

NEPALI Times

#495

26 March - 1 April 2010

16 pages

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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

THE MORNING AFTER

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

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

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. 🇳🇵

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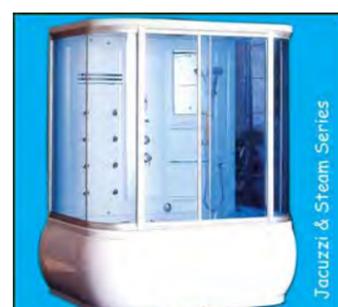
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THE GOLDEN MIDDLE

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 a person they belatedly recognised as a 'guardian', the Maoists need to see this process through.

But that is just not going to happen as long as they insist on being not just 'top dog', but 'only dog'. Their public statements, the behaviour of their non-cantonment guerrillas, the continued threats of violence, 'revolt' and state takeover will always be obstacles to a Maoist-led

government. The constitution is going to be a compromise between the political forces at play, and the Maoists can't threaten they will go back to the jungle if they can't pass the non-democratic constitution that they want.

Some argue that a non-violent Maoist that doesn't believe in grabbing totalitarian power is an oxymoron. There's a point there, but our Maoists have already shown they are different from Mao's Maoists by winning an

election. 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 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

credo 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 resurgent 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 disarray 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.



KIRAN PANDAY

status quo. But an overwhelming number of people also voted for the Maoists (and weren't necessarily their supporters) because they wanted the party to abjure violence once and for all, and join peaceful politics.

We have to also look at this from the point of view of the Maoist leadership, which has to keep the party intact. There are contradictory forces creating internal tension: the need to reconcile the party's ideology of violent revolution

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

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 Manmohan ('Girijababu gone', #494). He was always underrated 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, his role and record as a peacemaker might have come in handy.

Hawaladar

- Koirala fought against several forces in his life. He antagonised the old monied classes, who naturally found fault with him. Then he fought against the Panchayatis who, likewise, have nothing good to say about him. Third he fought against hard-core lefties who wanted to destroy the nation. Of course, he deserves blame for the country's present ills because he was prime minister for so long, but it's only fair to note that he was up against difficult opposition in the palace and the Maoist party.

OrdinaryNepali

- I am sorry to say that Girija chose to be Sujata's father rather than the country's father. He should have groomed her to be a party organiser and asked her to work from the grassroots. Where was she during the andolans?

Chiranjivi

THE REAL THREAT

The gravest threat facing the people currently is 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 environment for meaningful economic development, all talk of 'democracy' and 'empowering the people' is meaningless.

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

S Dahal

On the blogs

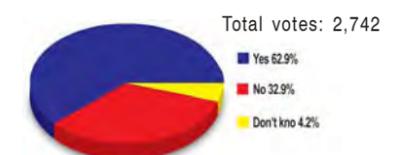
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East West: A look at Nepali homes defying the national obsession with Corinthian columns carved out of cement
Nepali Kukur: Off-road rambles and stomach rumbles by the Narayani

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 495

Q. Did the parties make a mistake by signing the 12-point Delhi agreement with the Maoists?



Weekly Internet Poll # 496. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. What does Girija's death mean for Nepal?



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

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 and Varanasi'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



KIRAN PANDAY

Real democracy

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, less about fighting for democracy than consolidating it and using it to address popular aspirations?

While GPK had hoped that the country would not have had to fight for democracy yet again, circumstances may dictate otherwise. The peace process is in limbo and the far right and far left have gained ground in recent months. The quest for a democratic constitution laying the grounds for a stable polity remains elusive. But even if politics moves towards that direction temporarily, the structural issues that newer leaders have to confront are totally different.

Travel to any mid-hill or Tarai district to see the massive changes underway. A generational transformation has taken place

and it is young people below 30 who run small enterprises, the local papers and FM stations, and human rights organisations. They are also the foot-soldiers of all the political parties and movements. Most students in schools across the country are first-generation learners whose parents struggle to make ends meet.

Radio and television have made huge strides, and people know now what urban centres and the consumer economy have

to offer. There is unprecedented connectivity, with both a telecom revolution and infrastructure building proceeding simultaneously. And of course, the money transfer economy has struck deep roots. Talk to any worker and at least half their acquaintances will be in the Gulf or Malaysia. The passport office and manpower agencies are more common points of reference than the local agricultural office or any factory. In a decade, even more ambitious

Post GP-leaders would do well to respond to the call of their time – not just democracy, but democracy to improve lives

and educated young people will enter their working years.

All these changes in the political economy have been made possible because of the freedom that the political parties helped bring. But increasingly detached from their roots, the new NC troika, as well as the leaders of other parties, do not seem to have given much thought to what society is demanding today.

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.

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Media mourning



FOURTH ESTATE
C K Lal

The good atheist that he was, Girija Prasad Koirala was sceptical of religious explanations about the cycle of life and death. This life was real for him, anything before and after mere speculation. He took life as it came and tried to make the best use of every opportunity to pursue the goal he believed in: democracy is a sine qua non for a dignified life and an honourable death.

upon the trials and tribulations of GP's remarkable life.

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 jovial 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.

memorable information about GP's life, despite the press doing his death to, well, death.

The Indian media refrained from sensationalising the passing of the architect of the peace process but gave the subsequent mourning prominence.

The *Hindustan Times*, the *Times of India* and the *Deccan Herald* editorialised about the possible consequences of GP's departure from Nepali politics. Indrani Bagchi, an advocate of a Hindu monarchy for Nepal, wrote a long piece in the *Times of India* urging her government to back the UML-led government to the hilt. Even well-known

The media has done Girija Prasad Koirala's death to death



Dignity was repeatedly denied to GP while he was alive. Ridiculed and reviled by disgruntled supporters and envious opponents alike, he learnt to build a platform from the bricks thrown at him. When he was finally put on a pedestal two years ago, having successfully conducted the Constituent Assembly elections, heroes and villains alike appeared Lilliputian in the shadow of his towering presence. That could have been why the Nepali media gave unprecedented coverage to his death.

Compared to the hysteria at the passing of Ganesh Man Singh or the desperation in the wake of the Narayanhiti Massacre, the mourners at GP's funeral were remarkably restrained. Some UML politicians were observed cracking jokes at Aryaghat, but the Nepali media as a whole chose to focus

The NC troika accompanying GP's hearse marred the solemnity of the occasion by waving at the crowds, but radio commentators made it even worse by focusing upon the unhealthy competition for the leadership likely to ensue in the party. Deliberations upon the legacy of the departed leader would have been more appropriate.

The print media displayed more maturity. The tabloid *Naya Patrika* came up with a better obituary package than the broadsheet dailies on the day of the cremation. When this was pointed out, a journalist at a rival daily commented that it might have been so because *Naya Patrika* had been working on the story for quite some time. This is hardly a surprise – what was surprising perhaps was how difficult it was to find a balance of accurate, lively, and

GP-baiter Yubaraj Ghimire wrote a critique in the *Indian Express* confessing reluctant admiration for the man he has loved to hate for years.

Obituaries on the Internet, or rather the comments that followed, were expectedly the most virulent. For all his commitment to peace and democracy, GP was clearly not a popular person in the hate-filled world of cyber-warriors. But then comments in cyberspace are ephemeral, with little or no impact upon grassroots politics in Nepal.

GP would have smiled had he been told of the things being said about him in cyberspace, and might have commented wryly, "They write without grasping the meaning and significance of any event." Perhaps that is true for most of what we do in the Nepali media even today. 📺

THIS WEEK

Business as usual

It's been barely a week since the death of Girija Prasad Koirala, and already the pious talk of reconciliation has given way to old habits, as Ram Chandra Paudel, Sushil Koirala and Sher Bahadur Deuba vie for the presidency of Nepali Congress. Deuba has been rather forward about his claim, saying he was "second-in-line" to the late GP and at any rate



already has experience as a party chairman. The tensions appear to have spoiled relations between Sushil Koirala and Deuba, as they have refused to attend informal meetings at

each other's residence. Koirala, for his part, has been more coy, saying that leaders of democratic parties don't have successors. A similar drama is unfolding at the High Level Political Mechanism, where both the NC and UCPN (Maoist) have staked leadership. On Wednesday, the hawkish Maoist leader Mohan Baidya said his party should lead the HLPM as it is the biggest.

Out of the shadows

Ex-king Gyanendra raised a political storm on Wednesday when, during an exclusive interview with Avenues TV, he said the monarchy wasn't dead, and could be revived if the people so wished. Politicians and analysts immediately hit back, saying the remarks contravened the people's aspirations and indicated an intention to return to power. Maoist vice-chairman Baburam Bhattarai said the government should prosecute Gyanendra for making statements unbecoming of a citizen in a republic. Anti-royalists have been on edge of late as the ex-king has made a number of public appearances, having attended a religious ceremony advocating the rechristening of Nepal as a Hindu state, and he has made high-profile visits to temples. His most recent remarks were made during a trip to Janakpur's Janaki Temple, where he was greeted with cheers of "our country, our king, are dearer than our lives."

Emergency!

Things have gone from bad to worse at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital. Last week, teachers and students closed all services except the emergency ward, demanding among other things the resignation of the Dean of the Institute of Medicine Arun Sayami, who allegedly rigged the entrance examination for post-graduate studies in return for Rs 12 million in bribes. This week, the protestors upped the ante. They shut down emergency services as well, leaving scores of patients, some with very serious conditions, in the lurch. Of the hospital's 400 beds, only half are currently occupied, and close to 3000 patients are being turned away daily. Besides the resignation of Sayami and his subordinates, the striking doctors and students are demanding a fair probe into the allegations.

New governor

The Council of Ministers appointed vice-chairman of the Nepal Planning Commission Yubaraj Khatiwada as the governor of the Nepal Rastra Bank on Friday. Khatiwada, a UML nominee, was selected over Bir Bikram Rayamajhi and Rameswor Khanal. The post has been vacant for two months because of disagreements between the NC and UML, in which time the financial sector has undergone significant strain. Khatiwada's first priority is to reform monetary policy and reduce the Balance of Payment deficit by encouraging exports. He also aims to encourage investment in productive sectors and infrastructure development. Khatiwada received his PhD in monetary economics at Delhi University.





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Lights on

The Norwegian Ambassador, Thor Gislesen, has handed over the 635kW Jhankre Community Hydropower Plant along with a transmission and distribution system and other assets on behalf of Himal Power Limited to the Khimti Rural Electric Cooperative in Dolakha. The cooperative currently provides electricity to 4600 households and a further 3800 households will be connected in ongoing projects which will have a total capacity of just over 1 MW.

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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.

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Forefront

Universal Tours & Travels, representing American Airlines Cargo in Nepal, has been awarded the 'American Airlines Cargo SilverWing 2009' and the 'Outstanding Yield Growth 2009' prize. The awards were presented by Dave Brooks, President of American Airlines Cargo to Parasar Prasai, Managing Director of Universal Tours & Travels.

Energy saving LCD

LG introduced yet another product in the Home Entertainment segment – the LG LH and LF series LCD television. LCD TVs from LG are designed for Smart Energy Savings and offer unique features to reduce power consumption by up to 70 per cent.



Governor's woes



SUNIL PRADHAN



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

Finally, there's been agreement on the governor. Well might we wonder why this took so long when Yubaraj 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. How come 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 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 sops 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

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. No more licenses please, unless 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.

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utility pants and bags full of safety equipment, and where 'taking it indoors' could easily mean going to explore a cave.

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

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



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/>

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PRAKRITI PATHAK and RUBEENA MAHATO

Whenever one thinks of school, the picture of a swing swaying over a muddy playground and a teacher writing busily on the blackboard, cane at the ready, comes to mind. But the whole nature of private education is changing in Nepal. The latest crop of internationally accredited schools employ cutting-edge teaching methodologies and technology enhanced classrooms. For the upwardly mobile parents of today, this is everything they never had, and they don't want their children to miss out.

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

screen. "The idea is to familiarise 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

Rote-learning is being supplanted by interactive learning boards

children with globally saleable education. Schools like Imperial World, Bridgewater International, Eurokids, Kavva, 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 students for higher education anywhere in the world.

With more Nepalis are vying for opportunities around the world, the need for globally competitive education is being felt more than ever. Schools have capitalised on this demand. Shreeram Pande, whose two children study in Ullens, says, "Giving kids the right education is the most important thing. Everything else will fall into place if the education is right."

Equipped with modern amenities and teaching aids, these schools claim they are changing the way kids learn. Imperial World, which has a franchised partnership with FasTracKids, a US-based early education program, offers a technology based teaching methodology. In place of the usual blackboards, classrooms use Interactive Learning Stations that deliver multimedia content and allow children to interact with objects and images they see on a

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 Dipti 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. 



KIRAN PANDAY

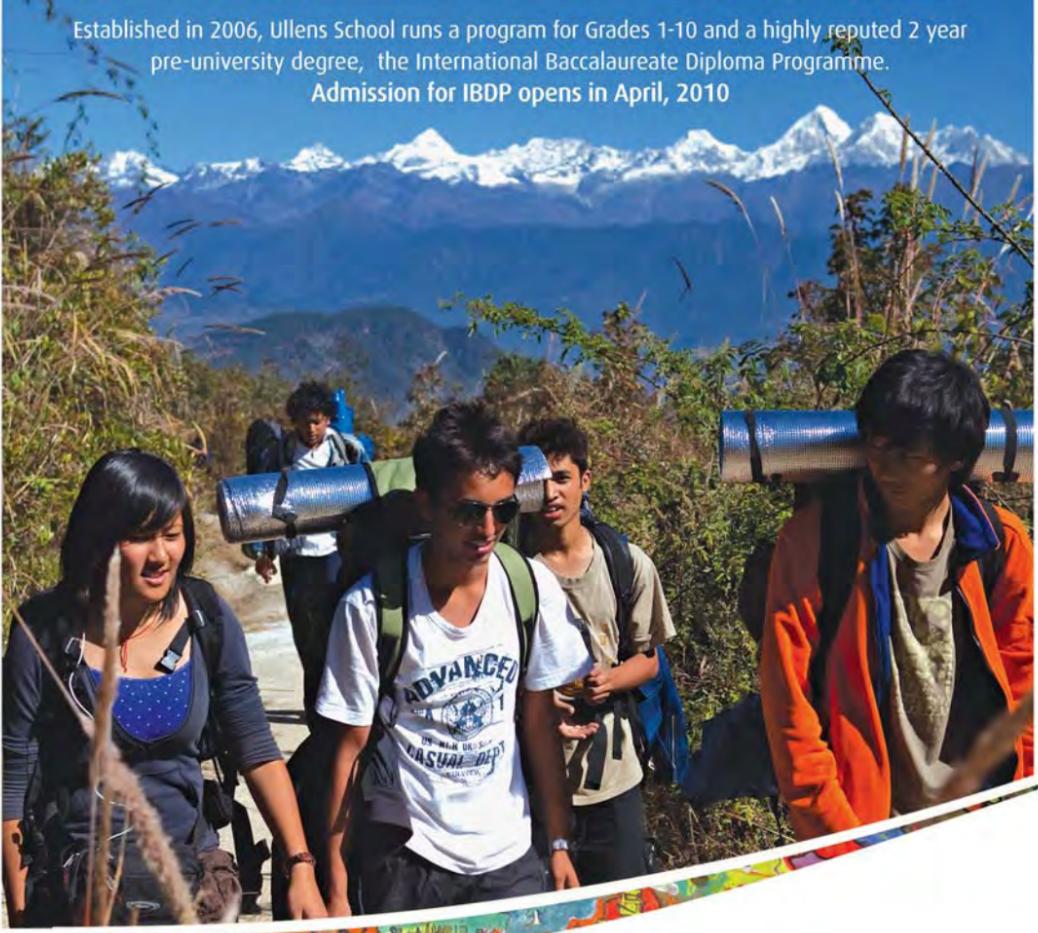
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Up in the air, KTM-style

"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 Chapakharka (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, opens Friday, 26 March, 5pm, 4466956



Beyond Radha, Bengali artist Suhas's rendition of Radha, the portrait of the ideal woman, Siddhartha Art Gallery at Babar Mahal Revisited, 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, 30 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, aponarch.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



Albatross, 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 DJ 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 Graham, 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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DINING

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. Jawalakhel, Open daily 11am- 9pm except Mondays, 2110517

Casa de Cass, out-of-Kathmandu dining in cosy surrounds with attentive service, what more could you ask for? A martini, of course. Hariharbhawan, 5010100

Lhakpa Chulo, a relative newcomer to Jhameel, but among the best for food – try the tender steaks and Thai-style salads. Jhamsikhel, 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 barbecued meats should keep you glued to the massive screen at one end. (rooftop of Bank of Kathmandu), Thamel.

Momotarou, 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, Bhagawatiasthan (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. Jhameel, 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

GETAWAYS



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 at 5536863, ktmparagliding.com

Email us with listings at editors@nepalitimes.com. Listings are free but inclusion is not guaranteed as space is limited.

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KIRAN PANDAY

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



KIRAN PANDAY

LIGHT AT THE END: Blind students Amala Maharjan and Raj Kumar Sadasankar sit for the School Leaving Certificate at Bal Binod Vaidya Ashram, Lalitpur on Thursday.



KIRAN PANDAY

RAIN ON ME: The Seto Machindranath Chariot reaches Hanumandhoka on Wednesday, the second day of a procession that will conclude today.



KIRAN PANDAY

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.

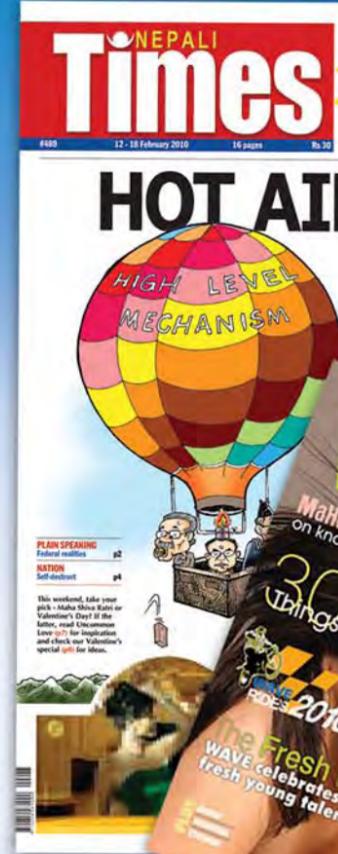
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WEEKEND WEATHER
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The average temperature this last week rose three degrees because of a sharp drop in pressure, which caused a fresh westerly front to enter our climactic zone. The front has generated cloud cover across southern parts of the country, and may cause hailstorms in pockets of high pressure in the western half of the Mahabarat and Siwalik ranges. There will be a layer of haze and passing afternoon clouds over the Kathmandu Valley as well. Don't expect the temperature to rise anymore until this front lapses next week.



<p>FRI</p>  <p>30-13</p>	<p>SAT</p>  <p>28-12</p>	<p>SUN</p>  <p>29-12</p>
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Babylon babble



KALAM
Rabi Thapa

If 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 was the real meaning of this raid, coming as it does on the heels of other crackdowns in dance bars across the capital? Is it part of the special security plan, or simply a particularly egregious example of moral policing from a



NARENDRA SHRESTHA

Never mind the kids, what were the cops and the media up to?

police force that has demonstrated amply that it is totally amoral?

If the former, well, it beggars belief. I don't even want to start on a to-do list for New Nepal's finest, and everyone knows the police are in on what goes on in Kathmandu's entertainment venues. Why bust Babylon now?

If there were any doubts about the self-aggrandising and moral nature of the raid, the invite to the media dispelled them.

Instead of simply closing down the disco, shooing away the kids, and informing schools and parents about the mischief their charges were getting up to, Nepal Police went for saturation coverage. Hordes of reporters were on hand to record the raid, and hounded the guilty parties (excuse me) inside and outside Babylon. Most, understandably, tried to shield themselves from the cameras, but as Narendra Shrestha from *The Kathmandu*

Post noted, the reporters were relentless. "Ey gadha, show your face!" shouted one, and smirks were in evidence on the faces of both policemen and so-called journalists.

What will the kids actually learn from this traumatic experience? Judging by most of the comments on websites, there is a great deal of indignation, some of it misdirected ("bunk party pani jana napaune k") but most spot-on – doesn't the Nepal Police have anything better to do?

The absurdity of the raid and the manner in which it was conducted was perhaps best put by a blogger writing about the experience. She prefaces her comment with "I know it was wrong to bunk school but..." 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. 🇳🇵

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Lots of women mountaineers are hoping to break climbing records this season

Himalayan

BILLI BIERLING

After 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



When Anudan Jung Rana started selling satellite phones in Nepal in 2003, the war was going on and demand was high. His Thuraya sets were flying off the shelves.

The mobile phone network wasn't as widespread as it is now, so there was heavy demand. In the jungles the Maoists were using ACeS satellite phones with SIM cards smuggled in from Thailand and the Philippines.

In the past four years, Rana has seen a shift in his customer base. Relief agencies all have satellite phones because of security, and mountaineering expeditions have started buying or renting phones here.

But in the last few months since the Haiti and Chile earthquakes, international aid agencies and even businesses in Kathmandu have started buying satellite phones to prepare for a possible post-earthquake communication

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



DIAL-A-SATELLITE: Anudan Rana of Constellation shows customers how a Thuraya satellite phone can be useful in an emergency.

KIRAN PANDAY

spring



BILLI BIERLING

TOP VIEW: Makalu (8463m) seen from the summit of Chomolungma (8850m) last spring. In the distance is Kangchenjunga (8586m).

Everest without artificial oxygen. The 39-year old will be climbing the treacherous North Face with her husband Ralf Dujmovits. If successful, Kaltenbrunner will be the first woman to reach the top of the world via the difficult Hornbein Couloir, which was first climbed by an American expedition in 1963, and she will only need to summit Pakistan's K2 to have climbed all fourteen 8000m mountains in the world.

There are currently three other women who have almost achieved this goal. Kaltenbrunner, however, has repeatedly emphasised that she does not see this feat as a race. What is more important to the former nurse is the satisfaction of summiting via interesting routes, without the help of Sherpas or supplementary oxygen.

South Korean climber Oh Eun-Sun is currently on her last 8000er, Annapurna I. This is the tenth highest peak and is considered one of the most treacherous due to the danger of avalanches. Oh was on Annapurna I last autumn but failed to reach the 8091m summit due to bad weather. If she reaches the top this time,

she will be the first woman to have stood on top of all fourteen 8000m peaks in the world.

Edurne Pasaban is also attempting to climb Annapurna I, her penultimate 8000m peak. If successful, the Spanish climber only needs Shishapangma in Tibet to tick off her list of 8000ers.

Annapurna I could see a few other 'firsts' this season, with South Korean's Park Young-Seok trying to establish a new route on the massive South Face of the mountain. Park is an old hand at Himalaya climbing and has already summited all 8000m peaks. Meanwhile, Joao Garcia is aiming to become the first Portuguese and 19th person overall to stand atop all 8000m peaks. The first person to do so was Italian Reinhold Messner in 1986.

The world's fifth highest peak Makalu will see expeditions climbing the North-West Ridge, the route taken by Frenchmen Lionel Terray and Jean Couzy when they became the first to climb the 8463m peak in 1955.

But two American climbers, Marty Schmid and Chris Warner, are hoping to climb a new SW Ridge and SE Ridge route to the summit this year.

The 2010 spring mountaineering season in the Nepal Himalaya has just started, so get ready for the records to tumble.

lost, stranded or have had accidents. A trekker on his way to Mansarovar who broke his leg in Humla two years ago called in a rescue helicopter with his Thuraya set, and was able to give his exact location because of a GPS on his phone.

It's not just for natural

disasters and accidents that satellite phones come in handy. Political crises like Gyanendra's 2005 coup also saw strong demand for satellite phones once all landlines and mobile phone lines, internet services and news channels on radio and TV were cut. Besides

the UN and the embassies, it was only Rana's Constellation company office in Jhamsikhel that had links to the outside world during this unprecedented communication blackout.

"It was like a rehearsal for a catastrophic earthquake," says Rana, adding, "we offered short calls for family emergencies for free."

Satellite phone companies like Thuraya now offer sim cards that can function as a normal GSM roaming when plugged into a cell phone, which helps the user keep it operational and topped up. Thuraya and Iridium also sell data communication antennae for customers who want to be online when ISPs break down.

Satellite phones appear to sell best in countries prone to natural disaster and political instability. Which must be why they are in such high demand in Nepal.

Kunda Dixit

PHONE BILLS

Thuraya pre-pay has a flat rate of \$1.49 per call except for hard-to-reach destinations. The post-pay calling rate is \$1.34. Thuraya to Thuraya calls are \$0.90 a minute. Thuraya also offers special sims for 80 developing countries, including Nepal, where the calling rate is \$0.75. www.thuraya.com

Iridium's standard offer is a \$70.99 monthly fee with 20 minutes free and \$1.29 for every additional minute. The annual fee is \$499. www.iridium.com



No peace within

RUBEENA MAHATO

Ashok Khatiwada, 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 Nepalis are believed to suffer from mental health problems, according to Pashupati Mahat, Senior Clinical Psychologist at the Centre for Mental Health and Counseling. But the conflict may have significantly upped the number.

Kabin 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 in Nepal.

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 psychiatric treatment and support. Prevention could go a long way. Says Jagannath Lamichhane: "If the government is proactive in providing psychological counselling 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
- Nepalis 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 *Nagarik*, 25 March

नागरिक

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’s wishes and opinions should be respected. Everyone has to follow that.



KIRAN PANDAY

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. Maybe the people were giving us a similar message? Maybe the people thought kings should not be active. I learnt that lesson. But the people shouldn’t forget that the king should also play the role of a guardian and take timely steps that the country needs. And there will come times when the people’s security and defence need to be addressed. In those days, that was the situation and those were the concerns, today the people have different concerns and there is a different situation. We shouldn’t be looking back, what does the future hold for the country? We need a successful and prosperous nation, and we should all work towards that goal.

Political vacuum

Special editorial in *Kantipur*, 21 March

कान्तिपुर

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 *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 21 March

समाचारपत्र

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 the peace and constitution-writing processes hadn’t concluded.

He used to say the word ‘rest’ didn’t exist in his dictionary, that life should be like a flowing river. He lived up to his words. He was consulting with political leaders about the deadlock even 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.



KIRAN PANDAY

Political being

Editorial in *Rajdhani*, 21 March

राजधानी

Girija Prasad Koirala was not the most successful, popular or upright political leader. It 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 it 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.

Post-GP

Editorial in *Janadisha*, 22 March

जानदिशा

Following 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 leaders. He took centre stage in politics from 1990 to 2000, and was the pivot of the peace process and the struggle for democracy from then on. 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 condolence 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.



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KIRAN PANDAY

CA extension

RADHESHYAM ADHIKARI

The political parties promised those who voted for them in the CA elections 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.

The CA worked as parliament as well, and 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 so say the other political parties are less culpable.

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

The constitution, once completed, has to be passed by two thirds of the CA. This is possible only if all parties work together.

The political parties other than the Maoists should sort out their disagreements, then initiate dialogue with the Maoists on the constitution. Given the national and international context, the Maoists should be flexible or the constitution-writing process will not move ahead.

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 148. 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 to do with ethnicity”

Lokendra Bista Magar, Chairperson, State Restructuring and Sharing of State Power Committee (CPN-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 warn 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 Punjab, 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. Nationality 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 to end this 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 Janjati 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 Makunay at his residence (not Baluwatar) 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 Narayan Kamred, 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

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 spilt on the floor of the cabinet room. But they came close. When Healthy Minister Chowdri 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 Maobuddies 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 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?



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