Throughout the last week, the media has been abuzz with the passing of former prime minister and president of the Nepali Congress, Girija Prasad Koirala. The weight of commentary has now shifted from the late Koirala’s achievements and failings to the political vacuum that has been created at this critical juncture in Nepali politics. But it’s not just about who’s going to succeed to the NC presidency: Sher Bahadur Deuba, Ram Chandra Paudel or Sushil Koirala. With time running out for the constitution, mainstream politicians should be concerned about whether extremists will rear their heads to take advantage of the fluid situation. On the left, the Maoists would do well to make for the middle ground. This would be as much for their own good as to counter the right, which will be heartened by the statements made by former king Gyanendra in Janakpur, Wednesday. If things fall apart, everyone should remember that this time, there’s no Girijababu to turn to.

SPECIAL K: Two youths peer out from behind a billboard as Girija Prasad Koirala’s funeral procession passes Dillibajar, Sunday

THE MORNING AFTER

PUBLISHER’S NOTE
The golden middle p2
PLAIN SPEAKING
Real democracy p3

ENJOY THE MOMENT
A SWING AT A TIME

DRINK RESPONSIBLY
PUBLISHER’S NOTE

There’s a point there, but our Maoists have already shown that they will go back to the jungle if they can’t pass between the political forces at play, and the Maoists can’t ‘revolt’ and state takeover threats of violence, which will be ‘top dog’, but ‘only as long as a person they belatedly honour the dying wish of an occasion. Even if it is to the Maoist leadership, which has to keep the party intact. The gravest threat facing the people of Nepal is currently the lack of law and order throughout the country, and the criminalisation of politics (‘Crumbling state’, #494). There is increasing criminalisation of politics (‘Crumbling state’, #494). There is increasing criminalisation of politics (‘Crumbling state’, #494). There is increasing criminalisation of politics (‘Crumbling state’, #494).

A MIXED LEGACY

Girija Prasad Koirala had his flaws, and made many mistakes, but assessing his life in its entirety I think he will go down in history as one of the greats, in the same league as BP, Ganeshman, and Mammon (‘Girijababu gone’, #494). He was always underestimated by the chattering classes, and reviled by the Kathmandu elite, because he was no orator, or thinker, and did not have the immediate appeal of a charismatic politician. To them he was a fumbling usurper from Biratnagar. Yet, he towered above everyone and humbled them all in the end.

Observer

• If there is any lesson to be learnt from Girijababu’s life, it is that standing firmly when it comes to your beliefs and principles is what wins the day but even the mightiest can fall if they lose sight of what got them where they are.

He attained a stature in Nepali politics that other politicians could only have dreamt of. Love him or hate him, he commanded enough respect across the political spectrum to bring disparate political interest groups together. As the country gets ready to adopt a new constitution and works its way through contentious issues such as ethnic federalism, its role and record as a peacemaker might have come in handy.

Kurti

Girija Prasad Koirala fought against several forces in his life. He antagonised the old monied classes, who naturally found fault with him. Third he fought against hard-core lefties who further their own political ends. It is manipulated by their political mentors to violence, who are in turn being infiltrated into politics by criminal mafias.

THE REAL THREAT

The gravest threat facing the people of Nepal is currently the lack of law and order throughout the country, and the criminalisation of politics (‘Crumbling state’, #494). There is increasing infiltration into politics by criminal elements inciting racial and ethnic violence, who are in turn being manipulated by their political mentors to further their own political ends. It is pointless to blame the police since their own superiors are usually political appointees, and it would be suicidal for them to defy the local political leaders. Without law and security, the local economies in most parts of the country have already been decimated. Without first securing the law and order front for meaningful economic development, all talk of ‘democracy’ and ‘empowering the people’ is meaningless.

Some people including ‘intellectuals’ say that federalism is the solution. In the absence of law and order all that federalising will do is create more dysfunctional states run by local mafias and their political mentors.

But that needn’t be so. However reluctant the ideological purists in the Maoist leadership are to admit it, the party is living proof that there is an alternative non-violent pluralistic path.

Girija Koirala has left a political void both within his own party and in the polity at large. A repentant religio-monarchist rightwing within the Nepal Congress is trying to fill the vacuum. The ground is fertile for a right-military shift in the overall politics because of GPK’s departure, the prolonged political deadlock and the backlash against federalism.

A Maoist party that continues to push a hardline and uncompromisingly violent path will strengthen the regressive, rightward tilt in Nepali politics. The Maoist party may find it in its own interest, and in the long term interest of all Nepalis, to shore up the non-violent middle ground.

Times

26 MARCH - 1 APRIL 2010 #495

THE GOLDEN MIDDLE

Girija Prasad Koirala’s last conversation with Pushpa Kamal Dahal focused on the latter’s leadership of the largest party and his responsibility to find a way out of the political stalemate to rescue the peace process. Emerging from that meeting, Dahal interpreted it for the media to mean Koirala had handed over the “responsibility” of being a successor kingmaker. In subsequent meetings, Dahal has been presenting himself as the elder statesman who will steer the peace process.

There is no doubt that the Maoists have a crucial role to play in resolving the present deadlock. As the leading party in the Constituent Assembly and Parliament, the Maoists need to rise to the occasion. Even if it is to honour the dying wish of an occasion. Even if it is to honour the dying wish of an occasion. Even if it is to honour the dying wish of an occasion. Even if it is to honour the dying wish of an occasion. Even if it is to honour the dying wish of an occasion. Even if it is to honour the dying wish of an occasion. Even if it is to honour the dying wish of an occasion.

The leadership itself has realised by now that their party’s future lies in transforming itself into a parliamentary force because neither the Nepali people nor the international community will tolerate vintage 1960s-style Maoism.

This is not to say that the Maoists have to be like the NC or UML. The party won the elections in 2008 because it was the one that represented change, an alternative to the with the need to engage in the democratic process. The Maoist leadership may not yet be able to publicly renounce violence because it has indoctrinated its cadre to believe in the Marxist theory of rupture, which deems that the path from feudalism to capitalism and socialism has to be accompanied by wrenching, bloody change.

Adhering to democratic norms and switching to the politics of compromise can be difficult for a party whose creed has been to bump off anyone who doesn’t agree with it and for whom the end justifies the means.

But that needn’t be so. However reluctant the ideological purists in the Maoist leadership are to admit it, the party is living proof that there is an alternative non-violent pluralistic path. Girija Koirala has left a political void both within his own party and in the polity at large. A repentant religio-monarchist rightwing within the Nepal Congress is trying to fill the vacuum. The ground is fertile for a right-military shift in the overall politics because of GPK’s departure, the prolonged political deadlock and the backlash against federalism.

A Maoist party that continues to push a hardline and uncompromisingly violent path will strengthen the regressive, rightward tilt in Nepali politics. The Maoist party may find it in its own interest, and in the long term interest of all Nepalis, to shore up the non-violent middle ground.
The commentary following Girija Prasad Koirala’s death has focused predominantly on his controversial record as prime minister during the 1990s, his stellar contribution to the peace process, and the vacuum we are now facing. This is understandable, for GPK’s most tangible impact at the national level was post-1990.

But of his 62 years in active politics, GPK spent 47 years (1947-90 and 2002-06) fighting for democracy. Biratnagar’s Jute Mill and Koirala Niwas, the das gajja at the India-Nepal border, the open fields and safe houses in Bihar’s Farbisganj, Patna’s lanes, Delhi’s power corridors, Kathmandu’s prisons, the Tarai’s district headquarters and villages – these were GPK’s haunts. Everyone today has a story to tell about their association with Girijababu because for close to half a century, he remained a man of the people, not a creature of Baluwatar.

Along with thousands of other anonymous warriors, GPK recognised that the primary challenge for his generation was to bring freedom and democracy to Nepal. He deserves appreciation for responding to the call of the time. There was a repressive regime in place; society was stifled; a new generation could see that opportunities were passing them by; and Nepali Congress and other dissenters provided a platform to channelise this discontent.

But the freedom that GPK helped bring in 1990 and 2006 has led to a fundamental transformation of Nepali society, throwing up an entirely new set of challenges. Stuck in relatively petty, manipulative politics after taking over, Girijababu failed to address the macro issues. As he admitted in the late 90s once, his politics was geared towards bringing democracy but the politicians didn’t quite know what to do with it when it came. That is precisely the question for the next lot of leaders who will take up the reins. Will they respond to the call of their time, not just democracy, but democracy to improve people’s lives?

The true tribute to GPK would be to do what he was unable to do — go beyond the rhetoric of democracy, and actually use it to improve people’s lives.

Post GP-leaders would do well to respond to the call of their time – not just democracy, but democracy to improve lives.
The Nepali media is still facing a steep learning curve, however, as the quality of coverage indicated. This may have had something to do with the choice of the national stadium for the beginning of the funeral cortège, but television channels turned the moment of grief into a spectacle. The cameras zoomed in on the joyful faces of leaders assembled at Aryaghat. The passing of an octogenarian is often an occasion to celebrate in the Hindu religion, but here it just looked jarring and disrespectful.

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101% safety
Syakar Company Ltd, the sole distributor of Honda motorcycles in Nepal, has opened its Syakar Safety Riding Training Center in Balkumari Gwarko. Thirty ropanis of land will be used to train upto 2500 riders a year, from age 6 upwards, both license holders and those without. Syakar’s slogan is Learn Safe Ride Safe: the company hopes to contribute to improved road safety in Nepal as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility.

Hygiene art
To spread awareness about the importance of washing hands to prevent diseases, and to encourage young talent, Lifelbury organised the Lifebuoy Germ Fighter Drawing Contest across the school nations. More than 7000 students from over 100 schools participated.

Governor’s woes
Finally, there’s been agreement on the governor. Well might we wonder why this took so long when Yubraj Khatiwada was the most likely candidate right from the start. During the Panchayat regime, everything in government bore the stamp of politics and unfortunately, the hot seat of the governor of the central bank has also been dragged through controversy in the republic. Perhaps the politicians wanted a share of what they imagined the governor would make from every currency bill he signed? One cannot rule out anything in Nepal, given that we are led by a prime minister who went on record to talk of exporting electricity through satellites. The appointment of Khatiwada comes at a crucial time. The economy is in terrible shape, and no one has been able to figure out why there is so much money in the system but little in the banks and the formal sectors. Hoard some people are now borrowing at five per cent from loan sharks and cooperatives are still doing brisk business. Prices are spiralling and our negative balance of payments indicates we are importing far more than what the balance of payments indicates we are exporting. How is the central bank thinking of dealing with this?

We need government to spend the money that has been allocated – not on junkets and personal expenses, but on development work. Export cops are the only way to boost exports and please, we are not talking about the export of vegetable ghee or aggregate or sand, we are talking about real products that can take advantage of the 300 million market just south of the border. We need a clear commitment to the exchange rate with the Indian currency, not whiskey-fueled debates on whether to keep it fixed or floating. Much hard currency, including Indian capital of Rs 5 or even 10 billion? Tax sops could facilitate these mergers, be it on the notional capital gains for taxes or the taxing of separation costs in the hands of the employees.

On the lending side, have more pragmatic rules on lending against real estate or investments like shares. Bank financing is always the multiplier that increases an entrepreneur’s net worth, so not allowing them to leverage loans is like telling an academic researcher you cannot borrow books from a library. But quality rather than quantity should determine such

A to-do list for the new Governor of the Nepal Rastra Bank
The appointment of Khatiwada is an important step in the right direction. We need a clear commitment to the exchange rate with the Indian currency, including Indian rupees, is being hoarded by those who are waiting and are expecting the rate to change. Try announcing Indian Rupee parity at 150 and see how much money will flow in! The central bank’s monitoring capacity has to be strengthened. If some banks have to go, let them go, there’s no point protecting players that are industry killers. More licenses provide leverage to industry players, the proposed banks have a specific segment to tap or are able to improve the banking network. It would be far better to allow existing banks to consolidate and merge. How about a one-year window for mergers, for a base lending. It’s not about who you are lending to, it’s about what you lend against. This paradigm shift is essential in the banking industry. There is no difference between a kurta-clad money lender and a pinstriped banker if lending is just about providing up to a quarter of what the collateral is worth at crazy interest rates.

Finally, research needs focus. We need to have timely central bank statistics that are disseminated to the market, including research agencies that can interpret them for interested parties.

www.articledex.com
Classes in the Sun

Initiative Outdoor brings an ‘out-of-classroom’ experience to a new generation of Nepalis

There’s a classroom with a difference—where shouting and cheering are not only allowed but encouraged, where students are not burdened with the bags of textbooks, where teachers come to work in sports t-shirts, utility pants and bags full of safety equipment, and where ‘taking it indoors’ could easily mean going to explore caves.

The ‘school’ in question is Initiative Outdoor, an adventure company set up to promote and provide experiential, or hands-on, education. Aside from offering the gamut of adventure sports from mountain biking to rock-climbing, the seven-year-old outfit also runs life skills and team-building courses for schools and corporations.

While adventure-seekers and corporations make up the bulk of Initiative Outdoor’s business, founder Chandra Ale’s (pic, right) passion lies in bringing the beauty and majesty of Nepal’s nature closer to a new generation of Nepalis. By doing so, he hopes to not only restore the nation’s love for the great outdoors, which has long given way to modernisation and its trappings, but also to impart lessons and skills which will inspire these young people to be responsible to themselves, the environment, and those around them.

“Youngsters these days have only one aspiration when they come of age,” jokes Ale, “to own a motorbike and to ride it around with a boyfriend or a girlfriend.”

Though he light-heartedly bemoans the dearth of an appreciation for nature in Nepal, Ale is dead serious about his company’s vision. He regularly visits schools all over the country to give talks and presentations, showing students a side of the country they may not be fully aware of, and encouraging them to participate in adventure camps during the holidays.

“Some of the students are very enthusiastic about our programs. The greatest obstacle is often the parents, who just don’t see the value in our activities,” says Ale. He explains that changing mindsets will take a long time but he is optimistic and is prepared to stay the course.

Ale’s persistence is beginning to pay off. Recently, the company took about 30 students from Ullens School out on a day trip to Chobhar for games and cave exploration. Like any typical group of students, there were boys and girls chattering away in cliques, complaints about everything from the heat to bad phone reception, and a general lethargy. Ale was having none of it. First on the agenda, the group was spread out over the activity area and asked to comb it for litter. Despite good-natured moans and grumbles, the youngsters proceeded without too much objection. Ale then explained the ‘Leave No Trace’ principle to the students, telling them that while the outdoors should be explored and enjoyed, one also has a responsibility to help preserve it.

Object lessons like the above characterise the games and activities employed by Initiative Outdoor. Ale and his team may be adventurous to the extreme, but they draw strongly on the spirit of Sangha and Seva, the former implying teamwork and cooperation and the latter, service to others.

Though some of the activities they run through are more challenging than others, they all require a group effort. Most importantly, the instructors never condemn failure. “If these kids don’t fail some of the time, how will they learn? And if they are afraid to fail, they will not even dare to try,” explains Ale.

As the group progressed through games with names like ‘Toxic Waste’, ‘Magic Stick’ and ‘Spider Web’, personal and social barriers were broken down and a new rapport established. The group was then decked out in helmets, pads and headlamps to tackle the narrow confines of the cave complex above the Bagmati River.

As they squirmed through the serpentine interior, the group took frequent breaks to ensure no one was left behind, and once more, the emphasis was on working together to negotiate the tough parts.

At the end of each hour-long run, the students emerged from the darkness, savouring not only the light of day, but also a newfound confidence in themselves and their peers.

http://initiativeoutdoor.com/
Rote-learning is being supplanted by interactive learning boards

children with globally saleable education. Schools like Imperial World, Bridgewater International, Eurokids, Kayva, Premier and Ullens have one thing in common. All of them are either part of an international chain of schools or employ modern international teaching methodologies. Ullens, for example, is the only school that offers the globally recognised International Baccalaureate Diploma program in Nepal. Entry into the program qualifies its students, and another five to ten per cent are given partial scholarships. For those who can’t afford to send their kids to these schools, but want to provide them with international quality education, such schemes may be part of the answer. Now if government only saw it that way.

Parents are willing to pay higher fees and commit themselves to involvement in school activities to enroll their kids in these schools. What’s all the fuss about? Part of the reason may be the disenchantment of students and parents with the conventional, rote-learning education system they’re accustomed to.

But it may have more to do with the desire to provide one’s kids with technology from a young age and also to improve their learning and motivation. This way, the kids learn in a fun way and also retain information better,” says Principal Shirish Shrestha.

Ullens was the first to introduce such boards for educational purposes in Nepal. Principal Medin Lamichhane explains, “We believe children themselves are the centre of education. We just provide them with the tools for self-realisation.” Classrooms with mini-libraries, separate areas for art and science, and personalised wash areas and toilets look nothing like those earlier generations spent their own formative years in. But it’s not just new look classrooms. The whole outlook of the educationalists behind these schools is different, and for pre-schools like Eurokids, it’s also instilling the ideal of ‘learning through fun’ early. Exams, too, don’t hold the same fearsome prominence they still do in conventional schools. In fact some have no provision for ranking students at all. Positive reinforcement is favoured instead of punishment. Such schools also offer a wider range of sports, arts, community service and personality development programs.

Unsurprisingly, these facilities do not come cheap, even by the standards of the 8500 private schools currently tussling with government, unions and a parent’s association to hike fees by up to 25 per cent come April 15. “We have not compromised with quality at all,” says Dphti Acharya, Director of Bridgewater International.

“From the safety of our classrooms to even the minutest details like the nutritional composition of our meals, everything goes through close scrutiny. Delivering this level of quality is expensive but it is not unreasonable.”

For some, high fees are also a means to subsidise the education of those who cannot afford it. Ullens, is providing need-based full scholarships to 25 per cent of its students, and another five to ten per cent are given partial scholarships. For those who can’t afford to send their kids to these schools, but want to provide them with international quality education, such schemes may be part of the answer. Now if government only saw it that way.
“Gone are the days when you needed to make a long trip to Pokhara to experience paragliding in Nepal,” say the people at Kathmandu Paragliding Company. As a Pokhara native, this reporter thinks there is something magical about the lakes and the tantalisingly close mountains almost always in clear view. But these guys have a point. If you’re looking for something exciting but can’t be bothered to deal with overnight hotel bookings or worry about making it back in time for work on Monday, paragliding at Chopakharka (next to Phulchoki) may be the answer. The more adventurous among you can get there by motorbike on the uphill dirt trail that leads to the flying site, located at 2100 metres above sea level. Once in the air, enjoy the view of the hills covered in rhododendrons, and try to spot your house in the Valley. If it’s muggy, get the Hungarian pilots to try some paragliding acrobatics. Finish it off with a picnic at Godavari Botanical Gardens, or splurge in one of the many resorts nearby. By the end of the day, you’ll be reciting the slogan of Nepal Tourism Year 2011: “Once is not enough.” Bring sunglasses, protective footwear and a warm jacket, no matter how sunny it’s down in the valley. Bookings and info at www.ktmparagliding.com (Indu Nepal)

**EVENTS**

**Khariko Ghero (The Caucasian Chalk Circle),** a Bertolt Brecht play about a peasant girl who loves her adopted son more than his natural parents do. Directed by Max Webster and Mia Theil Have at Rimal Theatre, Gurukul, open Friday, 26 March, 5pm, 4466956

**Beyond Radha,** Bengal artist Subhas’s rendition of Radha, the portrait of the ideal woman. Siddhartha Art Gallery at Babar Mahal Revised, 25 March - 2 April

**American Voices: Broadway focused workshops,** US Embassy brings performers from ‘American Voices’ to Kathmandu for theatre workshops and classes which will end with a joint performance with Nepali artists on 3 April. Limited participants, begins Tuesday, 26 March, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, 4491234

**International Art Workshop,** a 17-day long excursion program with sessions on various Nepali and international art and photography techniques. Starts 27 March, Summit Hotel, Rs 1000 per session, www.internationalartworkshops.com

**Infiltration of Darkness,** an exhibition of paintings by Nepali artist Sunil Sigdel, 26 March - 18th April, Kathmandu Contemporary Art Centre, Jhamsikhel

**Exhibition of Tibetan Authentic Traditional Thangka,** traditional art created by renowned artists following the true traditional teachings, 9:30am-7pm daily, Pathibara Art Gallery, Thamel, 4256004.

**Himalayan hash house harriers,** a running club with a drinking problem, meet every Saturday to run a course around the Kathmandu Valley, uponarch.com/hhhh

**Movie Screening (Romulus My Father),** adaptation of the memoir by Australian philosopher Raimond Gaita starring the very good-looking Eric Bana. Tuesday, 30 March, 6:00pm, Lazimpat Gallery Café, Lazimpat, 4428549

**Nepal Shakes Reading Series** is calling for scripts for plays, adaptations, original works or discovered pieces for their Reading Series scheduled for April. Email nepalshakes@gmail.com

**Spring Camp 2010** organised by Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, for children aged 3 to 12 years to discover the joy of dance, music and theatre. 29 March to 9 April. Reservations at 5013554 or info@katjazz.com.np

**Music**

Albatrosa, famous rock band from the late 90s is reuniting (again!) with a gig at House of Music. They have had their fair share of breakups since their incursion into the music scene with hard rock tunes. Expect mellow(er) alternative rock sounds this time. House of Music, Thamel Friday, 26 March, 7.30pm

The Kingz Clan with DL Flow, hip-hop, R&B and dance tunes. Club Cube, Kamaladi, Friday 26 March

ktmROCKS Ides of March V, heavy metal concert in association with Nepal Haemophilia Society featuring Antim Grahan, E.Quals, Jindabaad, Stairs of Cirith and Black Sins Immortal, Mahendra Police Club, Saturday, 27 March 3pm

Chevrolet Concert Series, presented by Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, enjoy ragas on piano and tabla, soul music and Nepali classical. Featuring KJC Ensembles, Nepal Soul Train and Triveni, Saturday, 27 March 27, 2.30pm at Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory’s Moksh auditorium.

Jazz at Patan Museum, April Rush, Jazz Tri-Silver Wind and Fate, 27 March, 6:30pm tickets Rs 500, 9841849786

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Contact: Mrs. Mahima Bhattarai, General Manager, Mobile: 9808447000, 50111054, 50111085

A unit of Bridgewater Education Foundation & Research Center
Chopstix, savoury Asian food cooked in true Chinese fashion sure to charm and impress. Begin your feast with the Dragon Chicken, it's one-of-a-kind. Kumaripati, 5551118.

Lazy Gringo, fail-safe Mexican restaurant. The lemonade with refills is what won us over, but the food is mighty fine. Bring your own booze though. Jawalakhet, Open daily 11am-9pm except Mondays, 210517

Casa de Cass, out-of-Kathmandu dining in cozy surroundings with attentive service, what more could you ask for? A martini, of course. Harinwarchowan, 2010100

Lhakya Chulo, a relative newcomer to Jhamel, but among the best for food – try the tender steaks and Thai-style salads. Jhamalikhet, open for lunch and dinner daily except Wednesdays.

Hankook Sarang, serves up the incredible tastes of Korea, including superlative steamed rice to anchor meals fit for kings. Thamel, near Roadhouse Café.

Comfort Zone, expansive restobar that needs to be full to come into its own. A decent range of cocktails and barbecue meals should keep you glued to the massive screen at one end. (rooftop of Bank of Kathmandu), Thamel.

Momotoru, nestled inconspicuously amongst the street shops of Thamel, this restaurant serves Japanese food that is top value for money. Extravagant taste yet humble in presentation. Thamel, Bhagawati (near Bhagawati Temple), 4417670.

Vesper Café, has a quaint outdoor patio good for leisurely weekend brunches. Serves good salads and steak-wraps but at a hefty price. Jhamel, open daily 11:00AM – 10PM

Attic, newly transformed lounge/bar ideal for Friday night drinking before hitting the dance spots. Popular among local celebrities. Uttar Dhoka, Lazimpat, 984161476

Annapurna Ultra Trail Race. You should have been in Pokhara already, eating pasta and hydrating for the big race. You can still go cheer the brave runners of the 35km and 71km trail race. Saturday, 27 March, starts at Barahi Hotel, Pokhara.

NexGEN Adventure Program, rock climbing and canyoning in Sundarijal: a pleasant respite from the rising temperature with a bit of adventure thrown in. Daily departure, 016914541, www.canyoninginnepal.com

Paragliding picnic, head towards Godavari on your favourite off-road bike, take a tandem paraglide flight with one of the experienced pilots (see review), and finish off with a picnic in Godavari Botanical Garden. Pick up available, booking and info at5536863, ktmparagliding.com

Email us with listings at editors@nepaltimes.com. Listings are free but inclusion is not guaranteed as space is limited.
RAIN ON ME: The Seto Machindranath Chariot reaches Hanumandhoka on Wednesday, the second day of a procession that will conclude today.

FAREWELL: A huge crowd of people descends upon Sundhara to participate in Girija Prasad Koirala’s funeral procession on Sunday.


FORCED EXIT: A patient is released from Teaching Hospital on Tuesday after it was closed down by striking doctors. Emergency services have been closed since Tuesday.

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KIRAN PANDAY

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By NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The average temperature this last week rose three degrees because of a sharp drop in pressure, which causes a fresh weekly front to enter our climatic zone. This has generated a cloud cover across southern parts of the country, and may cause hails in pockets of high pressure in the western half of the Mahabarat and Siwalik ranges. There will be a wiper of high pressure over the eastern part of the Kathmandu Valley as well. Don’t expect the temperature to rise anymore until this front lapses next week.
Babylon babble

I f not for the demise of Girija Prasad Koirala last Saturday, the media would in all likelihood still be babbling about Babylon. The previous morning, police conducted a raid at the aforementioned disco in Sundhara, discovered 356 students hard at play, arrested them, and held them for six hours at the Mahendra Police Club before releasing them. The media had a field day, for they had been invited to the party.

Our minds are on loftier matters perhaps, and the media has been filling pages left, right and centre with coverage of Asia’s ‘tallest politician’. But come the weekend, parents will return to that age-old worry: what is my child up to?

The Babylon raid raised a few other worries: what were the Nepal Police and the media up to?

A raid is merited if police suspect illegal activities. So even if dancing is verily a human right, thus legal, opening a nightclub at 8 in the morning is not in Nepal. Whether you think that is right or not is beside the point; Nepali law states nightclubs shall only operate between 6pm and 12 midnight. To compound this, clearly there was underage drinking going on within Babylon’s premises.

But why was it that the kids – as opposed to the proprietors and staff of Babylon – found themselves herded together like cattle, exposed to the media, and detained for the rest of the day? It may be against school regulations, and far from ideal preparation for the future, to bunk classes for a bunker disco. But as far as I know, it ain’t a crime. Are we really expected to believe that the police arrested the kids to test for drugs, and managed to process 356 samples in six hours? The results, they say, were negative. While waiting (with parents waiting outside), the good coppers ‘interrogated’ and ‘counselled’ their charges, presumably as part of their ‘social responsibility’.

What if, she wonders, a stampede had ensued within the narrow confines of the disco? Why were the media there, harassing them as though they were “fish caught in a net”? Why did the raid take place now, when bunk parties have been going on for years?

This is of course not to imply that petty crime doesn’t deserve attention. But it’s blindingly obvious the state is trying to deflect attention away from its failures by seizing on an easy target. Why this was not so obvious to the hacks who came to feast upon the shame of Nepal’s future is beyond me. Perhaps they’ll find an answer in the dregs of their Royal Stag the next time they find themselves in a dance bar.
A
fter a long cold winter, spring is in full swing. Hundreds of
mountaineers will be hitting the trails up new and old routes,
including the well-trodden paths to the world’s highest peak. Many
of the mountaineers are women aiming for new records.

Like every year, dozens of commercial expeditions will
attempt Chomolungma, from both
the Nepal and China sides. The
north side will have to wait till
the Chinese open the Tibet border
at the beginning of April.

And like every season, there
will be several attempts to break
records, including on the slopes
of Chomolungma. World record
holder Apa Sherpa will be
heading for a 20th summit.

American mountain guide and
climber Melissa Arnot is also back
on Mt Everest to become the first
American woman to summit it
without the use of supplementary
oxygen. Only four women have
done that, with New Zealand
mountain guide Lydia Bradey
becoming the first in 1988. Arnot
has already stood on the summit
twice before.

Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner from
Austria will also be attempting
blackout.

Rana was spooked by the
devastation in Port-au-Prince,
and he is one of few Nepalis
with a tin trunk in his backyard
stocked with digging equipment,
clothes, tents, dry foods and
water-purifying tablets to last
three weeks. And a satellite
phone. He plans to have another
standby pack in the trunk of his
car at all times.

“When there is an 8
magnitude earthquake, all
communications will be out.
How are we going to get word to
the outside world, how will we
communicate and coordinate
rescue and relief?” asks Rana.

Dubai-based Thuraya has
two geo-synchronous satellites
covering the Indian Ocean, but
extended its reach up to
Australia after the 2004 tsunami.
Iridium is based on low-orbit
satellites with worldwide reach,
and has a special department to
help relief and recovery efforts
during natural disasters.

Satellite phones can also be
handy for mountaineers who are

Keep in touch
Satellite phones may be the only way to
communicate in the event of a natural disaster
No peace within

RUBEENA MAHATO

A shok Khalwade, 26, (name changed) believed he was ready for anything when he joined the Maoist army. But things changed when he was badly wounded in battle. With a fractured leg and no medication, he stayed with his friends for several months. Somehow his father found him, and convinced the Maoists to let him take his son away for treatment.

Ashok’s leg healed, but he couldn’t recover from the trauma. When he stopped talking for an extended period of time, his family took him to the Mental Hospital in Patan. He was diagnosed with Undifferentiated Schizophrenia, a condition triggered by stressful life events.

Ashok is not alone. There are thousands like him who are reliving the horror of the war everyday. Up to one third of Nepal are believed to suffer from mental health problems, according to Pashupati Mather, Senior Clinical Psychologist at the Centre for Mental Health and Counseling. But the conflict may have significantly upped the numbers.

Kabir Man Dangol, Clinical Psychologist at TU Teaching Hospital, says that cases of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) have become increasingly common following the war. “War brings into play stress-inducing events, increasing vulnerability to several mental disorders,” he says. A 2008 study by Brandon A Kohrt and others at Emory University in the US showed that the rate of PTSD is twice as high among child soldiers in Nepal compared to those never conscripted.

Peace may have been achieved on paper, but society takes longer to recover from the lingering effects of war. “The culture of violence, increase in criminality and the nationwide rise in depression and suicide may be linked to the after-effects of the war,” says Jagannath Lamichhane, mental health activist.

In the aftermath of the conflict, the state’s neglect of mental health is set to be badly exposed

Nepal brought out a Mental Health Policy in 1997, which aimed to make services available to the general population by 2000. Ten years down the line, little has been achieved. Less than one per cent of the total health budget is allocated for mental health.

Most of this budget goes to the 50-bed Mental Hospital in Patan. The facilities are too meagre to accommodate growing demand. There are only 32 psychiatrists and a handful of clinical psychologists and psychiatrically trained nurses in the country, mostly in cities.

Experts say mental health services need to be integrated into the immense infrastructure and human resources available to Nepal’s primary health care system. Primary health care statistics show that 20-30 per cent of patients, while showing only somatic symptoms, have diagnosable psychiatric disorders. If mental health services were available at the primary level, with training and supervision for existing health workers, access would be improved considerably, and early diagnoses could help reduce cases of severe mental illness.

Whatever little the government invests in mental health is largely concentrated on providing psychotropic treatment and support. Prevention could go a long way. Says Jagannath Lamichhane: “If the government is proactive in providing psychological counseling and support to vulnerable groups such as conflict-affected people, susceptibility to mental illness can be reduced by half.”

NEED IN NUMBERS

- Nepal’s population: 28 million
- Nepals with mental health problems: 7-8 million
- Number of hospital beds for mental patients: 50
- Number of psychiatrists: 32
- Proportion of health budget for mental health: 1%
“That’s hypothetical…”

For the first time since he became an ordinary citizen, ex-king Gyanendra took a regular flight to Janakpur and on Wednesday, worshipped at the Janaki Temple. He spoke to Avenues Television at a hotel in Janakpur. Excerpts from August 25, March.

Avenues: If the Nepali people want to restore the monarchy, are you ready?

Gyanendra: That is a hypothetical question. On the monarchy, or any other question, the people have different concerns and opinions should be respected. Everyone has to follow that.

What do you think of the state of the nation after the end of the monarchy? Whatever the majority of the people want, that is also my wish. I get the feeling most people want security. My prayers are also for security and the people. I hope the Nepalis get what they pray for quickly. And, the garland that our ancestors put together to unite this country, let’s hope that it never breaks.

Some say you are engaging in power politics?

If that was the case, I could have done many things long before this. We have no such ideas, and no such plans. We left (the throne) asking for nothing other than peace and harmony in the country. I think the Nepali people understand that. You have to leave this question to the Nepali brothers.

Isn’t it true that the reason for the loss of love and respect for the monarchy was due to the royal massacre and your February First move?

There are two things here. First, the people can teach leaders a lesson. We have seen such things long before this. Second, the monarchy is not only a state but also a symbol of the country. We can’t have a symbolic monarch.

Do you think that the country is still in transition?

As the leader, I could have done more. As a leader, I shall do more. As a king, I could not do more. I am not a leader who is ready to face the challenge.

What do you think about the Nepalization of Bir Mall and Rastriya Times?

Gyanendra: Nepalization is a process. If the Nepali language is not used, then it is not Nepalization. Of course, I think the language should be used.

Political vacuum

Special editorial in Kantipur, 21 March

The nation has lost a guardian in the form of seasoned political hero Girija Prasad Koirala. He was above his official designation as the president of the NC, an institution in himself. No political leader has his stature. The death of Koirala has created a political vacuum that will be sorely felt as the country is in transition. In the absence of Koirala, there is a risk of political imbalance and anarchy, as he kept all kinds of extremist politics in balance. Consensus is necessary to ward off political extremism.

His political career began in the early Rana period, and he became the prime minister after the 1990 movement. He was tough with the communists then, but this approach changed over time, and he initiated political dialogue with the rebels. He also led the movement against the royal coup while bringing the Maoists into the mainstream. The monarchy was abolished in a bloodless transition. It was under his leadership that Jana Andolan II succeeded, the Maoists were brought into the peace process, the country was declared a federal republic and the CA elections were held. The person who led these processes is no more.

Death of the guardian

Editorial in Nepali Samacharpatra, 21 March

The death of Nepal’s top political leader Girija Prasad Koirala has created a vacuum in the country, and the political situation has become uncertain. The country is grieving as he died when he was bedridden and breathing from an oxygen cylinder. He was a man of action and had the will to achieve what he believed in. He was actively involved in the movement against the Rana regime, the Panchayat system, and led the popular movement against the royal coup. He brought the Maoists into mainstream politics and ended a decade of bloodshed. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh hailed his move and dubbed him the tallest leader in Asia.

He kept reciting the mantra of consensus, cooperation and unity as a way out of the current political impasse. Nepal lost its guardian at a time when mistrust between political parties is at an all-time high.

Political being

Editorial in Rajdhani, 21 March

G riraj Prasad Koirala was not the most successful, popular or upright political leader. He would be dishonest to claim otherwise. But Koirala was one of the most influential leaders and his death will create a vacuum in Nepali politics and the peace process.

Koirala’s 60-year political career was testimony to his belief in democracy. He led the worker’s movement at the age of 32. He weathered adverse political and economic circumstances and was at one point exiled to India for his democratic beliefs. He was the real guardian of freedom fighters, who were ready to raise arms if BP Koirala asked of them. But absolute power corrupts absolutely. Was Girija an exception? Only history will tell. What we can say for sure is that democracy within political parties was never a priority for him, which held up the advance of democracy throughout the country.

He abandoned BP’s national reconciliation policy but he did not come up with a better option. A nation is tested in a crisis. What have his successors learnt from him? We will see in their response to this crisis.

Life is a balance sheet of successes and failures. Koirala’s is no exception. Yet, he was an audacious freedom fighter and the best farewell would be to fix the problems that we face.

F ollowing the death of NC President Girija Prasad Koirala, people have been talking about his contribution and life. He earned much honour for his role in the peace process in the last quarter of his life, but he was one of the most controversial political leaders. He took the initiative for a high level political mechanism to end the political deadlock, but he died before the completion of the peace process. His death has created a vacuum in politics and the peace process and the writing of the constitution is uncertain.

His departure also marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. He was at the centre of politics for two decades. His wish to take the peace process to a logical end with the writing of a new constitution is unfulfilled. Completing the tasks he started will be a true coincidence to him. With Koirala’s death, responsibility has come to the shoulders of the Maoists. Although NC is the second largest party in the CA, Koirala was the pivot of politics. Even the Maoists accepted him as the leader because of his experience and maturity. Before his death, Koirala asked Prachanda to take on the responsibility of running the country. It is a historical responsibility that has come to the Maoist leadership.
T he political parties promised those who voted for them in the CA election a new constitution in two years. While they have not admitted it publicly, they have implied that a delay is now inevitable.

The CA was not completely passive. The draft committees have already submitted draft and concept papers to the Constitutional Committee. But the drafts are full of contentious issues, as the parties are pushing their own agendas. Ethnic issues have held back the discussions on state restructuring, and there are disagreements regarding the forms of governance, parliamentary system, electoral system, and judicial system.

While the political parties have not moved ahead, the Maoists, having emerged as the largest party, formed a coalition government. But their unilateral decisions led to the fall of their government after nine months. They launched protest programs in the name of civilian supremacy and national independence to get back into power, and warned of a people’s revolt. But since the protests failed to bring about an outcome, they pushed their agenda through the CA. This is why the Constitutional Committee received draft papers from drafting committees that had over 100 unresolved issues in them.

The political parties have proved that they preferred power to the constitution. They will now be forced to reflect on the consequences of not completing the constitution on time. The Maoists will be largely responsible for any delay in writing the constitution, but this is not to say the other political parties are less culpable.

Continuity of the existing CA will be crucial to write the new constitution

The political parties should work on defining the democratic republic and the fundamental norms of democracy. If the Maoists agree on these issues, perhaps their progressive social and economic agenda will also be acceptable to the other political parties.

The slow progress in constitution writing has led to political as well as legal complications. The interim constitution clearly stipulates that the tenure of the CA should be for two years, with provision for an extension of six months if a state of emergency is declared, according to article 144. Although this provision is applicable only to parliament, and not to the CA, amendment is technically possible. If the constitution-writing process is not completed by May 28 and the CA expires, there will be a vacuum. The state will have to find a way to fill it. A country needs a constitution. Therefore it would be wise to give continuity to the CA and complete the task of constitution writing. But there should be conditions. Given how the political parties have not kept their word to give the nation a new constitution, there is no guarantee they will do so if the CA’s term is extended. Therefore, an integrated draft constitution should come out before May 28.

For this, political parties have to come up with suggestions and send them to the Constitutional Committee. Based on the suggestions and directives from political parties, the committee can then prepare a preliminary integrated constitution. The draft will then be taken to the public for consultations, and this will be incorporated into the new constitution. If we don’t get this far by the scheduled time, there will be a crisis of confidence among the political parties and uncertainty will characterise the rest of the constitution-writing process.

The questions we have raised are not just with ethnicity

Lokendra Bista Magar, Chairperson, State Restructuring and Sharing of State Power Committee (CPI-Maoist, Rukum)

Even though it was said provinces would be formed on the basis of identity and self-sufficiency that did not happen.

These days many seem to be suffering from blindness. Identity includes ethnic, linguistic, cultural, geographic, territorial and historical bases. Self-sufficiency includes economic interrelations and resources, physical infrastructure, access to and availability of natural resources and administrative accessibility. These principles were passed unanimously by the committee. You cannot support the passage of these principles then protest when the committee produces a draft paper based on this.

What is the basis for Jadan and Sherpa provinces?

They are based on identity, self-sufficiency and geographic qualities. Jadan may not be self-sufficient right now, but it will become the most affluent in the future.

Don’t you think the committee’s proposals will divide the nation?

Those who seem ethnic provinces will lead to violence and conflict are themselves engaged in spreading violence and conflict. Nations like India have created provinces on the basis of ethnic identity. What are Punjabi, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and West Bengal? There is no harm in granting rights to ethnicities.

But conflicts remain unresolved in Indian states designated on the basis of ethnicity.

Problems may arise. There is no need for us to do what India does as we have different qualities that demand different thinking. We cannot ignore our multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural situation. We have to grant identity, participation and access to disadvantaged communities without repressing other ethnic groups.

Are we creating a constitution for ethnic management or for the nation?

This is not merely a question of ethnic management but also that of ethnicity. Ethnicity and nationality are the same. Nationally can be internal and external. Internal nationality is freedom among ethnic groups. Until this is strong, external nationality will not be sound. So, we are talking about nationality, not just about ethnicity.

Can the idea of giving political prerogatives for two terms be democratic?

Not just two terms, political prerogatives must be enshrined in the constitution for about 15 years. Only then can we talk about general democratic participation.

Fundamental rights: from 21 to 31

Binda Pandey, Chairperson, Committee on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles (UML, Nuwakot)

What were the main debates during the preparation of the preliminary draft and the concept paper of the new constitution?

We couldn’t come to an agreement on naturalised citizenship through marital relations. Currently a foreign man who marries a Nepali woman cannot obtain citizenship. But if a foreign woman gives up her original citizenship when she marries a Nepali man she is eligible for Nepali citizenship. When the committee proposed that the discrimination there was a difference of opinion. Similarly, there was disagreement on whether to grant citizenship to a child whose father is unknown or who does not acknowledge paternity.

There were also differences on whether to provide compensation in the course of land reform and whether it was necessary to accept pluralism when setting up a political party. The Jharga groups were in favour of self-determination being included as a fundamental right.

How many fundamental rights will there be in the new constitution?

The 1991 constitution had 21 fundamental rights while 31 are being proposed now. Some feel even this is not enough, and we have received external proposals to include 150 subjects within the ambit of fundamental rights.

Were the concept papers passed by agreement?

Yes, we did not even have to vote on the key issues.

But that draft paper was set fire to by a group under the leadership of your party colleague Pasang Sherpa right at the gates of the CA? Whoever was involved was not a member of the committee. They were protesting the fact that even with a majority, the draft papers did not include the right to self-determination, self-rule and autonomy. They should have been more responsible. Maoist CA member Ram Bahadur Thapa and NC CA member Lila Subba were there too.
Mass yogasm

It looks like Kingji badly upstaged Presidentji in Janakpur this week. The ex-head of state and the present head of state were head-to-head at the Janaki Mandir on Ram Nawami. The ex-raja came in a regular Buddha Air flight, while the prez flew in on the ex-raja’s chopper. The president, being ceremonial, couldn’t say much to the media, so the ex-king stole the media limelight. Ex-king: 1, Prez: 0.

There is still hope. According to The Economist’s survey of the world’s most unlivable capitals, Kathmandu is (surprise, surprise) not the worst. It is eighth from the bottom and what a relief to know that Douala, Port Moresby, Dhaka, Algiers, and Harare are even bigger hellholes. The survey used criteria like stability, healthcare, culture, environment and infrastructure. Whew, good thing they didn’t use loadshedding as a criteria or we’d have sunk right to the bottom.

As a wag said: here in Nepal we got rid of Shah Dev, then we got rid of Bam Dev, but we are getting ready to welcome Ram Dev. Going by the tayari and bandobast at Tundikhel, for sure next week’s Mass yogasm is going to be a cross between Glastonbury and Woodstock. The Ass would like to propose that we make it mandatory for some of our fat netas to attend. Kickbacks are heavily calorie-laden and they should take up yoga to burn all those corruption carbs they’ve accumulated and earn some brownie points in heaven while they’re at it. We’d like to see you all at Tundikhel sucking in your tummies.

Chairman Fierceness is looking rather trim these days and even the Prez (being a doc) complimented the comrade on having reduced his midriff. One year in the opposition seems to have been good for the Body Mass Index of Comrade Tremendousness, but the real reason could be he is so worried about the succession question that he has lost his appetite. The man is not even trying to hide the fact. He went to visit Maknayi at his residence (not Bahuwat) last week and when the prime minister offered to step down in favour of BRB, PKD replied: “No way, Jose.” Or words to that effect. MKN then said how about Kaji Namyu Kauree, and Awesome replied: “Nope, it has to be me.” Something along these lines also seems to have transpired during the long, long wait at Pashupati between Sitaram ‘GMR’ Yechury and Fearsome. So the answer to the political stalemate, and the reason the peace process and constitution are being held up, is not just a power-sharing agreement between the Maoists and the other parties, but more specifically: finding a mechanism to make PKD PM again. His Fierceness is now going around town with a single-point agenda: make me PM and I’ll sort out army integration and get the constitution written by May 28.

The bhag-banda between the UML and NC got so bad that the UML agreed to give up the MRP to the Kangres only if the Kangres gave up Rastra Bank to the UML candidate. Essentially: the Kangres got the passports and the eh-maleys got the bank notes. Still, it was done in a relatively civilised manner, no blood split on the floor of the cabinet room. But they came close. When Healthy Minister Chowdhi used Maithili expletives that included pithy descriptions of the genitalia of domesticated livestock against Homely Minister Rawal. The two would have castrated each other if a Comprehensive Ceasefire hadn’t been declared.

What’s with the Baddies suddenly singing paeans of praise for Girijababu, and falling over themselves to call him a ‘guardian’ and all that? It hasn’t even been a year since the Maohtukis declared that the Kangres was their ‘Number One Enemy’ and a “Satru Shakti”. PKD went as far as confessing this week that GPK had warned him not to sack the army chief last year and “I should have listened to him.” So, is the Chairman saying he blundered, and the entire agitation for ‘civilian supremacy’ was also a mistake?