After flirting with dangerous dogmatic politics, and overcoming volatile internal rifts, the Maoist standing committee has decided to re-focus on the constitution and the peace process.

In an exclusive interview to Nepali Times earlier this week, Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal said, “The party has had a history of ideological two-line struggles. But all of us have now vowed to work together, under a unified leadership, to implement the work plan.”

The plan includes:

First, a renewed emphasis on constitution and peace. This is a vindication of Baburam Bhattarai’s proposal, and sidelines those who were advocating an immediate “people’s revolt”. There appears to be a realisation that Nepalis, or even party cadres, do not want an outright confrontation. The party has also assessed the balance of power.

Dahal admitted, “A revolution may succeed, but there is an equal danger of a counter revolution.” The party will push for a revolt, he said, only if it feels domestic and international forces are conspiring to obstruct the peace process.

Second, the Maoists will continue to emphasise civilian supremacy and national independence. “We are not giving up on those issues. But we hope to find a way out through dialogue in the High Level Political Mechanism. The president’s step has to be addressed for the political deadlock to end,” Dahal maintained.

A Maoist-led national unity government remains on the agenda, but indications are the party will not hold the peace process hostage because of this.

Third, Dahal formally reiterated the Maoist stance that integration and constitution-writing have to go together. “The first cannot happen before the second and that is why the present government plan is not acceptable to us... a final decision should be taken on this issue after the constitution has decided on the new security policy and new state structure,” he said.

“Democratisation of the Nepal Army must also happen simultaneously,” he said. “We are not saying this to make the army Maoist as our opponents allege, but to make them paribartanmukhi, pro-change.”

The Maoists are cooperating with the Special and Technical Committee, but the other parties are insisting the PLA question must be settled before the new constitution.

Nonetheless, there is an air of cautious optimism in political circles, and the task now is to address specific constitution and peace related issues in a short span.
Prachanda concedes that no one strategic choice. “This was make a more fundamental paradox has forced the parties to what they wanted, entirely. This to create a new mainstream, thought we could use the process analysis of current politics and offered a glimpse into his Maoist insurgency? It provided a safe neighbourhood. power. Regional security is a shared generation leaders like B.P. Koirala. was rejected long ago even by old-#487). The ‘common security umbrella’ needs to fit into the security scheme of It is ridiculous to hypothesise that Nepal contribute to improving lives of citizens just by being honest, efficient and aware of the larger public in their everyday lives. Let’s invest more energy in making ourselves proud to be Nepal. Individually and collectively let’s celebrate what is still good about Nepal: our country’s beauty and diversity, our dignified and hardworking people, our generosity and sense of self-worth.

Prachanda is upbeat about hisagitation has been confined to not been obstructed. And their may differ but the process has oath. On the constitution, views prachanda.com

Circulation:

RESPONSE TO INDIAN CONCERNS
It is ridiculous to hypothesise that Nepal needs to fit into the security scheme of the South Block (Security concerns #487): The ‘common security umbrella’ was rejected long ago even by old-generation leaders like B.P. Koirala. India is yet to earn trust from her neighbours if she wants to be a regional power. Nepal’s past is a shared concept and is possible only with stability and prosperity in the neighbourhood.

Where was India when Nepal had a Maoist insurgency? It provided a safe haven for top Maoist leaders despite requests from successive democratically elected Nepali governments for their extradition. One rule for them and one rule for us? No! Nepal is a sovereign nation and must stay that way.

I have nothing against India. My family and my community still rely on the money that comes across the border. It’s for the majority of the rural population because Kathmandu never thinks about them. Sometimes the rural population because Kathmandu never thinks about them. Sometimes the rural population because Kathmandu never thinks about them.

Rishav

DO OR DIE
In your coverage of Kathmandu’s earthquake risk (‘Do or die’, #485) you rightly criticise the government, which has done almost nothing to prepare. But what of the donors? They fund health and education but how many schools or hospitals have earthquake measures in place or do emergency drills? Of all the millions of dollars in development aid spent in Nepal annually; 70% of which goes to earthquake preparedness? Where’s the training for officials and essential workers? Where’s the rescue and heavy lifting equipment for trained emergency services? If a community or youth club wants to prepare, where should it go? There are donor-funded radio, billboard, TV and poster campaigns about HIV, clean drinking water, washing your hands, etc. but where mass awareness building about earthquake risks? It’s no surprise ordinary people don’t take it seriously.

Suresh

On the web

www.nepaltimes.com

Let’s face it, it’s not original any more to complain about how bad things are. Load-shedding is here to stay. There is nothing new about the garbage piling up on the streets. Corruption is not new. The energy crisis, political instability, strikes, pollution and crime are all our livings. You can complain, but you will be predictable and boring.

The real question is: what are we doing as individuals and communities to make things better? We have plenty of examples of successful people here who have done well for the underprivileged, overcoming what seemed to be insurmountable obstacles. Take the Chhetrapati Free Clinic or the Samata School (pic), for instance (see page 12). There are many Nepals who contribute to improving lives of citizens just by being honest, efficient and aware of the larger public in their everyday lives.

Let’s invest more energy in making ourselves proud to be Nepal. Individually and collectively let’s celebrate what is still good about Nepal: our country’s beauty and diversity, our dignified and hardworking people, our generosity and sense of self-worth.

It is ridiculous to hypothesise that Nepal can’t bear to see fellow Nepalis get ahead? The favourite Nepali pastime is sitting around trying to find nasty things to say about each other. But what is it in our collective psyche that we just can’t bear to see fellow Nepalis get ahead? We lock over the visible faults in ourselves but spend endless hours digging out the imaginary shortcomings of fellow citizens. And since our rulers spend their entire time running each other down, we in the media treat this spectacle as one endless square. There can’t be civilised disagreement on issues, the basis of potential compromise, because positions are unending and personalised.

This obsession with finding fault is self-perpetuating and self-fulfiling. This refusal to see any goodness in our own kind makes it difficult to forge ahead. We love to white but don’t ever want to do anything about bettering our condition. It’s as if we want Nepal to fail so that our own catastrophist predictions about its fate will be proven right. We don’t want Nepal to turn the corner because that would undermine the reason we use to convince ourselves to do nothing, or emigrate.

Despite their desperation and despair, rural Nepal has faith in the future, they still have hope. It is their resilience and the Nepal's reliance on each other and their communities that has helped them survive and keep a positive outlook, something rare in the dimpsters of this panama catastrophe.

Plaintalk

Preshant Jha

A conversation with Maoist supremo Prachanda this week not only brought out the party’s new line but also offered a glimpse into his analysis of current politics and future strategy.

The rest of the problem, according to Prachanda, is that the 12-point understanding was ‘tactical’ for everyone who signed the agreement. “The other side felt they could get us into the mainstream and weaken us. We thought we could use the process to create a new mainstream, which would include political competition.” Neither side got what they wanted, entirely. This paradox has forced the parties to make a more fundamental strategic choice. “This was inevitable. The army issue is key. Neither side feels it lost the war. Prachanda concedes that no one won the war in material terms, but believes the Maoists won the war politically. “It was the then Royal Nepalese Army’s mandate and goal to protect the monarchy and block a republic,” he says. “They failed, and the PLA played a big part in bringing about this change.” “The way forward for these ‘recognised and legitimate’ outfits, he says, is “sticking to the peace accord, democratising the army and professionalising the PLA.”

Perhaps surprisingly, Prachanda candidly admits he may have mishandled the army issue while in power. “It was a time when the army was also a bit confused. The king had gone. I could have dealt with the army more maturely. I went to the army HQ a few times and saw the officers, especially the younger lot. I was impressed with their energy. I think it was still a space to make them govern."

On the India relationship, the Maoist chairman recognises the need to work in a new relationship with the Indian establishment. He says, ‘I have told them the relationship has to change according to new realities. We cannot and will not be like the NC or Surya Bahadur Thapa and it is not in their interest also. They agree in principle but in practice, they cannot give up their control mindset, which leads them to prop up people here.”

The Maoist calculation is that the ‘nationalism’ campaign has served its purpose. It has led to greater awareness about India’s rule inside Nepal, says Prachanda, and it has positioned them as the only force capable of challenging interference. He believes it has actually helped Dilhi becoming more open to engage with the Maoists.

Most contemporary media coverage has focused on the Maoist leadership’s recent utterances and dismissed them as madness. But for the most part, there is a method in this madness – be it to garner mass support, send a message to rivals and constituents, energise the party organisation, or even to set the agenda for the next elections.

More importantly, the rhetoric may be hardline but party actions over the past month have been fairly accommodating. Perhaps there is a connection between the two. The discharge process is moving ahead smoothly. On integration, the Maoists have agreed to the setting up of a secretariat that would be notionally in charge of the PLA and will subsequently implement any agreement.

Parliament is open, the government is introducing bills and the Maoists have played along on key issues like theVP oath. On the constitution, views may differ but in practice, they are on board in the larger political process.

The Maoists appear to have a multi-grouped strategy. Use the system, monopolise the opposition space, stoke internal feuds in other parties, remain internally consolidated and sort out organisational matters, reach out to their mass base, turn across the country, play the hero and victim by turn, and create a content – by raising the nationalism pitch but also transforming slowly – that will force India to develop a closer relationship with them.

Prachanda is upbeat about his party’s prospects. “Believe me, we have done a careful ground assessment and feel that 20 million out of 27 million people in the country are with us. A two-thirds majority is definite.”

This may sound like hyperbole, but the sense of having overwhelming mass support has given the Maoists the confidence to be flexible in the peace process.

United we stand
Maithili finds itself between a rock and a hard place

Chitwan, Butwal, Kailali or Ataria along the East-West Highway. In the central Tarai, this technique to expedite data collection put an unavoidable question mark over census figures. By the time some conscientious data supervisors spotted the error, part of the information had already been processed. Now, there is a concerted campaign underway to convert Maithili speakers from poor and marginalized sections of society into proponents of Hindi. Since almost every educated person from earlier generations read and wrote in Hindi, it has been the language of status-seekers for a long time. It wasn’t just the Badahakims of the Rana era, even the Anchaladhishes of the Panchayat period conversed in Hindi with the landed gentry. Since Marwaris and Banias dominated the local trade, Hindi established itself as the dominant language of the bajar.

The Nepali language challenged Hindi’s status in the early seventies when schools were nationalised and it became the sole medium of education. By the early eighties, the three competing languages had carved out their respective domains: we spoke Maithili at home, Hindi in the bajar and Nepali at school and in government offices. English is still a distant fourth, its use limited to conversations with occasional foreign visitors. When Nepali remained the language of the state even after the restoration of multiparty democracy in the 1990s, many upwardly mobile Madhesis began to use the national language even at home. Almost every prominent Madhesi politician today is the product of a system that promoted the necessity of a single language for national unity.

President Ram Baran Yadav opted for the state language. VP Parmananda Jha preferred the language of the bajar. Nurtured in a similar culture of linguistic uniformity, neither saw any merit in promoting their mother tongue. No wonder neither is seen as an icon of Maithili pride. President Yadav probably has more admirers among Pahadis than Madhesis. Politically, he broke no new ground. However, because of the controversy his oath-taking ceremony generated, VP Jha has enlarged the space for the politics of language. Unfortunately, the victim of these seemingly opposite stands is once again the language of the masses in the Madhes.

Sardar Ram Mani Dixit was a pioneering Pundit who led the movement for the institutionalisation of Gorkhali as the state language. He inspired its transformation into the lingua franca of Nepalis over the world. In his autobiography Purana Samjhana, Sardar Ram Mani reminisced that the resilience of languages like Marathi and Maithili in resisting the rising tide of Hindi motivated him to work tirelessly for the promotion of Nepali. His soul must be wondering at the behaviour of two of the most powerful Maithili speakers of Nepal.

But it seems that the allure of the state is stronger than that of the market in poor countries. Of the six daily newspapers published from Janakpur, none is in Hindi. And the language of the only weekly newspaper published from this village? You guessed it – Nepali.
long gone are the days of booking travel on weekly outbound flights. International aircraft arrivals increased by 8.41 per cent and domestic aircraft arrivals by 19.72 per cent in the first nine months of 2009 compared to the same period in 2008. Currently, 25 international airlines operate 35 flights a day and there are eight domestic airlines and five choppers. Kingfisher and Alpine Air will soon join that fleet and three other foreign airlines hope to follow suit.

Yet there have been no major additions to infrastructure. “Our airport doesn’t meet the requirements for an international airport, so it is very difficult to accommodate all the tourists,” says Amit Baburaj Shakya of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN).

There is one runway at Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA), no arrow bridge to connect docked planes directly to the terminal, and seven internal bays – when congestion at the air terminal may even have contributed to the death of a Korean woman, of a heart attack, three weeks ago.

If you don’t like crowds, forget Tribhuvan International Airport

Such problems were anticipated long ago, but officials have been slow to respond. A master plan drafted in 1996 was never executed. But there is more movement now. The airport will operate 24 hours a day, in light of Visit Nepal Year 2010, and offer discounts to airlines that operate outside of peak times. But there is more to be done. "We need to digitise ATM and use analog technology causes," says ATM expert Niraj Aryal. Nepal stands to gain more from such changes than other countries because its geography and weather – which cause most domestic air crashes – make analog technology unreliable. Though ATM authorities are committed to implementation, the surveillance, supervision and navigation system will be installed, along with improved lighting on the central runway, to make night-flying safer. The domestic terminal will be refurbished and an area will be set aside for choppers.

There will also be changes to airport infrastructure to make room for more passengers. TIA’s Managing Director Dinesh Prasad Shrestha says, “With assistance from the Asian Development Bank, TIA will be realigning the immigration and hand baggage checking areas to accommodate more passengers waiting to board. The waiting lounge will be expanded as well. It is hoped these projects will be completed within two years.

But a total overhaul of the Air Traffic Management (ATM) system may be necessary further down the line. Most airports around the world use analog technology to enable the surveillance, supervision and navigation of air traffic. However, the volume such technology can handle is nearing saturation point in Nepal, leading to a rise in the risk of accidents. “We must digitise ATM and use satellites, which have a wider, bird’s eye view of air traffic, have a much higher saturation point, and could eliminate the mistakes that analog technology causes,” says ATM expert Niraj Aryal.

Constitution first, federalism later

CPN-UML directed its party’s Constituent Assembly members to ask for a State Restructuring Commission in the constitution, indicating that the new constitution may be written before finalising the details of federalism. “Restructuring the state is a very complex issue,” UML President Jhala Nath Khanal said. “We suggest leaving this issue to the elected federal government that will be formed under the new constitution.” The CA began its discussion on state restructuring on Sunday. By the second day of the debate, the main party was supporting the 14 federal ethnic and community units proposed by the State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power Commission.

Against all odds

Nepal judo players returned home on Wednesday with four bronze medals in the 11th South Asian Games taking place in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Most of the seven-member judo team was injured last week when an elevator in their hotel in Dhaka fell several floors. Judoka Debu Thapa took part using painkillers and won a bronze medal. Nepal has won seven bronze medals so far.

Bird flu in Pokhara

A case of bird flu was discovered in Pokhara after a farmer reported that 22 ducks he was rearing died on the same day. A virus sample sent to London for tests confirmed the findings. The Department of Livestock Services has said the spread of the virus is limited to a small area and will be contained within a few days.

Lake View Resort

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We have spacious bedrooms with private bathrooms for your comfort. Wide lawns and gardens for your leisure. Nepalese cultural dance show (every evening) for your entertainment. In your visit, stay with us and enjoy Pokhara to its fullest.
Driven by a healthy obsession with cycling, Dan Austin and his brother Jared have left their tire tracks on many continents. But it was one trip to Cambodia in 2006 that set their wheels of fate in motion.

At the end of their trip, the Austins decided to donate their bicycles to an orphanage. But a selfless act that brought happiness to two orphans, the Austins realised, left out 86 other children at the orphanage. Thus began their push for donations to provide all the orphans with that same feeling of happiness, and The 88Bikes Foundation was born.

The Foundation’s Project FOUR has now brought Dan to Nepal, one of four designated countries to receive 300 bicycles raised through donations. Each of the bicycles represents a one-to-one exchange between a donor and a child. A postcard with the donor’s picture is given to each orphan along with the bicycle. In turn, a picture of the child is sent back to the donor. Some of these donors and children have become fast friends – pen pals.

“A bike is like a magical vessel of freedom and fun,” says Dan. Clearly he remembers how it feels to own a bicycle for the first time. “That idea of a bike being both useful and making someone happy is something we really feel strongly about.”

Project FOUR is providing 125 bicycles to children in the four shelters run by SAATHI, an NGO that works for women’s and children’s rights. Of the 154 children at the shelters, those not receiving bicycles are mostly toddlers. But a last-minute donation ensured both laughter and tears as five tricycles came into view.

Giving is only half the story for 88Bikes’ projects. Local mechanics employed by the organisation provide on-site maintenance for the bicycles. The mechanics will also conduct a workshop to teach the children how to look after their new prized possessions. Children with a talent for the trade will be picked out for apprenticeship programs, giving them an opportunity to make a living.

Beyond that, the children and their bikes are on their own. While 88Bikes and SAATHI are fully committed to providing maintenance support, each child will shoulder the burden of ownership. This responsibility, it is hoped, will prevent such liabilities as theft and even trading for money.

Sulakshana Rana, programme officer for SAATHI, is confident the children will not sell their bicycles off. She feels the close relationship the children develop with their bicycles acts as a deterrent. “Even in the case of a theft claim, a thorough investigation will be carried out,” says Rana. Bicycle shop owners in close proximity to the shelters have been asked to cooperate to prevent such incidents.

Rana is looking forward to seeing the children reap the benefits of Project FOUR’s bicycles. “The bicycles will give them more mobility and freedom than they ever had before,” she says. “It will also shift more of their time away from television and games.”

Unsurprisingly, the children are equally excited. “All of us are so happy to be able to cycle, even though some of the kids don’t know how to yet,” says 14-year-old Rabina Giri, a Room to Read scholar with SAATHI. She says that it takes some of the children about an hour to walk to school, so it’s clear the bikes will have an immediate impact on their lives.

Dan Austin is headed for India next to distribute more magical vessels of happiness. He’s a veritable Santa Claus, of course.

Great Leap Backward

STRICKLY BUSINESS

Ashutosh Tiwari

The ‘basic stuff’ continues to elude our investor-unfriendly politicos

It was all about the country’s ‘new beginning’. According to the advertoirial, Mongolia sits atop rich mineral deposits, has now signed international conventions against corruption, fixed its legal and tax environment to attract ‘big investors’ such as mining giant Rio Tinto, expects to ‘set a great example...as a competent player on the world stage.”

Two other emerging economies, Georgia and Estonia, regularly make out through advertoirials touting their low tax rates, educated and skilled workforce, reform-conscious bureaucrats, improved rankings on global business tables, and market-friendly governments.

And in Dhaka last week, I was pleasantly surprised by the growing confidence surrounding Bangladesh’s ambition to expand its trade volume to become a middle-income country—a label it wants as a birthday present for its Golden Anniversary in 2021.

In the first decade of this century, these countries and others have realised that they might have their share of God-given wealth, but in the absence of a system to convert that wealth into capital, there is not much they can do to improve the lot of their citizens. One can’t fill a hungry stomach with unprocessed natural resources or with promises of a yet-to-be-fulfilled potential.

To move ahead, these countries have come to accept the bona fide need to make it easier for foreigners to earn an attractive return when they invest money, time, technology, know-how, contracts and sales and marketing skills. Such skills help transform the fixed wealth into moving capital, which can then be used to provide water, sanitation, jobs, education and health care to millions of citizens. Absent such investments, development and growth slow down considerably. All this is basic stuff.

Yet this basic stuff continues to elude the central committee members of a certain political party, which reportedly ordered its foot-soldiers to issue a letter to GMR Group CEO Ramalinga Raju. One can’t fill a hungry stomach with unprocessed natural resources or with promises of a yet-to-be-fulfilled potential.

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right and warm hues—red, orange and green, among others—seem to dominate the aesthetics of Higher Ground, a small establishment comprising a Jawalakhel café, and a bakery and crafts department in Bhanimandal, Lalitpur.

“We wanted to create a welcoming environment, and also inspire optimism,” explains owner Bimala Shrestha Pokharel. It’s clear she’s also referring to the fact that Higher Ground actively seeks at-risk individuals and those in need, providing them with training and employment opportunities.

Even before she bought Higher Ground Café from friends in 2005 and transformed it into the socially conscious business it is today, Pokharel was conducting baking classes in her own kitchen. She trained women from low-income households in the hope that they would go on to start their own baking micro-enterprises. But she harboured dreams of setting up a bakery of her own, too.

This materialised in 2007 once Pokharel revamped the café she had acquired. She made it a point to hire only individuals, mostly women, who desperately needed a job to sustain their families. She recounts the particularly poignant story of a woman whose husband went to work in Malaysia and has yet to be heard from, six years hence. The crafts department came next. It originally started as an experiment after one of the bakery girls expressed a desire to revive her previous vocation of making bracelets and necklaces. Pokharel threw her support behind her.

“I like to encourage women to do what they want to do, and are good at doing,” she says. She sent samples of the craftwork produced to her friends and contacts in the United States, and they proved popular. The crafts aspect of the business is now on a solid footing.

Higher Ground has also managed to reach out to a few girls who worked in dance bars and cabin restaurants. It offers them viable employment alternatives and equips them with skills that will hopefully keep them from having to go back to professions they are often compelled to take up to survive in Kathmandu.

But while Higher Ground started out with a focus on girls and women, it is now turning its attention towards family units. This means men are also being employed as service staff. Gopal Tamang rejoined Higher Ground after a two-year stint at a restaurant in Malaysia. In spite of Pokharel encouraging him to move on should a better opportunity arise, he has no plans to leave Higher Ground, which he considers family.

To date, Higher Ground has trained dozens of women in baking and crafts. It currently employs 22 individuals, with that number set to increase as the business expands. But Pokharel recognises that she can’t give a job to everyone. So she is considering setting up training centres for employment skills. Also in the pipeline are plans to register Higher Ground as an NGO and partner other organisations to hand out scholarships to children in rural areas who would otherwise have to work.

Despite being the full-fledged businesswoman that she is today, Pokharel never considered a corporate career prior to Higher Ground.

“Before I went to the United States to study, I never thought of doing business. I hated business,” she says. She had initially aspired to be a doctor, but a story about micro-enterprises in Kenya, where women were weaving and selling baskets to support their families, proved a revelation. She realised there were more ways than one to help others. “Now,” she smiles, “I really find joy in doing this.”

Café with a conscience

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Salsa classes for beginners with the Salsa Dance Academy, starting February 7, classes Sat/Thu 5.30pm-6.30pm or 6.30-7.30pm at Samara International Club, or 7.30-8.30pm 5-6pm or 6-7pm at the Bhaisakhentri branch, 442064, www.salsaneapol.com

Hip hop dance classes for beginners with the Salsa Dance Academy, Bhaisakhentri, starting February 8, classes Mon/Wed 4-5pm, 442064

Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Tai Chi 10-11.30am Saturday, Yoga 8-9.30am and meditation 5-6pm weekdays, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel, 4410402

People After War, permanent photo exhibition, every day 11am-4pm, Madan Puraskar, Patan Dhoka, for bulk school bookings call 5521393

Photo.circle presents works of 24 young photographers from Bangladesh, Norway and Nepal, 6 February, 6pm at the Bakery Café, Sundhara

Happy cocktail hour, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jims Café & Bar, Thamel, 5-7pm

Live workshop and concert from Australian band Tigroquina, 11am & 2.30pm, February 14, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, fraimiskiel, free entrance, 5013554, www.katjazz.com.np

JSC Jazz Quartet, every Saturday from, Lal Darbar Marg, 4410402

Saturday African Nite, with African food and music from 8pm at Jazzabell Café, fraimiskiel, 2114075

Live band every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Darbar Marg, 4227288

Some like it hot, every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika’s Hotel, 7pm, 4479488

Nepali Ghajals at D’Lounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday 6.30pm, 4468589

Rudra Night live fusion music by Skew Nepali every Friday, 7pm at Gokarna Forest Resort, 4451212

Jazz evening at Delices de France restaurant every Wednesday, 11am-2pm, 4260028

HyJazz at the Box Bar every Friday evening, and Sunday Jazz Brunch at The Terrace with live music from Inner Groove, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 4485062, 4491234

Robin and the New Revolution, every Tuesday 7pm on at the Bamboo Club, Thamel, 4701547

Electro-Cardiogram: Internal Stories, paintings by Birendra Pratap Singh, until 16 February, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre, Jhamsikhel, 5521120

The Fragile Valley 2, watercolour exhibition by late Suzan Maharjan, till 10 Feb, New Orleans Café, Pulchok

Othello: The Sen of Nepal, performance by Nepal Shakes from 5-14 Feb, Kamal Mani Theatre, Patan Dhoka. Tickets available at Dhoikaima Café (Patan), Chez Carolyn, (Babar Mahal) and Nanglo Bakery (Darbar Marg)

Photo.circle presents works of 24 young photographers from Bangladesh, Norway and Nepal, 6 February, 6pm at the Bakery Café, Sundhara

Nepal Bharat Library presents Tavern Tales by Quixote’s Cove with readings by editor, writer and intellectual Kamal Mani Dixit from his book Dokhoko Muluk, Nepal Bharat Library, NAC Building, New Road, 5pm, 5 February
DINING

A café’s café, Dhokaima Café, Patan
Dhoka, 5522113

Famous stews of the world at the Rox Restaurant, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, from 6.00pm, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 4491234/4490902

Strawberry High Tea, 4.30-6.30pm, The Lounge, Hyatt Regency, 4491234/4490902

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, 4491234/4490902

Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisited, 4263070

Lavazza Coffee and Baskin n’ Robbins, at Blue Note Coffee Shop, Lazimpat, 4491234

Jazzabell Café, TGIF, 10% discount all day, happy hour 6-8pm, Hamro Kitchen, 2114075

Teppanyaki meat items and garlic rice at Le Restaurant, Ganeshnagar, 4490318

REALITY BITES

1. Trending. The Kaisers Café, Gardens Drurak, operated by Daveka’s Group of Hotels, 9am-10pm, 4425341

2. Himalayan Rainbow Trout at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg, 4248999

3. Tiger for Breakfast, breakfast everyday at 1905, Kantipath, 4215068

4. Gokarna Forest Resort for a variety of sizzlers at Tripti bar, 4451216

5. Live continental BBQ Fiesta, exclusive BBQ dinner at Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel, from 6.30-10.30pm everyday

6. Valentine’s Day Special, love with a free rose, a free Irish Coffee and 10% discount on Mexican specialties, February 14, K-tooth Steakhouse, Thamel, 4700043

7. The Corner Bar, 5-7pm, 3-11pm, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, 4411818

GREEN SAVINGS

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 Pokhara Paradise Package. 1 Night/2 Days including buffet dinner and breakfast, happy hours at the Gurkha Bar, discounts on spa & golf, valid until 28 April for Nepalis and resident expats only for Rs. 3999 per person on twin sharing basis. Also try our Wines & Roses Honeymoon Special for an unforgettable 3 Nights/4 Days stay including a bouquet of flowers and a bottle of sparkling wine, a daily set or buffet dinner, one hour spa treatment, 30 minutes foot massage, complimentary use of the jacuzzi, half a day of sightseeing and more for $599/$799 per couple, call 431482, www.fulbari.com

 Relax Package at the Hyatt for Rs. 6200 plus taxes for one night accommodation for two, including breakfast at The Café. Package valid till Feb 20, 2010. Only for local residents and Nepalese citizens for a maximum of 3 nights stay. Please call 4491234 or 4498800.
AGAINST ALL ODDS: Nepali judo player Debu Thapa returns home on Wednesday after winning a bronze medal in the South Asian Games in Bangladesh. She was injured in an elevator accident in Dhaka last week and participated in the games using painkillers.

HEAVY LIFTING: Nepal Armed Police employ a dozer to pick up trash at New Road Gate last week as employees of local bodies continued their nationwide protests.

WATCH OUT! Students of Adarsha Secondary School during an earthquake drill organised by the National Society for Earthquake Technology and School Earthquake Safety Division on Monday.

UNWANTED: Pedestrians point at a discarded foetus in the rubbish flowing under Balkumari Bridge, Lalitpur, Wednesday.

REMEMBRANCE: An offering of rice at Shahid Gate to mark Martyr’s Day on Saturday.
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Cooperatives, private donors and charities can offer alternatives to shoddy state services and their costly private counterparts

In Nepal, those without the means too often have to resort to poorly equipped and managed state services. In the absence of state health insurance, for instance, all medical costs must be borne privately. Thanks to a range of factors including disruptive unions and the demands of the urban middle class, costs have risen across the board. Health experts suggest a broad schedule of subsidies to make healthcare cheaper. “We need a system of graded subsidies — with subsidies lowest for the rich and highest for the poor — to ensure greater access to healthcare,” says public health expert Sanajh Dhiyal of Kathmandu Model Hospital.

But there are problems. The government is strapped for cash, with healthcare expenditures at a measly $7 per capita, and private hospitals have little incentive to offer such concessions.

Community-run health cooperatives like Chhetrapati Free Clinic offer a creative solution. They operate “micro-insurance” schemes, whereby patients contribute to a fund that subsidises healthcare for everyone in the community. Since the biggest contributors are usually the wealthiest, the scheme channels resources from the rich to the poor, much like a graded subsidy. Community oversight also reduces unnecessary costs. “Cooperatives can certainly improve healthcare delivery,” Kathmandu Model Hospital has helped many communities get started already, “says Dhiyal. But healthcare requires substantial external support. Nearly two thirds of Chhetrapati Free Clinic’s expenses last year were met by external donors.

While they can help a lot of people, they aren’t sustainable on a large scale,” says President Bijay Bahadur Mali. Initiatives funded by private donors, such as the Samata School, represent a replicable model to provide high-quality, cheap education to disadvantaged Nepalis. PestalozziWorld works across the world and in Nepal to provide scholarships to children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Community and charitable initiatives such as the Chhetrapati Free Clinic, Samata School and PestalozziWorld don’t absolve the state of its responsibilities towards its citizens. Neither do they detract from the top-quality, if expensive, services that the private sector can provide. But in providing alternatives to those with little choice at their disposal, they represent brave efforts to ensure all Nepalis reach their potential.

**Middle ways**

SUVAYU PANT

Chhetrapati Free Clinic (CFC) was set up in 1957 to provide affordable healthcare to the underprivileged. To date it has served nearly three million patients.

A doctor’s visit, plus a follow-up meeting, costs just Rs75. This fee is waived for those who cannot pay. Community members oversee the clinic through an executive committee.

The facilities are first rate. Ear-Nose-Throat specialist Premal Kumar Joshi says, “I see about 40 patients a day and I have the technology and equipment to provide a wide range of services.” CFC provides basic medical care and will soon install two operation theatres.

In 2000, CFC set up Nepal’s first modern dental lab. “We ushered Nepali dentistry into the 21st century. Our products and technicians are the best in the country,” says President Bijay Bahadur Mali. It may also be one of the few clinics with advances in medical technology. Its facilities, CFC will struggle to keep up with advances in medical technology.

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**Bamboo school**

City Montessori School in Lucknow, India, became the world’s largest school

Samata School was set up by Handicap International in 2001. It is an example of the kind of innovative school that is helping to meet the demands of children who have physical disabilities.

The school is built on the principles of inclusion and universal access. It provides education to children with disabilities, including children with visual impairments, hearing impairments, and those with physical disabilities.

The school is equipped with facilities that accommodate the needs of children with disabilities. It has specialized classrooms, sensory rooms, and specialized equipment for children with specific needs.

The school also focuses on developing the social and emotional skills of its students. It provides opportunities for students to interact with each other and develop their social skills.

The school has a strong focus on inclusion. It works closely with other schools in the area to ensure that children with disabilities have access to the same educational opportunities as their peers.

The school is supported by a range of external organizations, including Handicap International, which is the organization that set up the school.

The school has been very successful in achieving its goals. It has won a number of awards, including the UNICEF Award for Innovative Practice in Education.

The school is an example of how education can be inclusive and accessible for all children. It provides a model for other schools around the world to follow.
Muktinath Adhikari, headmaster and Grade 10 teacher at Padmini Sanskrit Higher Secondary School in Lamjung, was teaching a Science class when the Maoists came and took him away in January 2002. That afternoon, he was taken to a hill overlooking the village, tied to a tree with his scarf and shot through the head. According to the Maoists, he was an informant, who hadn’t donated the required 25 per cent of his teacher’s Dasain bonus to their cause.

It has been exactly eight years since Muktinath was murdered. His son Suman has since moved the family to Kathmandu. Suman’s mother has been ill since his father’s death and doesn’t want to go back to Lamjung. Whenever Suman visits his village, he feels uncomfortable in his own house.

Suman and his family have never wanted to know who killed Muktinath. What Suman does want to know is why his father, a sincere, hardworking man who had never hurt a soul in his short life, was accused of being an informant and killed so brutally. For eight years Suman has gone from one government office to another, to the Peace Ministry, to every Prime Minister who has taken office. They all sympathise, but no one has done anything. Now Suman doesn’t even know where to go, who is accountable, or how to go about trying to get justice.

It’s not money that the Adhikari family wants. Muktinath made sure that his children get a good education. Both Suman and his brother have jobs that can support the family. “What is reparation? Can any amount of money bring back my father?” Suman asks. He wants closure – acknowledgement from those responsible that what happened to Muktinath was wrong. He wants the party responsible for murdering his father to ask for forgiveness from his mother and his family. “My father shunned violence, he was not an informer, that is not how a good person should be remembered,” says Suman.

Whenever the issue of repatriation and reconciliation is raised, however, there are always those who say that this is not the right time to talk about it because it will hamper the peace process. The victims who are awaiting justice are also told the same thing when they approach the government. But how can a peace process be successful when thousands are still traumatised by what happened during the war?

The families of the war victims of both sides want to know how and why their loved ones were killed and where the disappeared are so that they can move on. The most unfortunate thing is that the government has no data on the number of people who were killed or disappeared during the war. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Disappearance Commission are in limbo. The victims do not know where to go to have their cases heard because no one wants to be accountable.

Media, civil society and non-governmental organisations can lobby and provide support to these victims, but the nature of reconciliation is such that government itself has to be involved, and doing out cash compensation won’t cut it.

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The government needs to come up with a comprehensive plan as a matter of priority for the peace process. The victims are in pain, some of them are very angry, and they will not wait forever. 

INTERESTING TIMES

Mallika Aryal

The nature of reconciliation is such that government itself has to be involved, and doing out cash compensation won’t cut it.
Editorial in Janadisha, 1 February

India responded to the Maoist campaign for national independence and civilian supremacy by protesting in the border area of Dashgaja. Protestors burned an effigy of chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Indian security personnel roughed up Nepalis living near the border. By doing this, India wanted to send out a message, ‘obey me or else you will meet the same fate’.

There is a Nepali fable in which a wolf attacks a lamb because it muddies a shared pond. India, which is 32 times bigger in size and 45 times bigger in population, is acting like the wolf. India is nurturing its ambition to become the world’s most powerful country and intends to bully its neighbours. It is pressurising the Nepal government to agree on an extradition treaty and air marshal agreement and now it is harassing Nepali people in border areas. Instead of protesting against such Indian offenses, Nepali corporate media and ‘intellectuals’ criticise the Maoists for launching the movement for nationalism, which they say has troubled the public. They are happy when politicians get a bad name. Loyalists who receive favours from India and are ready to live under oppression have made Indian atrocities tools against the Maoists. Indian atrocities are fuel for corporate media and ‘intellectuals’ to lash out against the Maoist movement. However, the relation between the two countries’ people will not deteriorate as desired by the rulers.

Suman in Annapurna Post, 3 February

“Our Special Coverage on Sri Lanka on Newsstands Now!”

Towards a Rajapakse future Tisaranie Gunasekara on a divided nation
Waiting for the Jaffna train Ahilan Kadirgamar on post-conflict peace
Stifled hopes Kopalasingham Sridharan on the University of Jaffna
Ignoring two decades Shireen Saroor on Sri Lanka’s displaced Muslims

ALSO IN THE ISSUE
Letter to the whole-timer Kanak Mani Dixit addresses Maoists cadres
Curry bashing? Bina D’Costa on attacks on Southasians in Australia

PLUS
Photo feature Scott Falia on the Kathmandu Valley
Fiction Sumana Roy on identity in Gorkhaland
Finalising the federal structure

DHRUBA SIMKHADA

The proposal for 14 ethnicity based provinces has to be endorsed by a majority in the CA, which is unlikely autocratic, as the committee had failed to decide even after 127 rounds of meetings and a four-day meeting of the sub-committee at Godawari Village Resort. Forty-two CA members commented on the draft at the final meeting of the committee, which doesn’t augur well for agreement on federalism. The 14-state proposal received 23 votes from Maoist and UML CA members. The majority also approved of political privileges to ethnic communities, special regions, protected areas and autonomous regions in the provinces. Fifteen members of the committee, however, demanded both proposals be presented at full CA sessions. MIF registered a note of dissent and announced protest programs challenging the committee’s decision. The NC, too, has registered a note of dissent demanding both the federal maps discussed be submitted to the CA. Even some Maoist committee members submitted notes of dissent. To top it all, some ethnic organisations have not approved of the proposal for 14 ethnicity-based provinces. The Tharu Welfare Council has demanded a re-division of the provinces on the basis of population, geography and historical background. It has announced protest programs in Tharuhat-Tarai districts. Clause 138(2) of the Interim Constitution says “a High Level Commission shall be constituted to recommend for the restructuring of the State” but the government failed to form the commission. Ex-president of the Nepal Bar Association (NBA) and lawyer Harirah Bahal says that state restructuring by ignoring the constitutional clause means that “As per law, this can be invalid.” But another NBA ex-president and lawyer Shamsher Thapa says the commission would have only been an advisory body to the CA, and not forming it does not mean the CA can postpone writing the constitution. Ultimately, even if only the 14-state model is discussed in a full session of the CA, it clearly is not the final draft. It not only requires approval in its entirety, every clause must be passed by a two-thirds majority. The State Restructuring Committee may feel it has fulfilled its mandate, but the road to federalism is a long one.

Ethnic states a mistake

Bhairi Kami, UML CA member, Achham

What is the current status of Dalits in Nepal?
The state says 14 per cent of the population are Dalits, but the actual figure is much higher. They are still subjugated. They used to stitch clothes, make tools and entertain people in the past and have no alternative but to continue these professions today, so poverty has become more acute. They lack education, so can’t enter the state mechanism.

Will the proposed state restructuring benefit Dalits or not?
Restructuring is not just a geographic division, but about eliminating traditional thinking, culture and norms in order to build a civilised society. Dalits will not get anything from the ethnic division of territory.

How can Dalits be helped then?
Power should be decentralised so communities can more readily enjoy their rights. This is why we need federalism, not to parcel out territory to ethnic communities. Dalits have never demanded and are against ethnic provinces with special rights for ethnic communities.

But your party proposed a federal model based on ethnicity.
An ethnic federal model is not possible in a country like ours. Ethnic autonomy is about freedoms of language, culture and tradition, not distributing provinces. If we create a Newa state, where will Pradhams, Shresthas and Podes have their state? Which Dalits deserve a state, Kams, Damais or Sarkis? This is either an innocent mistake or a malicious lie. They advocate human rights but withhold political rights. How ridiculous is this?

Muslims want identity

Sadrul Miya Haque, Independent CA member, Saptari-5

What is the population of Muslims?
According to the 2001 census, there are 1.2 million Muslims in Nepal. We are the majority in some districts of the western Tarai.

What do you think of ethnic provinces?
Various ethnic communities have been demanding separate ethnic provinces but not us. We want identity. Muslims, moqques and Kalashas should be recognised. A high-level commission should be formed to address the issues of Muslims. We have been marginalised for too long.

Are you Madhesi or Muslim first?
Definitely Muslim.

A CA committee has already proposed 14 states. Creating ethnic provinces is a ploy to divide us and create chaos. This will weaken rational unity and benefit others. There are more than 14 ethnic communities, but this map unfair to others? Federalism won’t succeed by heaping injustices upon injustice.

What can be done then?
Those who don’t get a province will revolt. Therefore we should be alert and take measures to prevent possible disharmony.
No one should have been surprised by our sagging fortunes at SAG in Dhaka. The whole thing was jinxed from the start. The falling lift, the royal anthem on repeat, the 21-0 thrashing we got from the Big Brothers in hockey, and then, as if the strange rectangular version of our double triangle banner wasn’t bad enough, the Banglas hung the proud Jangi Nishan upside down.

But we only have ourselves to blame for the ugly fisticuffs between Nepali sports officials prior to the kabbadi game. We should have enlisted those karmacharis in the wrestling tournament. I’m sure we could’ve got a few golds there.

The best proof of the old adage that there are no permanent friends or permanent foes in politics is the current honeymoon between Comrade Girja and Chairman Chhabi Lal. Clearly, the Gleneagles Summit was a deal to install GPK as president and PKD as PM so the two could live happily ever after. But that was not to be.

The main hurdle was not between the UCPN-Maoist and NC but opposition from kangresis themselves to the Old Man, and from comrades to the Old Fox.

Come to think of it, the High Level Mechanism is made up of three individuals who think they should be in power but aren’t. PKD was PM and sorely misses it. GPK always thought it was his destiny to be the first president of the world’s newest republic. And INK found out that winning an election gave him control of neither his party nor the government. They need a role, poor fellows, hence this triumvirate that hoped it would have the power to change the govt. But to really solve this country’s problems, it seems we need an Even-Higher-Level Political Mechanism that includes India and the PIs.

SuzyQ is in a deep sulk because of the stink over passports. Not only did she lose a fat chance to finagle the deal to alter the MRP ToR midway through the bidding process, but her PA has just confessed to selling a whole bunch of Nepali passports to Afghans trying to smuggle themselves into Australia. The Machine Readable Passports were supposed to prevent just such misuse of passports, but the way her ministry is going about it Somalis, Afghans, Sudanese, etc. would all be eligible for Nepali passports even before Nepalis themselves. All this is what must be keeping Suzzie Didi so busy that she boycotted the Rastrapati Bhavan for the credential presentation ceremony on Wednesday, preferring to spend the day as a dutiful dotter, scheming to get the Maoists to power just so Daddy can be president.

Chairman Feroziness has shown us all the pitfalls of being too clever by half. He funded Jhallu’s candidacy in the UML convention last year and is still trying to split the UML, he’s tried to dismember the kangresi although they were doing pretty well by themselves. He is now being consumed by his own Machiavellian machinations, and is running out of ideas, as each of his smart aleck plans has failed to get his party back in the saddle. In the epic saga of the rivalry between Chhabi Lal and Lal Dhoj, it is BRB who has prevailed for now.

Wrestling gold at SAG

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