Nepalis must come out of our habit of leaving things to fate and chance. Only by taking our destiny in our own hands, unifying with a common purpose can we sustain the peace process, and take the steps needed to finish writing the constitution on time. We have to end the current do-nothing deadlock to avoid a political disaster. And to prepare for future natural disasters, Nepal has to learn from the Haiti experience. Read more:

All for one

EDITOIAL p2
Any day now

GUEST COLUMN p2
“I feel the earth move”

JHAMTEL

Mix Jhamsikhel with Thamel and what do you get?

LIFETIMES p7,8,9

INDIA’S NO. 1 SUV YET AGAIN. THREE YEARS IN A ROW...

Tough Habits Die Hard! Record 55,924 units sales in 2008-2009
ANY DAY NOW

We like to make fun of our national culture of taking things as they come. In fact, we use the Hindi phrase ‘dekhne jaaye’ (we’ll see) to poke fun at our own habit of never doing today what can be done tomorrow.

Among the many traits of our political leadership that keep Nepal backward (selfishness, greed, elastic morals, laziness, incompetence), one of the most harmful is the fatalistic belief that somehow things will sort themselves out. This is probably the reason for the utter lack of urgency among the political parties and their CA members in seeing the peace process through, making progress on integration of arms and writing of the constitution by 28 May. This deterministic cultural explanation for inaction, however, should not be an excuse to continue with this do-nothing deadlock. The aim should be to get out of the habit of letting fate determine our future, of leaving the nation’s destiny to chance.

On the day of the annular solar eclipse last week, Nepali TV channels lied with each other to broadcast astrology-related programs in their regular new programs on what the celestial event meant to Capricornos and Leos. When the media mixes up myth and superstition with news and current affairs, it shows the malaise runs much deeper than we think.

Or, a national daily that on Wednesday printed the picture of the sunset illuminating contrails of an airplane flying the new Kathmandu-Delhi air route over western Nepal and said it was a ‘rocket’ on a ‘spy mission’ to Mustang. This is worse than superstition, it is disinformation.

Leaving things to fate is also seen in earthquake preparedness, or shall we say, unpreparedness. If there is one country in the world where earthquakes are a certainty, and where awareness and safeguards should be mandatory, it is Nepal. For us, it is not ‘If there will be a major quake, but when’. It could be tonight, or it could be five years from now, but it is 100 per cent certain that it will happen.

Yet, looking at the haphazard urban sprawl and dangerous construction in Nepal’s metros, it is clear hardly anyone is looking at prevention and readiness. This should be the government’s job, but how do you expect a leadership with such a short time horizon that it can’t even resolve the current political deadlock to prepare for a disaster that may or may not happen from one year to the next?

But it must. And Haiti has focused our minds on what can happen. An 8 magnitude earthquake in Kathmandu would actually be ten times worse than Haiti, which was 7 on the Richter scale.

Historically, we know great earthquakes have hit central Nepal every 75 years. The last one was 1934. The Big One is due any day now.

“The Big One is due any day now”

WENDY CUE

T he Haiti earthquake was disturbing. It was disturbing for professional and personal reasons. I have two simultaneous roles as a humanitarian, I want to help. As a mother and a daughter, I want to spend as much time as possible with my loved ones and live far from disaster zones. But then, why am I living in Kathmandu, one of the world’s most-at-risk cities when it comes to earthquakes?

This tragedy resonates deeply, as I have been working with the United Nations to raise awareness in Nepal about a similar catastrophic scenario. The possible scale of the disaster is so mind-boggling that often the reaction is apathy. The impact of the disaster would be so great, so devastating, what can one do that would make a difference if an earthquake were to strike?

The greatest risk is apathy. There are several cardinal truths regarding earthquakes:

Earthquakes cannot be predicted. Most calculations of risk are based upon statistical probability, but can be off by a magnitude of years.

• Most earthquake survivors are rescued by communities themselves.

• People are not killed by earthquakes. More than 75% are killed by collapsing buildings, and the rest are due to follow-on hazards such as fire and landslides.

• More survivors are then killed because there is a lack of medical service, or clean water.

As disaster risk reduction is a long-term investment, it must address the full range of hazards and risks as well as bring tangible benefits to people’s lives. A range of investments would include city planning, decreasing urban density, executing there are open spaces, widening traffic arteries and evacuation routes. These require commitment by the government.

Investment at the community level is also essential, in first aid training, evacuation planning, and light search and rescue. Most survivors are rescued by friends and neighbours, so we need to invest in community disaster preparedness. We need to know where the safe places are. In the Great Kathmandu Earthquake of 1934, many people fled into Tundikhel to seek safety. If the same thing happens tomorrow, structures could also bring houses more in line with the climate and preserve cultural heritage (concrete is not the best thermal conductive material for cold winters and strong sun). Traditional housing construction in Bhaktapur using a timber beam

HAITI HEREBY

It is not a question of ‘if’, it is just a matter of ‘when’. (Haiti calling, issue #485).

There will be a devastating earthquake in Nepal and the consequence will be horrendous and unimaginable. Post-quake casualties will be much higher as we are not well equipped with search- and-rescue operations. We have no equipment or trained personnel. The example of Haiti is a wake up call for us as we are one of the poorest nations in the world. We will also have to rely on international support. As we have seen in Haiti, it would be difficult to get international support in time.

If the recent ‘Haiti’ happens in Nepal, the consequences will be simply incomprehensible. The sad part is, in this ongoing climate of political chaos and uncertainty, does anybody even have the time and interest to think about this topic? I guess not. I am not sure much of Kathmandu will remain standing if we experience a ‘Haiti’ there. Apart from the immediate impact (which will be catastrophic no doubt), I am concerned more about the aftermath. Because just like Haiti, we probably are ill-equipped to deal with the situation.

On the web: nepaltimes.com/blogs

On the web: nepaltimes.com/blogs

East-West: Kunda Dixit assesses the impact of the next big earthquake in the Kathmandu Valley.

The Brief: Daily updates on news and current affairs.
Three years later

PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

This week marked the third anniversary of the Madhes movement. Over three weeks in January 2007, the spontaneous uprising in Tarai rocked the foundation of Nepali state and nationalism, challenged established forces, endorsed federalism, and reconfigured politics. At a time when the Madhesis were weaker and more fragmented than it has been since then, it would be instructive to look back at the lessons from the plains.

Here is what the Madhes told the existing Nepali state: change or perish. In specific terms, this meant political representation, substantive inclusion, reframing symbols of nationhood, and treating citizens who wore dhoti, did not know how to speak Nepali, and had kinship links across the border with dignity and not scorn. If the Kathmandu capital, and the entrenched social practices, the Madhes have won this battle politically and intellectually. What remains is transforming it into institutions.

The second message was to the Maoists: beware of what you mean political orientation (anti-communist), the caste mix of Maoists leaders, and the perception that the Maoists were a part of the same Pahadi club. The Maoists have since become more careful, but a similar pattern of ex-Maoists turning to ethnic radicalism can be discerned in the western Tarai. The Maoists and most Madhesi parties remain at loggerheads, but in some ways their commitment to federalism now makes them natural allies.

The people also gave a clear signal to the Nepal Congress, which the grand old party failed to read: reform or shrink. Instead of making the Madhes agenda its own, the NC misread the public mood entirely and felt that the anolan would only hurt the Maoists. The NC home minister (Krishna Shihara) was seen to have suppressed the movement. Leaders like Ram Baran Yadav (Krishna Sitaula) was seen to be exclusivist and discriminatory practices and did with Dalits, Muslims and Tharus what hill elites had done with them. This is why the various communities are now finding their own ways of political articulation.

The last year has not been good for the Madhes. Its most powerful party split. It has been unable to force the vice-president back into his position, and get language rights recognised. Most Madhesi leaders who had nothing to do with the movement have been able to corner all the advantages and win a share in the power structure. The distance with the Tharus, who are actually allies in the battle against the old regime, grew. The inclusion bill was never operationalised. And India (by splitting the MJF and not backing the VP) showed that it will happily sacrifice the Madhes if it clashes with its interests at the centre.

But history’s twists and turns should not make us ignore the larger picture. It is far better being a Madhesi in Nepal in January 2010 than it was in January 2007. That is the Madhes movement’s biggest achievement.

Madhesis have it far better in January 2010 than in January 2007.

Madhesi leadership, the class character (mid-sized landlords), political orientation (anti-communist), the caste mix of Madhesi leaders, and the perception that the Maoists were a part of the same Pahadi club. The Maoists have since become more careful, but a similar pattern of ex-Maoists turning to ethnic radicalism can be discerned in the western Tarai. The Maoists and most Madhesi parties remain at loggerheads, but in some ways their commitment to federalism now makes them natural allies.

The people also gave a clear signal to the Nepal Congress, which the grand old party failed to read: reform or shrink. Instead of making the Madhes agenda its own, the NC misread the public mood entirely and felt that the anolan would only hurt the Maoists. The NC home minister (Krishna Shihara) was seen to have suppressed the movement. Leaders like Ram Baran Yadav spent all their time in bashing Madhesi leaders and claiming it was sponsored by reactionaries. The distance with the Tharus, who are actually allies in the battle against the old regime, grew. The inclusion bill was never operationalised. And India (by splitting the MJF and not backing the VP) showed that it will happily sacrifice the Madhes if it clashes with its interests at the centre.

But history’s twists and turns should not make us ignore the larger picture. It is far better being a Madhesi in Nepal in January 2010 than it was in January 2007. That is the Madhes movement’s biggest achievement.

Madhesis have it far better in January 2010 than in January 2007.
Who’s your favourite?

FOURTH ESTATE

CK Lal

JALESHWAR. In these parts of the country, Nepali television means the state broadcaster. If any other channel is on, it usually means someone from Kathmandu is visiting, Nepal Television (NTV) grabs a lion’s share of advertising revenue, and its signal strength is also better than any other terrestrial or satellite channel in Nepal.

In software too, the pioneering broadcaster of the country is way ahead of all others. Three of the most popular slapstick teleserials in Nepali - Tito Satya, Meri Bassai and Jire Khurshani - run on the national channel. NTV often sources excellent documentaries from foreign broadcasters and has stringers in far-flung parts of the country.

But government ownership has its downside too. The news on NTV can get a bit dull when its editors have to defend the government or parrot official positions. It hesitates in giving airtime to those who have the most interesting things to say: government critics. But few private operators can match its resources in reporting straight from the villages and small towns of the country.

Two of the best television anchors in Nepal have their shows on national television. A self-assured Laxman Humagain allows his guests to hog the limelight as he deftly steers them towards the issue being discussed. Raja Thapa appears to have inherited the mantle of the late Indra Lohani and runs his talkshows with the panache of a public prosecutor.

The dominance of government media is even more unassailable in print: Gorkhapatra means ‘newspaper’ to many. UML loyalists still wait for Budhbar, but NC cadres seem to have forsaken Deshantar. Sales of Nepali magazines have plummeted, and are no longer in demand right off the buses out of Kathmandu. Indian newspapers too sell fewer copies, even though the Hindustan has increased its coverage of Nepali affairs.

The primary source of information and the medium of choice for entertainment are local FM stations. There are three radio stations in Jaleshwar alone. Inexpensive Chinese receivers catch the signals of all broadcasters based in Janakpur and Bardibas. Together, they have the entire district listening to young radio jockeys bantering away in Maithili, Nepali and Hindi about things that nobody thought they would ever care to listen to.

All local radio have tie-ups with national networks, and regularly broadcast news and feature capsules produced in Kathmandu. In addition, NGOs have their own slots to publicise their programs. Then there are the promotional materials of the conflict resolution industry, peace campaigners and pressure groups. Individually, these programs are much less popular than those that play pop Hindi numbers on request. But together, the programs of national networks and proactive NGOs weave independent radio into a web of solidarity and strengthen national unity.

Much before Benedict Anderson formulated his concept of the nation as an “imagined political community”, Marshall McLuhan had intuited that the printed word was the real architect of nationalism. In building bonds of fellowship between the citizens of a country, hard copy still has no equal. Their availability and access imply that physical and market infrastructure for product distribution have been created; and readers are sufficiently literate and sophisticated to pay for information that may not be of much use for their livelihoods.

Radio and television do not enjoy the level of trust of the printed word. However, advertising professionals have long known that an intelligent mix of print, radio and television is the best way to persuade the audience. Perhaps a similar strategy can work to reinforce messages of inclusive democracy, non-violent politics and tolerant nationalism? It may not be by design, but community radios in countryside seem to be working for that purpose.
Seven seas
Nepal Investment Bank has extended its remittance services in the United Kingdom in partnership with Samsara Nepal Financial Services UK, a London-based company. NIBL now provides direct money remittance facilities in more than seven countries through twenty of its partners and in the rest of the world through Western Union Money Transfer and Travelers Money Transfer.

Sagarmatha
The third meeting of the Nepal Tourism Year 2011 was held on 12 January. Discussing on how to utilise the budget allotted for tourism sector, the committee decided to mobilise Rs 20 million to mark Sagarmatha Day. In the meeting, Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation Sharat Singh Bhandari also said that development of infrastructure was imperative to bolster Nepal’s tourism sector.

Sweet 17
Himalayan Bank celebrated its 17th anniversary last week. It was established with the joint venture of Pakistan’s Habib Bank in the year 1993. Himalayan Bank is touted as being the nation’s leading bank, and is praised as being the joint venture of Pakistan’s Habib Bank in the year 1993. Himalayan Bank celebrated its 17th anniversary last week. It was established with the joint venture of Pakistan’s Habib Bank in the year 1993. Himalayan Bank is touted as being the nation’s leading bank, and is praised as being the

Bike away
Ganesh Enterprises, the distributors of Suzuki motorbikes, launched new models of its bikes last week. They now distribute the following models: DR 200 SE (Dust), DR 200 SE (multi purpose), GSR 600, GSX-R 600, Intruder 800, Gladius 650, GSX-650, GS 150R, Burgman 400, Hayabusa 1340, and B-king 1340.

Democracy and democracy
I had lunch with a 71-year old retired Nepali doctor in London recently. He had left Nepal when he was 31, when Surya Babadur Thapa was the prime minister.

Twenty years later, regardless of what your politics is, the 80-plus year old Surya Babadur Thapa is still in the running for prime ministership of Nepal, a country where to be but even three citizens are under the age of 35. Thapa is one example among many politicians over the age of 60, who were around in 1960, and who are still around now. Meantime, Tony Blair and George W Bush, both still in their 50s, are parts of history.

Even accounting for politicians’ lust for power, what’s wrong with our particular democratic structure that keeps on returning the same old politicians to power no matter how many Roman numeral add-ons we have?

Design thinking has not penetrated the consciousness of Nepal’s democrats, who equate democracy with truth, beauty and justice; rarely pausing to consider that politicians, like humans everywhere, have every incentive to design and maintain a system that is aimed at keeping them in power for a long, long time.

Architects know that the way rooms in a house or an office space is designed affects the outcomes: how and to what extent people interact, work together and play. Change the design, and you change the outcomes. Likewise, how a political system is designed affects the outcomes: how and to what extent people interact, work together and play.

On the outside, our system has the requisite avatar of a democracy (multiple parties, elections, political horse-trading, etc.). Dig deeper, and you will find that it’s not the voters who call the shots but the party leaders, who have designed their parties’ internal structures in such a way as to keep them in power for as long as they live. Voters can express resentment, but come election time, they have to choose among the same menu of candidates.

Meantime, our democrats love to argue for the capital letter Democracy. That’s because doing so is easy and it attracts both the political activists, rights-based organizations and the media. Nepalis know about and appreciate the value of Democracy by heart now. But they don’t want to be forever debating its inherent goodness. They now want to move on to the small-letter democracy: the nuts and the bolts of the devolution of political power, the accountability, the transparency of public decision-making processes, the palpable sense that we are heading somewhere better as a nation. Else, just having Democracy without democracy is like owning a BMW without an engine.

The era of old-time politicians will only be over when younger politicians focus more on democracy without getting into the hot air that forever surrounds Democracy.

There is world of difference between ‘D’ and ‘d’

New models in town? We teach French at AFK!

Next session of French classes starts 27 January - 7 April
Admissions 4 - 24 January
Courses are now also available in Bansbari for Beginners 1 & 2!

44 21 163 | allianc francaises.org.np
Behind the persona

T

o mark the first anniversary of
his death the Indra
Lohani Memorial
Committee this week launched
the book Euta Beglai Byaktitwa
- Indra Lohani, a compilation of
tributes by those who knew
the tv talk show
host personally and
professionally.

The book is a rare
glimpse into Lohani’s
personal life. His mother
Hari Maya Lohani
describes her home as a
place where no one would be
turned away: “Baba once told
me: your house is a place where
people would come and
will be given medicine.”

From his humble beginnings
in Gaum Daula, Bihar to
the National Law School in
Bangalore, to Kangpok
Television, it is evident
he was strong-willed
and very focused. He was
a man of a liberal
democratic mindset and
a great depth of
conviction of
pluralism, democracy
and the rule of law.
Lohani genuinely
believed that it was his
duty to help fellow
Nepalis - he went
even beyond the call of duty
when he rescued people
after the 2008 Kosi
floods, and he would
talk to his mother often
about how he wanted to
protect Nepali people
from the Himalaya to the
Tarai.

Lohani understood
the importance of
talking about issues that
others would want to
shove under the rug. Not
all would have agreed
with the way he ran his
show - he probed, he
asked hard and direct
questions and never let
anyone off the hook
easily. But he was savvy
with the way he ran his
shows, and was one of the rare
hosts who engaged with
his guests and got them
talking. He took issues
head on and had Lohani
questioning, he would have got
lawmakers and the public
talking about constitution
writing, the rule of law,
combatant rehabilitation/
integration, accountability and
impunity. He has left a void in
the lives of Sushma, Samragi
and Suhangi, but equally, in the
fabric of Nepali society.

It is also clear that Lohani’s
mother and wife Sushma,
stilled in their
daughters the values of
sincerity, charity and
education. As we read his
daughters’ tributes, we
understand how close he
was to his family, how he
loved just being at home
and hanging out with his
two daughters, inviting
friends over and
surrounding his house with
dialogue and conversation.

Lohani was the happiest
when he was at home with his
family. “Even 15 minutes before
his program Baban was to go live,
he would still be playing with
us, and we had to literally drag
him out of the house to go to
the studio,” writes Samragi, his
ten-year-old daughter.

Lohani had a premonition
that he was going to die young.
He used to talk about death often,
sometimes with his daughters
and his wife, as if preparing them
for the days when they would
have to live without him. He was
always very generous, and this
value held his family together.

Samragi describes her home as
a place where no one would be
turned away: “Baba once told
me: your house is a place where
if hungry people come they will
never go back without food, if
people without clothes come,
they will be given warm clothes
and if sick people come
they will be given medicine.”

Enough is enough
Tired of the bandas and strikes,
several mother’s groups in
Pokhara declared the tourist
neighbourhood Lakeside a banda-
free zone on Tuesday. Bandas
adversely affect our business
and create bad image of our
country, the organisers said.
They have threatened to take to
the streets with sticks if anyone
tries to shut down the area.
Local youth groups have pledged to
help the groups, whose
members are as old as 73 years.

Neighbourly love
Indian Minister for External
Affairs S.M. Krishna spent last
weekend in Kathmandu, and left
with a pledge to review the
controversial 1950 treaty. His visit
was eclipsed by Maoist
opposition who are currently running
a campaign for ‘national
independence’.

Koirala and Panchthar so that he could
never go back without food, if
people without clothes come,
they will be given warm clothes
and if sick people come
they will be given medicine.”

From his humble beginnings
in Gaum Daula, Bihar to
the National Law School in
Bangalore, to Kangpok
Television, it is evident
he was strong-willed
and very focused. He was
a man of a liberal
democratic mindset and
a great depth of
conviction of
pluralism, democracy
and the rule of law.
Lohani genuinely
believed that it was his
duty to help fellow
Nepalis - he went
even beyond the call of duty
when he rescued people
after the 2008 Kosi
floods, and he would
talk to his mother often
about how he wanted to
protect Nepali people
from the Himalaya to the
Tarai.

Lohani understood
the importance of
talking about issues that
others would want to
shove under the rug. Not
all would have agreed
with the way he ran his
show - he probed, he
asked hard and direct
questions and never let
anyone off the hook
easily. But he was savvy
with the way he ran his
shows, and was one of the rare
hosts who engaged with
his guests and got them
talking. He took issues
head on and had Lohani
questioning, he would have got
lawmakers and the public
talking about constitution
writing, the rule of law,
combatant rehabilitation/
integration, accountability and
impunity. He has left a void in
the lives of Sushma, Samragi
and Suhangi, but equally, in the
fabric of Nepali society.

High-level talks
Nepal Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala accused Maoist
leader Dahal of talking at his promise to support geographic
federalism by declaring ethnic autonomous states. Koirala said
that Dahal had agreed to create federal states on geographic
basis during a closed meeting with him in 2006. A day after
discussing Dahal of being a liar, Koirala met him in the first meeting
of High Level Political Mechanism and sweetly urged the Maoist
leader to withdraw their plans for an indefinite strike. Dahal said
he would consider it. On Friday, we will find out if Koirala saved
peace again and whether the government needs to revise his CV
for the Nobel committee.

Keep politics out
The Special Committee on Supervision, Integration and
Rehabilitation of Maoist combatants reached an agreement on
the code of conduct for People’s Liberation Army fighters
stationed in various cantonments around the country. The
agreement, which had been floundering since September due to
Maoist opposition, bars PLA members from engaging in
political activities. Under the code, the combatants will not be allowed to
sing the international communist song inside the cantonments as
they have been doing everyday. They will also be asked to remove
pictures of communist leaders, flags and other memorabilia of
the communist party. The new code will also prevent Maoist
leaders from giving speeches inside PLA cantonments.

Laminated flooring
Joshi Trading Pvt. Ltd.
Potalivard, Kathmandu
Tel: 4269583
9841316911
E-mail: joshitrading@net.com.np

Dhokai
A cafe with
class and
passion at the
gates of Patan.

Dhokai
At the premises of YALA MAYA KENDRA Cultural Centre
5522113
www.dhokabiyani.com
We cater for all kinds of events.
Jhamsikhel is for Kathmandu-based expats what Thamel is for tourists

For as long as anyone can remember, Thamel has been the go-to place for wining and dining and a little light music. For the bulk of tourists, this cluster of streets packed with cheap accommodation and souvenir shops has served as a portal into the exotic new world of Nepal. Food, drinks and music are all universal languages, and the jetlagged, disoriented backpacker as much as the seasoned trekker can sit in any number of resto-bars and satisfy cravings as that in Thamel, but the clientele they receive is different. Jhamsikhel and Sanepa have many expatriates and they form the bulk of their clientele.

“Here, you cater more to the residents and expatriates. In Thamel, it depends more on the number of tourists around, which can be seasonal,” says Sudesh Shrestha, owner of New Orleans Coffee Shop.

In short, the residential environment creates a stable business model, a sentiment that Roadhouse Café owner Erick Tan affirms.

The owner of Red Dingo Restaurant (off Jawalakhel), Jonathan Mendies, attributes this shift to the increasing willingness of locals to spend.

“Nepalis now have the disposable income, and are ready to pay for good food and ambience,” he affirms.

Those who fancy a tipple on Restaurant Lane will first come across Buzz Bar, and may well find themselves jiving at the reincarnation of Moksh at the end of the street. Beyond Hermann Helmers, is Café Bliss, run by three partners, Yunus Shrestha, Raven Bajracharya and Tilli Raj Ghale. A foreigner is bait for other foreigners.

With the area still growing and loaded with potential, Jhamsikhel is fast replacing Thamel.
Jhamsikhel
Jawalakhek
Pulchowk

1 Red Dingo
Go down under and wallow in the red earth ambiance while chowing down on Australian specialties such as meat pies and white snapper fillets. Red Dingo also serves a wicked range of smoothies, popular with the local school kids.

2 Higher Ground Café
Higher Ground is a café with a mission – promoting social responsibility through its hiring of at-risk individuals and those without much opportunities. As you sip a cup of fine local coffee with some carrot cake, rest easy in the knowledge that you are helping to advance a worthwhile cause.

3 The Lazy Gringo
Tucked away in an alley, this Arizona-style Mexican food joint is a superb find for casual dining. A pleasant Mexican-themed interior and friendly staff won’t distract you too long from the excellent menu.

4 Buzz Café & Bar
Whether it be drinks after a hard day’s work or catching up with friends over coffee, this curry café bar also offers a wide variety of bites, notably its spicy-hot buffalo wings. What’s more, some of the ornaments and paintings are for sale, so you can recreate part of the experience at home.

5 Sing-Ma Food Court
In true Singaporean and Malaysian fashion, diners are treated to a casual food court setting, without the hassle of self-service. Try chicken rice and nasi lemak (rice cooked in coconut cream) or munch on golden goreng pisang (banana fritters) while surfing on your laptop.

6 Masala
Kebabs, biryani and all things North Indian in a classy environment, complete with soothing Hindi music.

7 5 Spices Asian Lounge
Specializing in both Chinese and Thai dishes, the Lounge’s wacky oriental interior is as modern as can be, and with a groovy bar at one end serves family, friends and more intimate encounters equally well. Spicy!

8 New Orleans
New Orleans’ greatest pull is its outdoors ambiance, jazzed up on Tuesdays and bluesed out on Saturdays. Try a succulent rosemary chicken or hamburger, designed by owner Sudesh Shrestha. Wander around the complex and visit Masala Beads, Rangy Chancy or Therapeutics Shiatsu Center. Quixote’s Cove, an independent bookstore with an extensive children’s section, is adjacent to the restobar.

9 Vesper Café
Probably one of the classiest restobars on the stretch, the immaculate interior and open garden design are a treat. Wood-fired pizzas and continental selections to be enjoyed next to a cozy fire – if you can decide where to sit.

10 Dan Ran
The true taste of Japan will melt in your mouth with sushi and sashimi from chef-owner Junko Naito, but the teriyaki chicken and sukiyaki are just as popular among locals. For an authentic experience, try dining at the low tables.
11 Roadhouse Café
Recognised as one of the best wood-fired pizza joints in town, Roadhouse is ideal for family and friends. If you can’t wait on the pizzas then spice it up beforehand with their special chilli momos.

12 Chapter 9
The spacious garden is the perfect setting for a picnic or birthday party, and feels like home. With an Italian chef at the helm, expect a truly authentic taste.

13 Haddock
One of the few places there that serves Thakali cuisine, Haddock is also a great hangout for football enthusiasts. Sit back with your buddies and cheer for your teams in front of the large television near the bar.

14 Cinnamon
Another living room away from home, Cinnamon has the class of a hotel. Fine dining, grilled food and great coffee. If you’re in the mood, go deeper for a drink at the bar.

15 Moksh
The new Moksh is all about space. Ample parking, and a huge garden perfect for sitting around with a drink in your hand. Serious diners can go to the upper floors and chill with continental dishes and their signature momo soup, and there’s not one but two concert rooms for the sonically inclined.

16 Café Bliss
A fun orange drags you into a lively, fresh yet cozy space perfect to hang out listing about on the deep couches amongst the paintings and books and magazines. Plenty of culinary variety, too, including Japanese snacks and brushing main courses. Real bliss.

17 la Soon Restaurant and Vauhveen
Lunch alfresco in a big sunny garden or an easy candlelit dinner inside, La Soon has long been the place to go for a wide range of quality continental and pan-Asian spreads. Fortunately the staff can help you choose.

18 Jazzbell Café
Along with a continental selection, there’s also an African menu perfected with the help of African expats, and an African Nite to boot. Try their bite-sized chicken basket as an appetiser while sipping on a drink in their exclusive space.

19 Nanglo’s Bakery Café
Airy, bright and cheerful café from the Nanglo chain, strategically located opposite the UN and near the minister’s quarters. Try the famous volcanic sizzler that Bakery CAFÉs are now famous for and wash it down with a mug of San Mig.

20 Café de Cass
A classy space indeed for exquisite mid-morning crepes or late evening wining and dining, Café de Cass is an intimate, upmarket experience.

21 Jalan Jalan
Off the road between the Summit Hotel and Hotel Greenwich Village, this little kampong-style (traditional Malay village house) restaurant is another find, with delectable cuisine from Malaysia. There’s an equally delightful view of the Himalaya from the balcony.

22 Breakfast everyday from 7am - 11am
The Bakery Café, Jawalakhe
EVENTS
- The Mahabharata: An Impression, painting exhibition by Karchu Dasgupta, 23 Jan, 3pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited.
- Poet’s Corner at Lazimpat Gallery Café, write, read and vote, entries accepted until 24 Jan, voting from 24-31 Jan, 4438526
- The Fragile Valley 2, watercolour exhibition by Late Suzan Maharjan, 11-10 Feb, New Orleans Café, Pulchowk.
- Othello: The Sen of Nepal, performance by Nepal Shakes from 5-14 Feb, Kamal Mani Theatre, Patan Dhoka. Tickets available at Dhoikama Café (Patan), Chez Carolyn, (Babar Mahal) and Nanglo Bakery (Durbur Marg)
- Book-a-bee, children’s event organised by Quito’s Cove to promote reading and writing, 23 January. Participation is NPR 1000, which includes a full day of activities and lunch for the participating children. For details www.qcbokshop.com or call 5523974.
- Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Tai Chi 10-11.30am Saturday, Yoga 8.30-9.30am and meditation 5-6pm weekdays, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel, 4410402
- People After War, permanent photo exhibition, everyday 11am-4pm, Madan Puraskar, Patan Dhoka, for bulk school bookings call 5521939.

MUSIC
- Donato, Beppo and Anthony, playing American classics and original compositions, 22 Jan, 6 pm onwards, Lazimpat Gallery Café, 4428542
- Celebrating Diversity: A Musical Caravan, at the Garden of Dreams on 1 Feb and Basantapur Darbar Square on 2 Feb.
- JSC Jazz Quartet, every Saturday 8pm onwards, Gokarna Forest Resort, 4491294, 4428582.
- Some like it hot, every Friday BBQ and live fusion music by Shyam Nepali (pic) at Fusion, Dwarika’s Hotel, 7pm, 4479488.
- Robin and the New Revolution, every Tuesday 7pm on at the Bamboo Club, Thamel, 4701547.
- Live band every Friday and rooftop BBQ everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Darbar Marg, 4227288
- Happy cocktail hour, ladies night on Wednesday with live unlogged music at Jatra Café & Bar, Thamel, 6-7pm
- Nepali Ghajals at D’Lounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday 6.30pm, 4468589
- Rudra Night live fusion music by Shyam Nepali every Friday, 7pm at Gokama Forest Resort, 4451212
- Jazz evening at Delices de France restaurant every Wednesday, 11am-2pm, 4260326.

BINGING
- Boudha Stupa Restaurant and Café for wood-fired pizza and free wi-fi Internet, 012103681
- Famous steas of the world, enjoy famous steas of the world at the Roo Restaurant, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, from 6-00PM onwards, 4491234/4493852.
- Wine and cheese, every Friday & Saturday, 5-8pm, Strawberry High Tea, 4.30-6.30pm, The Lounge, Hyatt Regency, 4481234/4489386.
- Arabian Nights for Middle Eastern specialities every Friday from 6.30pm, Oriental Nights, flavours and specialities of Asia every Wednesday at The Café, 6.30pm, Hyatt Regency, 4491234/4498362.
- Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisited, 4263070.
- Live continental BBQ Fiesta, exclusive BBQ Dinner at Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel, from 6:30-10:30pm everyday.
- The Corner Bar, 5-7pm, 5-11pm, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, 441818.
- Lavazza Coffee and Baskin r Robbins, at Blue Nile Coffee Shop, Lazimpat, 4491294
- A café’s café, Dhoikama Café, Patan Dhoka, 5522113.

QUAKE DEMO: An earthquake-resistant house stands while a less seismic-proof one crumbles in an “shaking table” demo at Jawalakhel on Monday.

UNWELCOME: Motorcyclists at New Baneshwor intersection on Tuesday below a black Maoist banner protesting the visit by the Indian Army Chief, Gen Deepak Kapoor to Nepal.

SPRING IS HERE: The troika of President Ram Baran Yadav, Speaker Subhas Nembang and Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal at the Basanta Panchami ceremony at Hanumandhoka on Wednesday. The kings of Nepal used to officiate this ritual.

UNWELCOME: Motorcyclists at New Baneshwor intersection on Tuesday below a black Maoist banner protesting the visit by the Indian Army

Chief, Gen Deepak Kapoor to Nepal.
When Nepal’s U-21 Cricket team sets off for the South Asian Games next week, we can be sure that our boys will be in good hands. Since veteran Sri Lankan batsman Roy Dias (above) became coach in 2001, Nepal’s age-group cricket teams have won nearly every tournament they have competed in.

Roy Dias played for the Sri Lankan national team from 1973-1987, and was the first Sri Lankan batsman to score 10,000 runs in Test matches. He was also on the first Sri Lankan squad to qualify for the Cricket World Cup in 1979, and would go on to coach the national team during the 1998 World Cup. Since he came on board as national coach, Nepal’s age-group teams have won several ACC Trophies and the Plate Championship at the 2006 ICC U-19 Cricket World Cup, among others.

Dias’ unique contribution as coach has been a focus on the basics.

“I want them to have a solid footing in basic techniques. The top world players, like Sachin Tendulkar, all have excellent technique,” says Dias.

Cricket enjoys grassroots support that is rare for Nepali sports. The national cricket teams are fairly diverse, with many members coming from Tarai districts. Local enthusiasm for cricket is motivated in part by the success Nepal’s neighbours (four of seven countries in South Asia are test-playing nations) and, more recently, our own age-group teams, have had on the cricket pitch. Nepal cricket also enjoys a fairly robust structure. There are six cricket development regions, many college-level cricket scholarships and the domestic league is reasonably lively.

However, cricket infrastructure is poor. We have few cricket grounds, many of which subsitute mats for actual pitches. Batmen who practice on these grounds are usually unprepared for the slower pace of bowling on real pitches. Binay Pandey, president of the Cricket Association of Nepal, says this goes a long way in explaining some of the difficulties the national team has had in batting.

Part of the reason for Nepal’s poor cricket infrastructure is that it was never colonised. “In India, the British left behind many wealthy cricket clubs that can afford good equipment,” explains Pandey.

This is partly why, despite the impressive feats of our age-group squads, the national men’s side continues to struggle, ranked 21 out of 94 non-test playing nations. Cricket pundits, explaining some of the difficulties the national team has had in batting.

So, what does Nepal’s U-21 team stand at SAG, where it is in the same preliminary group as cricket-powerhouses India and Pakistan? Dias is optimistic.

“If we play in a relaxed manner and remember the basics, we can cause an upset,” says Dias.

Malaysian badminton coach Annamalai Sanikar (above) is in town for two weeks to train the Nepali badminton squad before it heads off to the South Asian Games. Nepal Times caught up with him on Tuesday.

Nepal Times: Tell us a little about yourself and what brought you to Nepal?

I was invited here to help the national side with their training. In Malaysia, I have coached two top state teams, Kuala Lumpur and Perak. Many of my players, including current world number one doubles player Kin Keat Koo, now play for the national team. I also coached the Sri Lankan girl’s team which qualified for the 2008 Olympics for the first time in many years.

A. Sankar: What do you think about the Nepali team?

They are all so young, many just 16-22 years old, and eager to learn. They are also strong and fast. But their strokes and form need improving. I’ll focus on that.

What do you think of the badminton establishment here?

First, the infrastructure and system are not good. There aren’t enough domestic tournaments, the lighting in the main stadium is bad, and the same court is shared by all the teams.

What are our chances at SAG?

A gold medal will be difficult. Our players are very young, and will be competing against experienced players, some of them 30s and 40s old. Our Indian and Sri Lankan teams are very good. But some Nepali players show promise. On the men’s side, Ratnajeet Tamang and Sajan Krishna Tamrakar are good and I’ve asked the Badminton Asia Confederation (BAC) to sponsor them. I think our women’s team has a very real chance at getting a medal. Watch out for Sara Devi Tamang, Pooja Shreshtha and Sabina Pant.

You have trained several teams in the region. Who are you rooting for?

Let the best man win. I have no preference!
At the end of February, 60 enumerators will be dispatched to six districts around Nepal for a dress rehearsal of the 2011 census. They will ask people questions about their age, gender, occupation, ethnic group, housing, and education. When the real thing happens next year, they are expected to gather raw numbers from about 28 million people.

For a country that is supposed to have 33 million gods, our overly fecund population will soon be overtaking non-mortals in number. And that may be the only thing certain about the census 2011.

The census, which will be conducted over two months next year by 80,000 enumerators, will be the most accurate census to date, says Rudra Suwal, Director at Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS). It is expected to cost over 2.7 billion rupees, most of which will be funded by donor agencies.

With state restructuring in the works, the new census will also bet the most closely watched census in history. It is expected to show dramatic changes in the composition of ethnic, religious and urban populations. “Due to the 10-year long conflict and economic reasons, people, especially from rural areas, have moved significantly. We know that population concentration is not what the politicians thinks it is,” says Vijay Thapa, of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

The proportion of Hindu population, for example, may remarkably decrease in the new census, if not significantly. “Substantial number of people belonging to hill ethnic groups may possibly dissociate themselves from Hinduism, and affiliate to other religions like Buddhism, Krist etc. Worshipping some of the so-called Hindu gods and goddesses does not necessarily mean that worshippers are Hindu, according to some ethnic leaders,” says statistician Pawan Kumar Sen. Some Gurungs, for example, are called Hindu gods and goddesses does not necessarily mean that worshippers are Hindu, according to some ethnic leaders,” says statistician Pawan Kumar Sen.

For generations, this relative prosperity sustained a division of labour between the Brahmins, who occupied the fertile lowlands, and the Magars, who lived high in the adjoining hills. A few Brahmin households owned most of the land and commissioned the Magars to work the fields for a share of the harvest. But much has changed with people leaving for the cities. The key landowning Brahmin families have sold their property piecemeal to finance investments in the city. Many of the buyers are Magars.

“Before, all my parents’ neighbours were Bahuns, but the demographics have definitely changed now,” says Jark Raj Panley, who works and lives in Kathmandu.

Urbanisation is changing relations between and within Nepali communities.
devotees of local Devis (Hindu goddesses) but may not necessarily call themselves Hindus.

There will also be remarkable changes in the ethnic composition of population in the Terai due to internal migration. Migrants from hill and mountainous areas, who make up 85 percent of the total migrants, most of them moving to Terai. Consequently, concentration of population in Terai region will be higher than in the hills.

The most dramatic increase will be in the urban population projected to be between 20 to 30 percent of the total population in the new census. The number of people leaving rural areas stands at 30 percent, says CBS Director Suwal, one-third of which is from the country for foreign employment.

The new census may be sensational but it should not side-track the urgent issue, which is population management.

The last census in 2001 projected a fertility rate (average number of children per couple) of 4.3. With campaigns for contraceptive use, family planning and increase in female literacy, the number has gone down to 3.5 percent, says Suwal. Despite the lowered rate, we are looking at a total population of 33 million by 2016, making population management a challenge for the new decade.

Population management becomes more pressing if we consider our GDP growth rate, says Suwal. “It used to be around 3 percent but has lowered to 2.5 percent. Our neighboring countries have a growth rate of 6 or 7 percent.” Economic growth is not keeping pace with even population growth.

In spite of being the most densely populated mountainous region in the world, Nepal’s population is manageable considering its resources, says The Chief of UNFPA.

What have we in our favour is a large workforce. Nearly a third of country’s population is in the working age group. How we turn this large population into a productive workforce will be crucial in shaping our country’s future. And, the new census will provide vital information to development planners about how to tap into that future.

GPS-assisted

The Central Bureau of Statistics will be using a Global Positioning System (GPS) in the new census, which it says will provide the most accurate data since the first census conducted in 1911. Until now, the data was aggregated on political divisions of the country, but the new system will be able to map settlements geographically.

It means each individual will be put on a map, instead of being lumped into the data for a particular political division such as VDCs. This will be important if the country adopts a federal system where old political boundaries like VDCs and wards may no longer become relevant. More importantly, it will be able to map natural resources like water source and agricultural land, which will be crucial in planning development work.

"Look, there’s the new rich,” scowls my companion, gesturing to a richly adorned Magar woman passing through the village.

For the most part, however, these changes have been received peacefully. The bigger danger to social harmony comes from a different angle. While income disparities between communities have narrowed, those within them have widened. Many Mages buy property in the lowlands with remittances from relatives working abroad. Those less fortunate continue to toil high up in the hills.

Life is still tough for me. I have two children and sometimes I struggle to feed them. Before I would get some help from my neighbours, but now I have to look after them myself,” says Sujata (name changed), whose husband works odd jobs in Kathmandu.

Among Bahums, too, income gaps have widened between families with children doing well in the cities, and those that rely solely on farm income. The impact of these changing sources of income has been keenly felt in the local school. As the value of education, in preparing students for city jobs, has grown, enrolment figures have soared.

Urbanisation has benefited those communities with the means to take advantage of it, leaving the marginalised out in the cold. Hungi’s experience is mirrored by the Nepali Living Standard Survey, which shows that while the income poverty rate has dropped, income disparities between communities have widened across the country.

Anthropologist Mukta Singh Tamang explains, “The poverty rate among the mostly high-caste groups who live in or near urban centres and are educated has declined more rapidly than the poverty rate among communities in rural centres.” Tamang attributes this in part to rising renaissance and low agricultural productivity.

With the 2011 census expected to reflect these changes, it’s time the government figured out how to make urbanisation work for everyone.
Maoist media policy

Pardhumani Kafle in Rajdhani, 14 January

The Maoists have decided on a two-pronged strategy to make the media speak in their favour: irrevocable, if not intervene.

The preliminary draft of the party’s national media policy has advocated a strategy of neutralising its critics and transferring media ownership to the hands of its sympathisers. The media to be a unitary system again?

RAJESH KC

Proposed separate regulations for print, audio bring the media into the Maoist fold. It has a strategy to have more favourable coverage and to operate radio and cable TV in the regions and districts.

Based on contents, they are: pro-party, neutral government run, party run and privately run. The policy recommends a good relationship with media representatives of “revolutionary” journalists, as a media mechanism at the South Asian level.

A five-page long draft policy has suggested a public-private partnership. The Maoists have decided on a two-pronged strategy to make the media speak in their favour: irrevocable, if not intervene.

The preliminary draft of the party’s Publicity and Publication Department of the State Committee has categorised media based on ownership: Publication Department of the State Committee has categorised media based on ownership: government run, party run and privately run. Based on contents, they are: pro-party, neutral government run, party run and privately run.

The meeting also proposed the establishment of a “pro-public” daily newspaper and television channel as well as a media mechanism at the South Asian level.

A five-page long draft policy has suggested a strategy to have more favourable coverage and to bring the media into the Maoist fold. It has proposed separate regulations for print, audio and visual media. Dinamath Sharma, head of the Publicity and Publication Department, in a joint meeting with Pushpa Kamal Dahal and representatives of “revolutionary” journalists, proposed a central publication house in public-private partnership.

Under the heading of “publication house”, sub-clause of Clause 11 says the party’s publication department should look after editorials while the opinion pieces should be monitored by the publication house. Article 12.2 says specifically that “initiatives should be taken to make ADR, Sagarmatha and Avenues television pro-Maoist.”

Clause 6.1 on Policy on Government Media, says “efforts should be put to exploit government media to their benefit” and recommend training and mobilisation through the Revolutionary Journalists’ Association. The same clause however has mentioned the need to “establish rights as per democratic norms” and learns who those who go against these norms “should be dealt with”.

The policy recommends a good relationship with media staff rather than the owners. The paper states the quality, trend and content of the media will be closely monitored and “negative aspects” should be dealt with on political and theoretical fronts. It has also proposed all media (print and radio) be run under a single roof to operate radio and cable TV in the regions and districts.

There is huge public support for the protest against federalism. Survey and public poll results show that people are beginning to oppose federalism. There are anti-republic voice in NC and UML. Public supported our anti-federalism protests, and we didn’t intimidate them to support us. This shows nationwide support for anti-republic sentiment.

Communists talk about class. Why do you think the Maoists raised ethnic issue? This is unfortunate. The Maoists have come forward for ethnic autonomy while the class struggle is supposed to unite them all. Ethnic division leads to conflict and the Maoists are adding fuel to the fire. This is the result of departure from communist principle. That’s why they are not true Marxists and Leninists.

Your party and the pro-monarchy RPP are launching anti-federalism protests at the same time. Is this intentional or a coincidence? RPP has been insisting on referendum, and so has Sujata Koirala of the NC. There has been a realisation that the leadership jumped into federalism without giving it a second thought. Our protests have made people aware of its merits and drawbacks. The Maoists themselves will stand up against federal republic once they face the consequences of what they are advocating for.

Back to square one

Prasanth Aryal of Nepal spoke with Mohan Bikram Singh, secretary of CPN Masal, affiliated with National People’s Front, about their anti-federalism movement for the 24 January issue. Translated excerpts below:

Nepal: What do you want to achieve through anti-federalism movement? Mohan Bikram Singh: Two objectives: first, to make people aware that federalism does not suit Nepal and second, to prevent the country from possible ethnic and regional conflict and disintegration. History will show that our protest is sensible and realistic.

What alternative do you have to federalism? Unitary system is the alternative. Over 170 countries follow this system, both capitalists as well as socialists. Unitary system should not be a centralised feudal system, but have decentralisation and local self-government. We want local self-government to be named a fundamental right in the constitution. The local bodies should be freed from interference from the centre. The court will decide if conflict arises in such issues but the government must stay away.

Everyone already believes federalism is the best way forward. How can you persuade them to support a unitary system again?

Plastic Karki of KTM in Kantipur, 17 January

Boy killed

Kantipur, 17 January

It was Saraswati Puja, and 10-year-old Santosh Karki got up early to go to school and pay respects to the goddess of knowledge. At school, he also got the results for his Grade Two exams. He came first, and was overjoyed. It was while walking back to his home to tell his parents when he was caught in a hail of bullets fired by hired gunmen of Maoist Kavre committee adviser, Ratna Lama. Raja Ram Thapa and Ratna Lama had had an altercation about construction material that Lama had piled on the street. Lama’s hitmen fired at Thapa, injuring him but a bullet also hit Santosh Karki in his back. Lama had mobilized ten gunmen from Kavre who arrived in motorcycles and shot at Thapa indiscriminately. Maoist Kavre district in-charge admitted Lama was retained as an advisor. Before rushing to school that morning, Santosh had asked his mother: “What will you give me if I come first in class?”

“Yuck, what’s with that moustache? You look like someone who doesn’t know what he’s saying.”

Batesyayan in Kantipur on 17 January

Vacancy

KATHMANDU INTERNATIONAL STUDY CENTRE

We are looking for a full time Teaching Assistant for the Secondary School English Faculty. The job entails supervising the classroom teacher to facilitate the active participation of students in the academic and social activities of the school.

Minimum Requirements:
- To work according to the KISC mission, vision and values
- Bachelor’s Degree
- Experience of working in an exatriate teaching environment
- Excellent skills in behavior management
- Excellent standard of English

Qualities required:
- Friendly and enjoys working with children
- Works well with others
- Reliable, honest, punctual

Further information see the KISC website www.kisc.edu.np

To apply send a copy of your Curriculum Vitae/Bio Data and covering letter of application to the KISC Recruitment Officer, Liz Watson, recruitment@kisc.edu.np

Applications must be in by 1 February. Interviews will be held on 11 February. Only short listed candidates will be called for interview.
“Citizen’s point-of-view is important”

Nepali Times spoke with Pekka Hallberg, President of the Supreme Administrative Court of Finland and President of the Councils of State and Supreme Jurisdictions of the European Union, about constitution-writing.

Nepali Times: How important is the constitution-writing process?  
Pekka Hallberg: The constitution is the basic law for all citizens. The citizen’s point of view, therefore, is paramount. The modern constitution should guarantee basic political rights, and also economic, cultural and social rights, which are relevant to a country as diverse as Nepal. They should be written as clearly as possible but we should be realistic at the same time. Constitutions should delineate a separation of powers, and the appropriate relationship between legislative, executive and judicial powers.

We discussed presidential and parliamentary models with Nepali legal experts. I can tell you Finland’s experiences, but can’t say that it’s suitable to Nepal. In the beginning, Finland had a mixed parliamentary and presidential system. Nowadays, it is more of a more parliamentary system: parliament elects the prime minister, but the president is fairly influential.

How was the constitution of Finland written?  
First, the constitution was written by committees of experts and elected political representatives, which completed the task after decades of consultation. The parliament was quite unanimous in endorsing the constitution with only two votes against it.

How do you assess the direct involvement of political representatives, including nominated members, in the constitution-writing process in Nepal?  
It is impressive to see active participation. It is very good to discuss differences of opinions before the final constitution is drafted. The constitution is legitimised by the people. Remember, the constitution is not a theoretical instrument but for the people. In Nepal, there have been open-minded discussions and active canvassing of public opinion. It’s good to see what these opinions are. The Maoists say parliament should control the judicial system, determine interpretations of the constitution, and that the chief justice needn’t be a judge prior to his appointment. What is your take?  
The independence of the judges and judiciality are not for the judges only but to guarantee the people’s rights. An independent judiciary would be better able to interpret the laws of a country.

There are many models according to which judges are appointed. However, it’s important that judges be able to remain in office without political pressure from the outside. Our constitution says that a judge shall not be suspended from office except by a charge by the court. Independence is not isolation but the integrity and the identity to make an impartial decision.

How can you ensure independence?  
Transparency is the most important solution. Criminal procedures are not enough to ensure good governance. There should be boards which take the initiative to investigate cases of corruption. But there should be no political influence, and that the court must have the final say.

What kind of a judicial setup would suit a federal system?  
There are different models. The general model is to have a general court at three levels. Europe does it differently: there is a general court for civilian criminal matters and administrative court for administrative matters. What matters most is that the system should work properly.

What about the constitutional court in federal system in the context of Nepal?  
Federal countries often have constitutional courts. But in Finland we have a provision concerning primacy of constitution, which means that if ordinary laws with constitution, we give preference to constitutional provisions. I would say that constitutional court may do well in many countries but at the same time they isolate constitutional problems from people’s daily lives.

“The constitution will be written”

Akkal Bahadur Thing, UCNP Maoist, Kavre - 2

What do you do when the CA is adjourned?  
Even if the CA is out of business, parliament sessions are going on, I have to lobby for the development of my district in the house and also do party work.

Is the conflict between Tamsaling and Newa states getting serious?  
Our party declared the states in principle only, demarcation has not happened yet. Conflict might arise when demarcating the state boundary. In district-wise division, Kavre is in Tamsaling but what if Tamangs claim Swayambhu like Newars’ claim Banepa?

Where will you make the capital of Tamsaling?  
We have not decided yet. The capital should be at a convenient distance for the people so that they don’t have to walk for more than 3 hours to reach services. It will be decided only after consultations with the people.

Tamsaling state stretches from Ganeesh Himal to Gauri Shankar. Doesn’t that make it impossible to deliver service in three hours?  
We can make autonomous units within a state to address this issue.

Helmo and Chepang are against the declaration of states, aren’t they?  
They don’t have what is needed to make a state/province. Jirel, Thami and Danuwar are also in a similar situation. They should be given autonomy anyways.

Will you still remain CA member even if the constitution is not written by 28 May?  
The CA clause of the interim constitution says the CA members shall remain until a new constitution is written. We’ve had good discussions about the constitution so far. The CA will continue until the next constitution is promulgated. The constitution will be written for sure.

“CA members have no role”

Sanjay Kumar Shah, State Minister for Physical Planning and Works, Dhanusa-4, MUF (D)

What do you do when the CA is adjourned?  
We read constitutions of other countries in the morning and evening, and go to the ministry during the day.

How far much of the constitution is written?  
It is going satisfactorily although there are some differences left to resolve. The Maoists moved to bypass the CPA and interim constitution has endangered the process. Nowadays, it is going satisfactorily although there are some differences left to resolve. The Maoists may not control the corruption. Political party presidents are the kings. Nepali politics is in the mafia’s grip. People’s representatives are helpers. Most of the CA members can do nothing but applaud what their party leaders say. Some CA members had to give party leaders money to be nominated. How, then, can the constitution be written?

Which Maoist-declared state do you belong to?  
When in the government, the Maoists attempted to capture the power by removing the army chief and appointed the person of their choice. As they failed to do so, they are now using ethnic groups as a ladder to grab the power.

Has your party been demanding one Madhes province?  
Madesi people want one Madhes Prades and we won’t compromise on it.
Generals in labyrinths

Lately, it does look like the Indians and the Chinese are competing over which country sends more delegations and senior dignitaries to visit Kathmandu. In late 2009, there wasn’t a week that went by without Beijing dispatching the PLA brass, or the entire TAR government machinery or its MoFA honchos on Nepal visits. Now, the Indians are doing the same: no sooner had Foreign Minister Krishna flown back to Delhi, it was the turn of Gen Kapoor to fly in. And because the Chinese last year had visited Birganj, Kapoor made it a point to go to Mustang as well. The two regional alpha males doth look like they are watering the perimeters of their domain. Or, shall we say, spike their spheres of influence with urinary markers?

Our own Gen Gurung must have had a dialogue of the deaf with Gen Kapoor, however, because news of the Indian Army Chief’s hearing problems (apparently he wasn’t wearing ear muffs while shooting off guns during a US Army weapons demo last year) was splashed by Indian tv while he was in Nepal.

And the Buddies, with their impeccable sense of timing, visited various disputed border hotspots just before the Injuns invaded. There were some interesting paradoxes: Kaji Narayan Kamred, who was caught on candid camera shaking hands with the Indian SSB on the other side of Nawalparasi was, only a few days later, raising his fist at the Indian Embassy sit-in on Wednesday. Awesome gave broad hints to Minister Krishna that he should install him (Ferocity) as premier, and a few hours later went down to Udaypur to call for the abrogation of the Sugauli treaty.

But at least Awesome seems to be reading the Ass, which advised Comrade Chairman last week not to stop at the Mahakali but plant the Rato Ra Chandra-Surya on the banks of the Sutlej. Here are the Maoists refusing to give back property they seized from fellow-Nepalis, and they want the British to return territory it took away from us in 1816. Forget the Indians, the Buddies should declare war on Britain.

OK. Let’s get this straight. PKD says he wants to talk directly to India. A few days later he says BRB is an Indian stooge. So why doesn’t PKD just talk to BRB and save us all the bother?

A vigilant reader has written to the Ass with a suggestion that the high-level committee entrusted with drawing up Girijababu’s curriculum vitae for the Nobel Peace Prize Committee not to leave out the part under ‘Work Experience’ that GPK once waged an armed rebellion, helped hijack a plane, and that he even admitted in a tv interview once that he used to forge Indian currency. To this, we could add that he forced the government make his dotter DPM, and SuzieQ just scrapped the tender bids for Machine Readable Passports because the cabinet refused to change the TOR that would suit her favourite bidder. And when news of this leaked to the press, she berated Farang Ministry employees and (literally) threw the book at her PA, injuring him.

Breckneck News: with PKD and Makunay nearly coming to blows at the meeting of The Mechanism the other day, the Three Wise Men have decided to form a taskforce to suggest ways that their High Level Political Mechanism can take the peace process forward and write the constitution. The task force is made up of two members each from the big three parties. To summarise: the NC, UML, UCPNM JLPM TF will do a TOR. Why do we have a government made up of 44 ministers, remind me?

ass(at)nepalitimes.com