its flagship Martyn Memorial Cooperative Organisation in Simikot rural district. When Baburam Bhattarai was Finance Minister, over Rs 10 million was made available to this cooperative by the government.

The deposit of Rs 32 million for Balaju’s Sanamaiti hospital was drawn from government payments intended for PLA temporary camps, according to a source. Total investment in this hospital now stands at Rs 330 million. The debate on the involvement of leaders in such ventures continues. Maoist politburo member and YCL in-charge Kul Bahadur KC says he too has heard the rumours of financial dealings by party leaders and admits this is why the investigative committee was set up. Echoning the 15-point code of conduct, he warns, “If anyone is found to have invested for personal profit then it will be taken as a serious crime and will be severely punished.”
Jumping the gun

Federalism is fraught with potential failure

The elected Constituent Assembly is supposed to write the constitution. But we jumped the gun. The commission tasked to write the interim constitution declared the country a federal republic before CA members had a chance to debate its merits.

We need to step back and take a fresh look at the problems involved, not least because the commission doesn’t have the right to preempt the popularly elected CA.

Second, the proposal to write the constitution is stuck in a rut. The new Independent People’s Democratic Party has already submitted the draft and has handed it over to the government. There are two of us in the CA right now, the other being the Maoists.

How did you spend the last 13 months in the CA?

We’re currently writing preliminary drafts on the basis of the suggestions we received from ordinary people. Five committees have finished their drafts already. Although the schedule’s already been revised a couple of times, there’s no need to panic. CA members should work deliberately, not hastily.

Do support a unicameral or bicameral system?

We’re currently writing preliminary drafts on the basis of the suggestions we received from ordinary people. Five committees have finished their drafts already. Although the schedule’s already been revised a couple of times, there’s no need to panic. CA members should work deliberately, not hastily.

Has your committee finished its draft?

The parties must first cooperate, focus on the people’s demands, and there shouldn’t be any more protests. If all this happens, the constitution will be written on time.

Will the constitution be written on time?

The house is frequently disrupted. At this rate, will the constitution be written on time?

Do you support a unicameral or bicameral system?

A bicameral system, with a lower and upper house, would be best. Federalism has its merits, of course, but it’s dangerous at the doses we’re recommending. The right medicine, at the right time, in the right level will work. No more, no less.

We need to discuss federalism in more detail and rejecting it doesn’t mean less representation. Take the demand for a Newa province as an example. If one is to look around, many of the major cultural celebrations of Nepal are based on Newa culture. Similarly, what is fumed as Nepali architecture is actually Newa architecture. Therefore it is in the Newa interest to ensure that our motherland, Nepal, doesn’t disintegrate due to problems with its proposed federal structure.

Nepa identity is like a fish that will not survive outside water. In this case, our motherland. The same could be said of all of Nepal’s ethnicities, scattered as they are across the country. It is just not worthwhile to split this country along ethnic lines.

Ratna Sansar Shrestha is a water resource analyst.
Karaoke is the new-fangled tonic for everything from boredom to stress.

Tonight, in karaoke bars around the world, something more profound than you might realise will be happening...
SABHYATA TIMSINA

I

If you’re such a bad singer that you croak like a toad, don’t worry. You’re more than welcome at any of the new karaoke bars in Kathmandu, where after a few drinks you will have the distinct impression you can sing like Frank Sinatra.

Karaoke is a new fixture in the Valley’s popular culture, and karaoke bars have caught on as a favoured hangout for people weary after clogging all day at work.

We’ve taken a cue from the Philippines, where half the population has a karaoke box at home. Filipinos even host their own singing and dancing competitions! Karaoke is a form of daily recreation and an absolute must at all get-togethers and festivals in the Philippines.

Little wonder then that it was Roselle Prisno from the Philippines who set up Kathmandu’s first karaoke bar in her restaurant Baryo Fiesta in Naxal. It was an instant hit. Nepalais showed up from day one howling like wounded dogs into the microphone.

“People come here and have the most enjoyable time and it’s nice for us to be sharing this love for singing with Nepalis,” Prisno says.

Thirty-year-old Shweta Pradhan visits Baryo Fiesta regularly to unwind after work. “It’s the most effective stress buster for me. When I sing everything that’s bothering me comes out, and though it’s late after slogging all day at work.

Karaoke is apparently also a great way to work out since it increases oxygen levels in the blood without leaving you hot and sweaty. It also produces ‘red-good’ endorphins (eating chocolate does too, but singing is less fattening). Doctors in Japan and Taiwan are now prescribing karaoke instead of Prozac to cure stress.

If you don’t like going out but are eager to try karaoke, you can do so from your couch at home. All you need is a computer microphone and software that’s available online. Come to the moon! ●

Top Ten Karaoke Hits

My Heart will go on–
Gloria Gaynor

Summer of ‘69–
Bon Jovi

Always–
Bryan Adams

Everything I do–
The Police

Hotel California–
The Eagles

Born to be wild–
Steppenwolf

Kid Rock

‘empty’ and ‘orchestra’. Karaoke is above all a space, an absence

Korea-ke bar

What do you get when you mix music,
diplomatic intrigue and a
supreme leader who fancies
American girls? A North Korean
karaoke bar, and there’s one right
here in Kathmandu. The word on
the street is the Korea-Pyongyang
Okyu-Gwan Restaurant

Karaoke Bars in Kathmandu
Baryo Fiesta, Naxal
Everest Korean Restaurant, Sorakuthe Station, Lazimpat
Café de Patan, Patan Darbar Square
Korea-Pyongyang Okyu-Gwan Restaurant, Darbar Marg

You can say, for example, that ours is a Karaoke Age, in which
the arts of mimicry and simulation are more esteemed than originality
invented us more than we invented it.

The word is a compound abbreviation of two Japanese words meaning
‘information’ out of her, but it
seemed she spoke neither Nepali nor English. Perhaps she had
been warned not to divulge any
more than was absolutely
necessary?
But I did pick up some
snippets. The restaurant has been
around for two years and is
attended to by 11 waitresses, all unmarried, who sing and
dance at specific times listed in the
brochure. All the other branches of the restaurant are
in China. The restaurant is
frequented by our own
comrades when they have to
meet their diplomatic
connections. They seem to find
the privacy they want in the
cubicles, but I doubt they ever
turn on the karaoke machine for
a session of sino-Nepal duets.

Finally, I braced the big
question, “Who owns the
restaurant?” The waitress
pointed to the lady behind the
desk. “Can I get her name?”
The answer was an
unsurprising “no”. North and
South Korea are different, she
seemed to imply, and, unlike
the former, the latter do not like
to feature in bar reviews. ●

Thun lithys ‘jailbreak’, and I’ve never been able to look at him
the same way again. At the instant he sang “See the boys and me mean
performer swells: into this vacancy he must project his beautiful
ghost-music, tinkling with its own deadness, and that unsung

This one goes out...’

A bout the karaoke machine, that most prophetic of postmodern

‘I dedicated this column to the karaoke lovers, who will make tonight
their own.’

● James Parker
The Boston Globe
One hundred days with Nepal

The government of Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal turned 100 days on Wednesday. These have not been the easiest 100 days for Nepal, neither the PM nor the country. Nepal was elected unopposed by the CA a year after embarrassing defections in elections in two constituencies. Kalthmandu and Rautahat. Critics said this would discredit the CA elections. “We selected the person who was rejected by the people as the leader of the country, what do you expect?” a disenchanted young activist asked.

Nepal has become the butt of many jokes. So desperate is he to fulfill his life-long dream to be Nepal’s PM that he will sign anything, they say. The Maoists obstructed house proceedings, hurled insults and finally stepped down to start street agitations. “We selected the person who was rejected by the people as the leader of the country, what do you expect?” a disenchanted young activist asked.

Maoists are scratching their heads about how to wiggle back into power. When MKN became PM there was no euphoria or celebration, just a lot of cynicism. Those who voted against veteran leaders like Nepal were angry and unhappy that the achievements made since the end of the ‘people’s war’ were all going to go to waste. With such low expectations, the Nepal government didn’t have much to prove.

Yet the UML-led government has been surprisingly resilient. It appears more confident after the PM’s Dehi visit, and the Maoists are scratching their heads about how to wiggle back into government. But the government got by with doing absolutely nothing on the development front for the first 100 days. It can’t afford to now. If there is one thing that will give Nepal legitimacy and moral authority, it is a perception that he means business.

The challenges are daunting: the peace process must be kept on track, the constitution must be written, the security situation must be improved, inflation controlled, food supply ensured and the two armies have to be integrated.

Time to make difficult decisions and prove to the people that this government really exists

It would not be fair to say that the government has done nothing right. The appointment of the chair to the constitutional committee, the formation of a special committee on army integration, the appointment of secretaries in various ministries and the start of a special security plan to deal with the deteriorating security condition were all done by the book. All this, despite having to fight fire over crises like the VP’s oath row, the flak over the cholera epidemic, the decisions over the army more firmly under civilian control until the reinstatement of democracy in 2006.

Security expert Siddharth Khahtri of the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies agrees. “The defense ministry was a post-box for the army so it didn’t have any real powers at all.” As a result, he says, security policy became increasingly unresponsive to ordinary people’s needs.

A wide-ranging collection still misses the point

The NSC floundered partly because it wasn’t held accountable to parliament, which the government relentlessly undermined. Contributor Dhruba Kumar explains that parliamentary committees were warned against grilling security personnel about their misdeeds.

But the book exaggerates the threat the army poses since the Nepali military is less troublesome than its regional counterparts, most notably those in Bangladesh and Pakistan. Since 1990 the army has accepted a more democratic role although there have been hiccupps along the way. The army punished when the Maoists came to power as it felt threatened by the PLA. Still, the Nepal Army tends to look for outside leadership, says Khatri. The bigger security problem is the lawlessness that has swept across the country these past three years, which reflects a growing legitimacy crisis. The state appears illegitimate partly...
be handled with care

DHURBA SIMKHADA

Despite the restoration of democratic rule and the end of the civil war, Nepal's security situation can hardly be said to have improved. Insecurity at the hands of state and non-state forces continues to thwart the aspirations of Nepalis, and is examined more closely in Dhruba Kumar's broad-based definition of human security sets the stage. Drawing from the Human Development Report 1994, he declares that human security is "a child who did not die, a disease that a co-parenting, developing a coherent security strategy, professionalising the police and army, and educating policymakers about Nepal's new internal security threats. But the book's biggest failing in that it makes only a fleeting mention of the legitimacy crisis that sparked the current lawlessness and ignores the fact that our gravest threats are corrupt parties and rampant politicisation, not a stubborn army. Unless we reform our parties so that they better represent people's interests, civilian oversight of the army isn't going to reorient the security establishment's objectives, and the politically disenchanted will continue to turn to violence. Yet, the book fails to ask the million dollar question: how do you reform parties when you need the consent of their leaders, who stand to lose the most from reform? A practical answer to this question could pull us out of the mess we're in...
It wasn’t a ‘miracle’ that brought prosperity to Malaysia, it was hard work

This week we celebrate the 52nd anniversary of Malaysia’s independence. What in 1957 was an underdeveloped country with a poverty rate of 78 per cent and an annual per capita income of $270 has now emerged as a progressive and prosperous country of 27 million people with a per capita income of $7,000. By Malaysia’s National Vision year of 2020, the country aspires to join the ranks of the developed nations.

I have often been asked what made Malaysia tick. There are ten points that made our progress possible:

1. Political stability. The National Front, consisting of 13 political parties representing all the ethnic groups in Malaysia, has been governing the nation since independence. The alliance, painstakingly forged by the forefathers in 1954, was built on an overwhelming spirit of accommodation and moderation. It serves as a unique example of long-term power sharing among multi-ethnic and majority-minority communities and between West Malaysia and the regions of Sabah and Sarawak.

2. Peace, security and social harmony. The country is blessed with visionary leaders. The people haven’t felt the need to change a winning combination. Our leaders think out of the box, like the time we rejected the IMF policy prescriptions and successfully adopted home-grown remedies to lift the country out of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. We adopted pragmatic, globalised economic policies long before globalisation. A strong economy has acted as a glue to bind our people, first, by forging inter-ethnic economic partnerships and second, by giving to every community a share in an expanding economic cake.

3. Enduring inter-ethnic harmony. Instead of creating a melting pot, Malaysia painstakingly weaved a rich cultural mosaic. The plurality of lifestyles this engenders has given rise to an extraordinarily multi-faceted society that stands as an example of how a fragmented multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural polity can be welded together in a common nation.

4. Eradication of poverty. Malaysia invested in free primary and secondary education and free health care, and has used its expanding economy to preserve social peace. We adopted pragmatic, globalised economic policies long before globalisation. A strong economy has acted as a glue to bind our people, first, by forging inter-ethnic economic partnerships and second, by giving to every community a share in an expanding economic cake.

5. Peaceful and cooperative social engineering. Malaysia embarked on a pragmatic expansion of opportunities for all. This reduced tensions that flared in 1969 due to the economic gap between the majority-minority communities.

6. A culture that avoids open confrontation. Behind-the-scenes negotiations and compromises on a whole range of issues are preferred to open confrontation. Malaysia imposes severe controls on mass protests, thereby keeping social conflict off the streets. This may have some human rights implications by western standards but has circumvented the continuous cycle of political and religious violence that bedevils many democratic societies. Trade unions do not resort to bandas and demonstrations to press their demands in Malaysia.

7. Professionalism and competency of the Malaysian civil service in planning and implementing development programs. The government has invested massively in developing human resource capital and upgrading its public delivery capacity.

8. Malaysia as a Muslim country is an exemplar of a moderate, multi-cultural and tolerant society. Secularism and Islam co-exist peacefully despite the rise of political Islam due to the government’s balancing of Islamic measures with the broad secular, capitalistic, democratic and globalised features of Malaysia’s multi-ethnic and multi-religious society.

9. Women’s rights. In the work place, in schools and in universities, women easily outnumber men. About 65 per cent of students in colleges and universities are women.

The World Bank used to categorise the achievement of Malaysia as an ‘Asian Miracle’. It is a compliment, but Malaysia’s prosperity was not the result of some divine intervention, it was brought about by our own hard work and sacrifice.

Ilankovan Kolandavelu is ambassador of Malaysia to Nepal. This is an excerpt of a speech he made on his country’s national day on 31 August in Kathmandu.

It’s not about 150 of the most happening fashion designers from Kathmandu, Pokhara and Dharam. It’s not about 30 of the most happening fashion models. It’s not about the sexiest sounds and sizzling sets. It’s about the orchha, piazzar and the chhathah. Book now. Unless you have, already.

TGIF: Nepalese Fashion Week 09

in association with

Chivas Live with Chivalry

September 7 - 11, 2009
**Back to the future**

Michael Jackson was not the only moonwalker commemorated this year. 2009 marked the 40th anniversary of the Apollo 11 mission that placed American astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on the moon. Even as China and India are cautiously attempting space missions of their own now, that first moon landing marked in the world the height of a certain optimism in the notion of progress, a certain faith in the endeavours of science and humanity, and our inherent ability to overcome challenges and transcend our limitations, a mindset that seems to have long receded into the common perspective. It does not seem unfair to question that optimism when 40 years later diabetes and malaria are still among the leading causes of death, a fact brought home to Nepalis when 40 years later diarrhea and malaria are still among the leading causes of death. A cinematic landmark was the first moon landing, the first recorded visit to another world. Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on the moon.

Under the pipal tree

The lynchpin of the sprawling, segmented 2001 is the notion of progress, a certain faith in the endeavours of space missions of their own now, that first moon landing. American astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on the moon.

The movie is iconic beyond doubt, and has provided an exemplar of profound impact on a person's way of thinking. Within this oasis-like event space, and a store for many things: a bright and airy setting, an extension, life in general, with an attitude of clarity and simplicity. The overall effect is of good taste, minimalist functionality and traditional elegance in a restored space within a former Rana residence. Linkins has a definite vision: "Whether you are designing a building, piece of clothing, cutlery or a business card, design is integrative and holistic. It is all about designing challenges and, by extension, life in general, with an attitude of clarity and simplicity." But why the name Pipalbot, we ask Ongmo. She is happy to explain. "The pipal tree gives shade. It's where travelers take a rest and stop to chat, and it has a spiritual dimension."

Pipalbot is at Baber Mahal Revisited Open Tuesday – Sunday 11AM-7PM (bookings required), all-day tea and dessert, dinner by prior arrangement.

**Design:**

**Designer Interior:** Dining table with ceramics, wall carpets and lampshades combine Kathmandu’s traditional craft with contemporary design at Pipalbot, set up by Diki Ongmo and Tim Linkins (above). On Friday 4 September there is a raga evening with Gurudev Kamath. "We really feel that the built environment has a subtle but profound impact on a person’s way of thinking, so we wanted to provide an example of contemporary design in the Nepali context," says Linkins, who has designed furniture merging Kathmandu’s traditional craft with contemporary lines for dining tables, sofas, lamp shades, partitions and ceramics.

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**EVENTS**

- **Monsoon Wedding**, movie screening at Lazimpal Gallery Café, 5 Sep, 5:30PM, 4428549
- **Patan Press club** meeting every Thursday at Dhokaima Café, 6PM, 5523113
- **Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre**, Meditation Mon-Fri 5-6PM, Yoga Mon-Fri 8.30-9.30AM, Tai Chi Sat 10-11.30AM at Himalayan Vegetarian Garden Café at HBMC, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel, 4410402

**MUSIC**

- **Some like it hot** Jazz evening
- **Sunday Jazz brunch** Live band Live Sensation, Happy cocktail hour
- **Baja gaja** Mediterranean cuisine
- **Kakori**, Al Fresco, Jazzabell Café
- **The Corner Bar** Wine Festival, Dhaka Biryani Festival

**DINING**

- **Indra Jatra Festival** at 1905 postponed to 10 Sept.
- **Dhaka Bihari Festival**, by Berek Bawarchi from Bangladesh at The Café, 11 Sep, 4489502
- **Wine Festival**, 11-15 September, Kiyora’s Thamel, 4250440
- **Chocolate, Coffee and Caramel**, every evening at The Lounge, 4.30 PM-6.30 PM, 4491239
- **A café’s café**, Dhokaima Café, Patan Dihka, 5522113
- **Jazzabell Café**, relaunched at Jhamkhel, 2114075
- **The Corner Bar, 5-7PM**, 4215068
- **Live Sensation**, performance by Yankaey every Saturday 6PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu, 4491234
- **Nepali Ghajals** and songs at D’Lounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday 6.30 PM onwards, 4498856

**INGREDIENTS**

- **Al Fresco**, for home-made pasta, steak and freshwater trout, Soalice Crowne Plaza, 4273996
- **Kakori**, for biryani, curries and kebabs, Soalice Crowne Plaza, 7-10.45 PM
- **Chez Caroline** for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Baber Plaza, 4491239
- **Mediterranean cuisine** every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle East at The Café, Hyatt Regency, 4491234
- **Tepanyaki** meat items and garlic rice at Le Restaurant, Gaithdhara, 4436318
- **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpal, Rs 600, 4412999
- **Reality Bites**, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika’s Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM, 4425341
- **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-La with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shamaba Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards, 4429999
- **Himalayan Rainbow Trout** at Hotel Yak and Yeti, 4418018
- **Tiger for Breakfast**, breakfast everyday at 1905, Kantipath, 4215088

**GETAWAYS**

- **Dhulikhel Lodge Resort** offers an overnight stay for Rs 1600 till 30 September, 4222389
- **Relax Package** at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu for Rs 555 plus taxes, for a night of double occupancy with breakfast, complimentary use of spa, Offer valid for Nepal and local residents only, 4498900
- **Spa package**, ayurvedic massage and access to the pool and spa with either breakfast or lunch at The Café or Business lounge at the Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 4491234

**WEEKEND GUIDE**

**NEW EVENTS**

- **Dhulikhel Jhari**, photographed exhibition by Shubhecha Tewari, Shangri-La hotel, Lazimpal, till 6 Sep, 11AM

**MUSIC**

- **Raga Evening**, performance by classical vocalist Guru Dev Kamel at Pipali, Baber Mahal Revisited, 4 Sep, 6.30PM, 9721331390
- **Baja gaja**, every Tuesday at Moksh, Pulchok, 7.30 PM onwards, 5524810
- **Live band** every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Darbar Marg, 4227292

**RECIPES**

**South African Milk Tart**

```markdown
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredients</th>
<th>Quantities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 cup 75 grams butter</td>
<td>2 sugar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 cup sugar</td>
<td>⅓ tbsp 1⅓ tbsp cinnamon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>⅓ tsp 4 tbsp</td>
<td>1 cup 2 cups milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 tablespoons 1 tablespoon</td>
<td>1 teaspoon 1 teaspoon vanilla essence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 egg</td>
<td>1 cup 1 cup</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

This is an easy dessert or tea tart recipe. I usually serve it with a coffee syrup but one can also use a fruit coulis or a chocolate sauce.

**ABOUT TOWN**

**EXHIBITIONS**

- Concealed splendour, photography exhibition by Shubhecha Tewari, Shangri-La hotel, Lazimpal, till 6 Sep, 11AM

**WEEKEND WEATHER**

- Expect more of this during the coming week, since the Bay is pumping in a lot of moisture up in our way. In addition, there is a lot of transpiration from mid-hill forests which rise up the mountains in the afternoon convection and fall in the evening as rain. It will be hot and humid, the sunny spells, but the nights will be substantially cooler over the weekend. We are still looking at a couple of deep troughs spinning out of the Bay, and these will keep the monsoon active to beyond expected closure of the rainy season in mid-September.

**RECIPE BY NGAMINDRA DAHAL**

**South African Milk Tart**

This is an easy dessert or tea tart recipe. I usually serve it with a coffee syrup but one can also use a fruit coulis or a chocolate sauce.

1. Cream the butter and sugar together.
2. Beat the sugar and eggs together before adding the coffee syrup but one can also use a fruit coulis or a chocolate sauce.
3. Beat the egg mixture into the tart mixture. Bake at 180C until golden brown.
STICK ‘EM UP: A health worker at Kathmandu airport testing a young passenger for signs of swine flu on Monday. The manual testing and filling of health forms results in huge queues at immigration.

DIVINE REVOLUTION: Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal at a prayer vigil organised by preacher Dinabandhu Pokhrel at Kapan on Tuesday to raise money for a local school.

WHEN I AM 77: Founder of Dwarika’s Hotel, Ambika Shrestha, in a ceremonial chariot at her jankhu that marked her reaching 77 years, 7 months, 7 weeks and 7 days on Tuesday.

THANKS A LOT: Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal with Korean ambassador, Hong Sung Mog, after the inauguration of the Government Integrated Data Centre on Wednesday at Singh Darbar.

Programme Manager for Enabling State Programme (Re-advertisement with some changes in terms and conditions)

DFID is a bilateral development agency in Nepal. We work with Government and others to reduce poverty. DFID is committed to promoting government reform, social and economic development in order to address the root causes of poverty. We give priority to support for economic opportunities and essential public services to poor and disadvantaged communities, and to social justice and governance reform. We are committed to delivering assistance transparently and full accountability to local communities.

With a budget of £27.5 million, the Enabling State Programme (ESP) is DFID’s biggest governance initiative in Nepal. It seeks to improve governance which is more responsive to the interests of the poor and excluded. ESP contributes to this by strengthening the relationship between state institutions and citizens to promote inclusive policies and programmes. This involves helping to increase understanding of governance, learning about how change in governance occurs in Nepal, supporting change by funding projects developed by local reformers. ESP was launched in January 2007 and will run until December 2012.

The programme seeks to improve the four core areas: social and political inclusion, public financial management, anti-corruption, local governance, delivery of public services, and Constituent Assembly processes. ESP is run by a small team of professionals and support staff headed by a Programme Manager.

The management of ESP will be outsourced through international competition. This process will start immediately. The Programme Manager will be expected to contribute towards this without any disruptions in ESP’s regular activities.

Applicants should have a keen interest in governance, with the ability to network widely and to work with and earn the respect of key individuals and organisations in the political and administrative spheres of governance, as well as in civil society and private sector.

Qualifications requirements:
- Master’s Degree in a governance related subject
- At least 10 years of work experience in governance with a minimum of 5 years experience in senior management position with comparable development agencies
- Knowledge of, and experience in, public policy-making in Nepal is desirable
- Excellent English language skills, both written and spoken.

Core competencies:
- Working with others
- Communicating with others
- Analysis and use of information
- Decision-Making
- Managing change

There will be an attractive and highly competitive locational salary and benefits package. The successful applicant will be contracted for one year. DFID is an equal opportunities employer and applicants on merit based on open competition. Applicants are wellcome from all parts of the community. Please send email to recruitment-regal@dfid.gov.uk for application form, diversity questionnaire and job description and send the completed forms to recruitment-regal@dfid.gov.uk. Only completed applications made on the prescribed application form and diversity questionnaire will be considered. Telephone inquiries after the deadline of the application will not be entertained.

Candidates who have applied for this job announced in May 2009 need to re-confirm by email if they would like to be reassessed (recruitment-regal@dfid.gov.uk).

Closing date for applications is Monday, 07 September 2009.
The Nepali language has all kinds of uses for the verb “khanu” (to eat). Ministers greet each other with “Khanu bho?” when they meet in the corridors of power, but they actually mean “How are you?” We eat water, water cigarettes (“churot khanu”), eat blame (“gali khanu”) and we even eat bribes (“ghoos khanu”). The whole debate about the vice president is about him eating his oath (“sapath khanu”) in Hindi. Given the food crisis that is looming in this country, it figures that we are a nation preoccupied with filling our bellies and one that prioritises eating above all else.

The Makunay Govt’s honeymoon period is over, and the PM marked the occasion by supersizing his jumbo cabinet by another dozen or so ministers to reach a record 42 members who are now all eating their ministries (“mandalayu khanu”). This proves Parkinson’s Second Law which states that the size of the cabinet will expand in indirect proportion to the government’s effectiveness. The Madhesi members were inducted into the cabinet to shore up the fragile coalition and hopefully it will work otherwise we will have a huge hole in the state exchequer. Quite symbolic, though, that the last ministries to go were the Ministry of Environment, and the Ministry of Men, Women and Children and the Ministry of Scientific Technology. These are regarded as ‘not important’ ministries because of the slim pickings (“khanai paidaina”) available there (“khanai paidaina”). Still, that didn’t prevent one Sad Bhavana stalwart to strike while the iron was hot and grab whatever he could: a berth as Minister Without Portfolio. Wonder what potentiality to forage he saw there.

There is a lot of moaning and groaning among Kathmandu’s chatterati that there is no government at present. What are they complaining about? What else is new? The best periods in this country have been when there has been no government. The logic is simple: since governments make mistakes, not having a government means no one has a chance to make any mistakes. Which is why a militant party staged a press conference at the Reporters’ Club the other day brandishing pistols in front of the gathered journalists and dared the Home Minister to come and get them. And when there is no government, a five-year-old boy in Banepa was allowed to drive a car through traffic, cheered on by cops and felicitated by none other than the vice-chair of the Constituent Assembly. Way to go!

Has Comrade Awesome taken the Baddies from being a godless party to one that is god-fearing? Chairman Dahal seems to have suddenly turned spiritual in his old age to atone for his sins. What else could explain his presence at a prayer vigil organised by Dr Baburam Bhattarai at the Bauli temple? The preacher man looked stern-faced throughout the proceedings, and we can’t really blame him since it was Awespiring’s party that assassinated his father in Nawalparasi during the war. Guess even atheists have a guilty conscience.

Worried by growing illicit liaisons among his flock, Chairman Tremendous has got his party secretariat to dash off a directive to female comrades to get married forthwith. The letter from Paris Danda to 13 women CA members of marriageable age states that female comrades currently living in sin should tie the knot, settle down and raise families. This hasn’t gone down too well with feminist comrades like Jayapuri who have told the party to go mind its own business.

Without too much fuss in the paparazzi press, King-G has moved back up to Nagarjun, and has granted audiences to a slew of visitors in the past week, including an NRN delegation and like-minded hacks. The ex-Majesty is supposed to be relaxed, happy and rather pleased with himself. His message to everyone is: “Look, I voluntarily stepped down from the throne so things would get better, but the country is going to pot.” With one visiting journalist, King G even expressed his fear that the country was heading towards ethnic fragmentation and that if the people wanted him back to preserve the country’s unity, he was always willing.