In more than twenty years of heading a ‘revolutionary’ party, Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has had to make difficult decisions on several occasions. But the next month may well be the ultimate test of his political judgment, priorities and leadership.

At Khula Manch this week, Dahal made it clear there could be no peace or constitution as long as this government is in place. To oust Madhav Kumar Nepal, Maoists could table a no-confidence motion and get 301 seats. This approach has been under consideration in the party, but senior leaders like Dr Baburam Bhattarai have opposed replacing one majority government with another.

He is reported to have argued that the country needs a national unity government to complete the transition, not merely a Maoist-led government with the support of a few smaller groups. Bhattarai believes that the Maoists should project this government as a total failure, wage a public campaign to discredit it further, and then assert its claim to the leadership as May 28 approaches.

For a national unity government to be formed, NC and UML have laid out strict conditions – an agreement on the future of former Maoist combatants, and the dismantling of the YCL. Even then, non-Maoist parties and India will not be willing to accept Dahal as the Prime Minister. Bhattarai’s name has been thrown up as a compromise candidate.

Since the peace process began, the party has been driven by Dahal’s leadership and Bhattarai’s political line. But this would overturn that formula. Dahal is understandably insecure. He has told aides that a ‘deep conspiracy’ is underway to sideline him and divide the party. Critics allege that this insecurity is essentially a result of Dahal’s excessive ambition and fear that Bhattarai could develop his own power base and emerge as a better PM than he was. But Dahal’s supporters say that he is more concerned about the implications on party structure and the balance between its various factions.

Dahal is being asked to give up on certain key instruments of the party machinery (like the PLA and YCL); dilute his political agenda; convince the cadre about the need to transform; sideline dogmatists; and accept Baburam Bhattarai or someone from another party as the compromise prime minister of a national government.

It is a tough check-list, requiring statesmanship, sacrifice, confidence about one’s own personal strengths, and faith in colleagues. Dahal’s decisions and political skills will determine the future of Nepali politics.
Diplomatic disaster

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

In all the distraction of the political meanderings and shadow boxing of the past month, what is often forgotten is that the Maoist party hasn’t adjusted violence. In fact, it is just the opposite.

Puthra Kamal Devkota, in his speech to supporters at Tundikhel on Wednesday, once more threatened fire and brimstone, and the mother of all rebellions. His speech, of course, wouldn’t have been complete without a threat to unleash another bloodbath if this party was not allowed to capture state power. And sure enough it can’t. “This time it won’t just be 15,000 people who’ll be killed but 30,000.”

One could only take perverse satisfaction in the downward trend of the threat. Six months ago the Chairman said 1,000,000 would be killed. And this time he mercifully didn’t threaten to “swim in the blood” of the dead.

There hasn’t been a public recantation of the party to peaceful pluralism. And until that happens, there just won’t be the requisite trust among the non-Maoist parties and the main international players to agree to hand over the responsibility of power to them again.

What is bizarre is the tolerance shown by missions of supposedly democratic and civilized countries in Kathmandu to such incendiary rhetoric. Anyone calling on the Maoists to give up violence is immediately labeled a “rightist status quist”. Or fingers are pointed at the relatively docile youth wings of other parties, which sprang up in reaction to the VCL. Since when did speaking for ahimsa become reactionary? Why does a party that won power through the ballot still need the bullet? The argument usually is that the Maoists need to say such things (and lie to the UN about guerilla strength) to appease their hardcore cadre. That argument may have worked before, but it doesn’t anymore. This is the familiar Maoist method of blackmailing with the threat of going back to war unless they get total power. The portrait of Stalin on the walls of Maoist leaders isn’t there just for show.

A majority of Nepal’s don’t really care if the constitution is written by the deadline or not; they just don’t want to die in another war, and they want their lives to improve. The priority now is to defuse the threat, which looks like it’s between the president and the three parties (including the Maoists) on Sunday cleared the air a bit. More needs to be done.

If the Maoists now publicly commit to non-violent politics, a lot of things will fall into place, and could pave the way for a Maoist-led national government.

Such a coalition can then quickly agree on integration numbers and the operating principles of a new constitution to be announced on May 28, the details of which can be fleshed out later.

In 2066, Nepal became less independent than ever before in its history.

Nepal may have been poor, but it was always regarded with affection in the international community. Nepalis were thought of as law-abiding and benign. Not any more.

At a diplomatic level, the national interest has been replaced by our selfish, chauvinist and partisan behaviour. Instead of selecting representatives to other countries on the basis of merit, character and competence they are chosen through inter-party power swapping. This has not just weakened our foreign relations but also muddied Nepal’s international reputation.

The past year saw a marked increase in the activity of foreign powers in Nepal. India has traditionally had a greater influence on Nepal, but China has also increased its interest, as manifested in the greater number of visits by Chinese dignitaries and security delegations.

When there is internal instability, outsiders will become more vigilant and active to safeguard their own national interest. India and China are global geopolitical rivals, and some of this competition is reflected in Nepal as well. While the Indians have traditionally been active across the board, the Chinese were focused more on trade and economic cooperation. Both countries prefer to work behind the scenes to influence decision.

Recent years have shown that China may also be trying to exert influence not just to counter its traditional rival, but also to reflect its growing international stature.

Indo-Nepal relations are influenced less by what New Delhi wants and more by our kinder, gentler, and more cautious attitude of pity. The challenge is that they are beholden. Our vocabulary sooner or later will show that we will be their friend if they propel us individually or organisationally to power. Even those who use a different vocabulary sooner or later will show that they are beholding.

They have expected this country to be so dependent on the outside world as to today. Which is why, instead of empathy, all we get from the international community is an attitude of pity. The challenge is, therefore, whether we are assuring foreign powers that we will be their friend if they propel us individually or organisationally to power. Even those who use a different vocabulary sooner or later will show that they are beholding.

For their part, the Europeans have always expressed their people’s desire for a change in government and human rights. But they have been dismayed by Nepal’s confusion and how political infighting has made even relatively easy activities much more difficult to implement. They thought they could be helpful to the peace process and constitution writing from afar, but even that is proving challenging.

We simply observed that only Nepal has to suffer wherever they go, be it in the brotherland India or the Middle East? Now, even our old soldiers haven’t been spared.

Chetan Dahal

GURKHIA-LAND?

It’s very sad to know ex-Gurhnaas are living a miserable life after resettling in the UK (Final betrayal, #496). Why is it that only Nepalis have to suffer wherever they go, be it in the brotherland India or the Middle East? Now, even our old soldiers haven’t been spared.

Sambhu Guragain, Subhash Kumar, Arjun Karki

Vacancy

Here’s an ad to encourage young Nepalis into politics

(A call to politics, #496): Education: None. Proficiencies: Technical, none required. However, mastery over rhetoric and cliches preferred. Proficiencies: Shrewdness, shamelessness, avarice, inflated ego.

Income: Untold amount (as much as you can make with your wits and wife).

Benefits: Unlimited. Unchecked power. Can spread benefits to family, associates and “business partners”.

Accountability: None, except towards the party and party dons.

Responsibility: None, not even towards the party and party dons.

Job description: Appear at mass gatherings and make loud accusations and bold claims which don’t need to be verified.

Feed press with rehashed patriotic prophecies and plot against threats (real or virtual) to your power and privileges.

That’s pretty much it. If you can perform any of the above and are interested in a cushy life while preventing to do a job, which pays very highly and carries no responsibility, pls send in your application.

Carry no responsibility, apply anyway.

Total votes: 1,474

Heaven on earth:

Kunda Dixit gets higher than a kite

VACANCY

The blogs

nepalitimes.com/blogs

Q. Will the MHPN’s promise to deliver the constitution hold?

Q. How can we best meet the constitutional deadlines?

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India’s war

PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

The fear was palpable along the Konta-Dantewada highway in south Chhattisgarh in November 2007. In a village off the highway, very close to Chintalnar where Naxalite Maoists massacred 76 Indian security personnel on Tuesday, a tribal leader told us, “This war will continue for at least ten years.”

Thousands of displaced tribals were housed in makeshift camps by the road under the government’s ill-thought out and coercive state and brutal campaign. But the alienation it has rethought the Salwa Judum camps as government agents, and against the Maoists. The Maoists deploying tribal youth to fight SECURITY personnel on Tuesday, a village off the highway, very close to Chintalnar where Naxalite Maoists massacred 76 Indian security personnel on Tuesday, a tribal leader told us, “This war will continue for at least ten years.” This involved forcing tribals out of their homes, creating strategic hamlets, then tribal leadership told us, “This war will continue for at least ten years.”

Those in the know understand where the parallels between Indian and Nepali Maoists begin… and end.

Those in the know understand where the parallels between Indian and Nepali Maoists begin… and end. In these pockets, young men and women do not see the state at all. Abjumish, where Arundhati Roy travelled to write her gushing essay on the Naxals, is an area the Indian state has never even surveyed. If the government does appear, it is not in a wellfated but predictable avatar. Inequitable policies, absence of justice, land issues, a corrupt administration, a death of mainstream political actors, forced displacement, and insensitivity to non-violent movements have helped create space for an armed outfit that appears, it is not in a wellfated but predictable avatar. Inequitable policies, absence of justice, land issues, a corrupt administration, a death of mainstream political actors, forced displacement, and insensitivity to non-violent movements have helped create space for an armed outfit that

The Nepali Maoists were shifting senspoints on multiparty democracy that disrupted India’s relationship with them. They were also seen as insensitive to India’s security concerns on a China keen to expand its influence. Things went sour because of what was happening within Nepal, not the conflict within India. As Professor S D Muni said in an email interview, “Indian Naxal concern is an issue but not of major proportions because the Maoists on their own would also be cautious in pitching themselves against India in the longrun. Maoist links with the Indian Naxals never exceeded logistic support for themselves, ideological affinity for the international and South Asian image and limited personal sympathies.”

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S-Nepal trade talks ended on a bittersweet note on Thursday. The two countries signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), which will help streamline US-Nepal trade, but nonetheless failed to agree to a duty-free facility on Nepal-made garments. A bill proposing preferential access for Nepali garments was first tabled in the US Senate a decade ago, but has since collected dust. The disagreement is a blow to Nepali garment exporters, who have seen business plummet since the termination of the Multi Fibre Agreement in 2005.

TIFA, which was signed after two days of deliberations, will offer some consolation at least. It will set up a joint council to oversee US-Nepal trade issues, promises to improve market access for Nepal-made goods into the US market, and offers Nepali businesses technical assistance to boost their export potential. Joint Secretary of Commerce and Industries and member of the Nepali delegation visiting the US Surya Silwal says, ‘TIFA will offer a framework within which US-Nepal trade discussions can be furthered. It will help us to gain technical assistance.’ The absence of any special concessions to the garment industry will sting, but usefully redirects attention to local supply constraints that improved market access would not have erased. Garment exporters have struggled with power cuts, labour problems, the distance from a viable seaport, and the absence of large-scale domestic fabric makers. Most exporters simply rework imported fabric, and at high cost.

Sanjai Agrawal of Heritage Fashions, one of a few garment exporters that have done well amidst the slump, explains: ‘Some of the major problems are homemade. We have to use a generator for half the day, many exporters face labour problems, and Nepal lacks the infrastructure for the mass production of fabric. Obviously, all of this raises costs.’

### SUVAYU DEV PANT

While the value of garment exports to the US was a whopping $50 million in 2005, that can in large part be attributed to our being in the right place at the right time: foreign garment makers flooded into Nepal in the 1970s when the US spared us the import quotas it had imposed across the region. When that arrangement was terminated in 2005, garment exports to the US came crashing down, arguably to levels commensurate with the fundamental strength of the domestic industry. Last year, the export industry was valued at just under $5 million, and this has already dropped 60 per cent from January to February this year.

There are lessons to be learnt from Bangladesh, which, unlike Nepal, has seen US-bound garment exports grow briskly following the elimination of quotas. ‘In Bangladesh, there are garment-exporting zones in which all garment-related government offices are concentrated and strikes are forbidden. The garment makers also enjoy tax breaks,’ says Ashok Koirala, chief executive officer of Garment Association Nepal. The government has shown some sensitivity to such concerns. The Department of Industry and Commerce has forwarded a plan of action to spur industrial activity to the government, and an interest subsidy for exporters is on the cards. However, experts doubt if these measures will be sufficient to recreate the industry’s heyday. ‘We’re probably better off focusing on small orders,’ admits Agrawal.
Instigative journalism seeks to provoke events, rather than just report them

**FOURTH ESTATE**

T he post-1990 boom in the Nepali media pushed many established practices of the past into the shadows. Professional attitudes and commercial considerations made ‘mission journalism’ unfashionable. But the idea of the journalist as a stakeholder rather than merely a recorder survives in a different form.

Instigative journalism sounds like a oxymoron, but dates back to the circulation wars between Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst in the latter part of the 19th century. The New York Times coined the term ‘yellow journalism’ in early 1897 to describe the combative coverage of events. Pulitzer coined the term ‘yellow kid’ journalism in some form is reason enough to celebrate.

However, instigative journalism perhaps best describes the techniques adopted by Hearst to provoke the populace into action. As theory goes, Hearst sent author Stephen Crane and artist Frederick Remington to Cuba to report on Spanish atrocities. To Remington’s request that he be called back as there was no war in Cuba, his boss replied: ‘Please remain. You furnish the pictures, I’ll furnish the war.’ The year 2006 BS began with a sensational peace of instigative journalism. In a front-page report, Kantipur Daily alleged that the Nepal Army was contemplating a ‘soft’ coup to pre-empt the dismissal of its chief by the Maoist-led coalition government. The NA public relations outflank took the story seriously enough to issue a denial the same day. It termed the report ‘imaginary and illusory’.

Himal Khabarpatrika responded with a provocative caption on its cover to accompany a cleverly manipulated image of Pushpa Kamal Dahal in military regalia. Other print media ran equally confrontational opinion pieces. The subsequent polarisation of public opinion, it could be said, led to the dismissal of the army chief, his restoration under presidential orders, the resignation of the prime minister and the formation of an anti-Maoist coalition. Politics has been going around in circles ever since, with President Ram Baran Yadav at the centre. The Kathmandu establishment loves President Yadav’s penchant for Hindu rituals and his barely disguised anti-Maoist politics. But as the day of reckoning (May 28, 2010) nears and the possibility of completing the constitution in time recedes, everyone is feeling apprehensive as far as the president is concerned.

Premier Nepal recently urged the head of state to exercise restraint. The media have adopted a hostile tone. Constitutionalists close to UML have stopped defending presidential consultations. Even Himal Khabarpatrika ran an editorial sometime ago requesting President Yadav to resign. Ever since his vocal opposition to the Madhes Uprising, President Yadav hasn’t been very popular in the Tarai. Now Palbari too seems to have lost some of its initial enthusiasm for him. But one journalist has stood by the president throughout, defending all his actions and inactions with commitment and zeal. In the writings of Birganj-based reporter Pushpa Kami Dhakal in military regalia, Other print media ran equally confrontational opinion pieces. The subsequent polarisation of public opinion, it could be said, led to the dismissal of the army chief, his restoration under presidential orders, the resignation of the prime minister and the formation of an anti-Maoist coalition. Politics has been going around in circles ever since, with President Ram Baran Yadav at the centre. The Kathmandu establishment loves President Yadav’s penchant for Hindu rituals and his barely disguised anti-Maoist politics. But as the day of reckoning (May 28, 2010) nears and the possibility of completing the constitution in time recedes, everyone is feeling apprehensive as far as the president is concerned.

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Dehradun: What could be a better time to ponder the future than when you are surrounded by creative minds at a literary festival? Dehradun really inspires creativity. No wonder writers like Ruskin Bond have decided to live there.

The stark difference one can notice of course is that their greenery is dwindling at a far slower pace than in the Kathmandu Valley. What one can see from the window seat while taking off from Kathmandu is, simply put, sad. It seems that valley residents, real estate developers in particular, hate greenery and are looking to demolish anything that looks like trees.

If real estate development is to be sustainable here, then perhaps those who say they are responsible players and have ganged up as an association need to ensure there is self-regulation in this business. Else, we will be fighting to sell the last hillock. For Nepal what it also means is that conservation and sustainable utilisation of natural resources have not been internalised. Donors have lost interest in these subjects as ‘inclusion and exclusion’ and predicting another conflict have become hot topics.

One of the issues we discussed in Dehradun was man-mountain relationships. Compared to mountain people, people living in the valley are far removed from nature. This is perhaps why they don’t have any qualms in being part of the destruction of nature. This may also explain why felled trees aren’t replaced in Kathmandu, or Gaugan for that matter, and their residents are happy to convert rivers and rivulets into open sewers.

The architectural landscape seems to be changing everywhere and protruding rebars have become contemporary styles. Indian architect Gautam Bhattacharya describes them as Punjabi Baroque, Marwari Mannerism, Bania Gothic, Anglo-Indian Rococo, Sindhi Hacienda and so on. We have our own Trigonometry Landmarks: buildings with more than four corners, chowk malls (traditional chowks that have been converted to shopping complexes) and heritage pasals (shops fronting traditional facades). As far as our surrounding valleys and the hills along our highways go, the day will not be far when you will actually have to go on a ‘tree hunt’.

But the next big question is: in order to make cities sustainable, is it not necessary to have an efficient transportation system that does away with private car ownership to a large extent? This may not be music to the ears of the automobile industry, but the taxi pods experimented with at Heathrow airport could give us some pointers. It took us nine hours each way to cover 240 kilometres from Delhi to Dehradun, courtesy of the jams created by people who don’t want to follow traffic rules. Amitosh Pande, who was in conversation with the Beed on Unleashing Nepal noted that road rules are understood differently in South Asia. We Go, Look and Stop.

The problem in Nepal is that each urban centre is aping the development model of Kathmandu, which means unplanned growth that puts much pressure on urban infrastructure. The problems have been extensively written about and have featured in many donor reports, but when will we actually start implementing plans? While we talk about energy shortages, donors continue to fund an inefficient NEA. Melamchi is the best project we have for now. But politicians turn a blind eye to ghettos developing on the river banks as they are their vote banks and money banks. Self-sustained new townships along the lines of what have been developed in some parts of the world could be the answer. This Beed prefers to keep his cards close to his chest, however. Anyone is free to dream up their own sustainable cities. www.arthabeed.com
ne would be hard-pressed to find a clean, white-washed wall lining the streets of Kathmandu. If one appeared, it would soon be painted over with political slogans or plastered with posters. Something similar happened to the immaculate south perimeter wall of the Hyatt Regency Kathmandu from 4-8 April. Except this time it was at the behest of the owners of said wall, and a reputable artist was at the helm of the project to paint a mural spreading the message of peace and harmony.

Assisted by children from the Kailash Hostel, Buddhist Child Home, Mansarovar School and Young Hearts Bonding School, Andorran artist and educator Jordi Gasmajor applies his design on the wall, while the children animate the stylised outlines with cheery hues of red, yellow and blue. The colours, as well as the images of figures joining hands, work together to complement the intent of the message.

It is a tall order to add to the grandeur of the Hyatt Regency, with its palatial architecture and luxurious ambience. But that is not the point. Kiran Adhikari, public relations executive of the hotel, explains that this is part of the hotel’s corporate social responsibility programme. “We want to give back to the community, and we feel that if a platform can be created for underprivileged children to have fun and spread a positive message at the same time, why not?”

The mural project was organised in collaboration with the Himalayan Youth Foundation (HYF), Kathmandu, and the Mountaineers Himalayan Foundation of the tiny European principality of Andorra. “One of the advantages of this project is its visibility to the public,” says Steve Webster, a HYF board member and coordinator of the mural project. “We want our message to reach as many as possible and for the work of the artist and the children to be recognised.”

This wish is not too far-fetched, for even the soot and the dust from passing vehicles will do little to obscure the enthusiasm and positivity on display.
Theatres as politics

The story of a peasant girl who rescues the abandoned child of a rich family, and raises him as her own at all costs is hardly a matter for comedy. But Max Webster and Mia Thel Hai's Gurukul staging of The Caucasian Chalk Circle (Khariko Ghero) is characterised by just that. Well-known for his aversion to sappy emotions, Bertolt Brecht used theatre to experiment with political ideas. Perhaps the humorous lines are meant to balance the sadness of the peasant girl's plight and anarchical social reality, prepping the audience for the objective reflection that Brecht would have wanted. Either way, it suited the palate of the Nepali theatregoers present, who gave the play a warm reception.

There is no doubt this play-within-a-play is a political study, which is as much about the peasant girl as it is about the judge. There is no doubt this play-within-a-play is a political study, which is as much about the peasant girl as it is about the judge. Whether she is characterised by just that.

The Caucasian Chalk Circle (Khariko Ghero), a Brecht play adapted into Nepali about a peasant girl and her adopted son set against our recent politically turbulent history. Directed by Max Webster and Mia Thel Hai at Rimal Theatre, Gurukul, until 1 May.

Fishing Expeditions and Day Trips, Tiger Mountain offers a chance to catch the Golden Mahseer, one of Asia's most famous game fish, in Bardia National Park, while exploring the beauty of the Himalayan foothills. Perfect for this time of year.

Enfield Rendezvous and Poker Run, if you own an Enfield motorcycle, you have no reason not to fire it up and head out towards Chitwan on a poker run. You may get the best poker hand. You may not. Who cares? It'll be a darn good ride to yarn with friends.

New Year Package, whether for a day picnic or an overnight stay to view the sunrise on New Year’s Day, the Mirabel Resort is perfect for that quick get away to view the sunrise on New Year’s Day, the Mirabel Resort is perfect for that quick get away.

Grand Piano concert, Ramoyne Wheeler, who performed at the air base of the US space shuttle in New Mexico, will be doing a charity concert for Women’s Wing Nepal, Sunday 11 April, 2pm, Lincoln School, Rabi Bhawan, 9803003750

Kabita Yatra, this paper once described poet Momila as “deeply interior and outspoken, expressing her political concerns through private, individuated expression.” She will be reciting at Gurukul this weekend as part of a solo poetry recitation series. Saturday 10 April, 3pm, Sama Theatre, Gurukul, 4460658

Chailya & Silent Flow, works of Kailash Shrestha and Sushma Shalya made during their one-year residency sponsored by the Australian Himalayan Foundation. Runs until 21 April, Sidhnathra Art Gallery, 4218048

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GETAWAYS

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Events

Roles of the Indian Film Heroine, film festival that looks at the changing ethos of Indian film heroines from Satyajit Ray’s Dwi to Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s Michelle in Black. Also features talks from cinema-watchers, including actress-turned-director-turned-activist Vandita Das.

Saturday’s Farmer’s Market, a weekly farmers’ market starting in Kantipath this weekend promises to be different from all other farmers’ markets in town with lasagne, pies and Mediterranean treats along with organic fruits and vegetables. Every Saturday, 9am to noon, 1605 Restaurant, Kantipath.

Sub: Transition 2067, we don’t know what the ‘sub’ stands for but it’s a New Year’s party at the Factory. Two actually. Aditi Sharma will be playing with her band in the Hall followed by DJ Ankit. Expect some fireworks on the roof – not literally – as DJ Naved has been flown all the way from India to ‘set the place ablaze’. The Factory, Thamel, 7pm, Rs 2000 and Rs 1000 respectively, with complimentary drinks.

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MUSIC

Moksh Music Fest, a line-up of events running through four consecutive days leading up to the new year. 10-13 April, 5pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel 5526212. More info at http://partynepal.com

Newaz, famous metal band from the 90s, reunited last August. They will be performing some of their originals at House of Music, as well covers of Hendrix and other guitar artists. Friday, 9 April, 8pm, House of Music, Thamel

Climate Champion’s Concert, nature lovers and tree-huggers can revel in Rojesh Shrestha’s new song in the first, and what seems like a long climate change concert in Nepal. Make a statement by being there. Saturday 10 April, 10am-7pm, Basantapur

4th Element, it’s New Year’s Eve and you can’t decide where you want to go, or what to listen to. Then head to Electric Pagoda in Thamel where the Shillong band, 4th Element, is offering music with elements of R&B, soul, funk and jazz. Japanese DJ

Moksh Music Fest

DINING

Ghangri Café, a quiet place with comfortable sofas and a lovely courtyard, perfect for those sunny afternoons. Although famous for their open sui mai, they offer a few other great dishes as well. Pulchowk (near the Suzuki showroom), 11am-10pm except Tuesdays

Bronco Billy, a new restaurant in town offering Tex-Mex and Indian dishes. They make their own corn tortillas, which gets a big thumbs-up. But really, we can’t wait to try their Marmaladas. Pulchowk

The Factory, a trendy restobar for a refreshing stopover in the chaos that is Thamel. Great food and drinks, with zesty music. Don’t miss out on their cheesecake, it’s a must. Mandala Street, Thamel

New Orleans, offers a wide variety of western dishes that are scrumptious yet healthy. We got hooked on the rosemary chicken and hamburgers. Jhalem, 5522708.

Irish Pub, not only does it feel like one, but it’s Irish all the way down to the original recipes from the owner’s wife. Go green with their fish and chips. Anandini Bhanu, Lazimpat, 4416027

Aalishan, a newcomer to the Jhalem scene, serves a mix of both Indian and Chinese cuisines. The posh interior can be a bit intimidating, but don’t let that put you off the food. Jawalakhel (near the roundabout)

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

Ghangri Café

New Orleans

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Dining

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4th Element

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PRIORITISE: Visually impaired people participate in a rally in Babar Mahal calling on political parties to complete the new constitution on time, Monday.

WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

KATHMANDU

FRI SAT SUN

33-12 30-11  31-10

The Indian plains and Nepal got heat waves in March, drying out vegetation and making them prone to the forest fires now sweeping the midhills and Tarai. Smoke and wind-blown sand from the desert have cloaked the whole country in a thick haze up to 12,000 ft. This won’t go until washed away by rain or a change in wind direction to the northwest. This satellite/radar image from Thursday afternoon shows a westerly front advancing on central Nepal. The injection of moisture could turn into cumulus build-up and bring localised thundershowers mainly in the west. The Valley may see some weekend build-up with light rain and a wide variance in day and night temperatures.

HAPPY FEET: Celebrating diversity during the inauguration ceremony of the 7th National Congress of Indigenous People in Bhrikuti Mandap on Saturday.

DAZZLING: A display of flora draws visitors on Monday, the last day of the 13th Floriculture Trade Fair in Bhrikuti Mandap.

HIGH ESTEEM: Climate Ambassador Apa Sherpa receives a banner from WWF on Monday that he will take with him to Mount Everest, which he is attempting to summit for a record 20th time.
For the dispossessed in their meals and ate dry beaten rice so scared they did not even cook to be careful. Some families were Friday reminding their neighbours destruction, when 20 houses were a fire every year since I moved here grass-thatched wooden huts and from nearby forests, consuming the every year, carried by strong winds.

A fire rages through the village bring a sense of menace to a fire,” said a local. “It seemed like an invisible force was... metres apart from each other. “It... hours, 69 houses had been burnt to than the wind carrying it. Within...

The 2600 residents of the village, where he taught in return founded the first school in the Panchayat era when they heard the floods and landslides, they... this patch of forest 65 kilometres... anymore. “This is the pride of Badarjhula,” said principal A.G. Pariyar as he...

The school was meant to meet the needs of the ever-increasing young... – a two-storey concrete structure building had just been inaugurated among the locals. A new school there was a sense of optimism... in CHITWAN INDIA NEPAL
Dehradun: What could be a better time to ponder the future than when you are surrounded by creative minds at a literary festival? Dehradun really inspires creativity. No wonder writers like Ruskin Bond have decided to live there.

The stark difference one can notice of course is that their greenery is dwindling at a far slower pace than in the Kathmandu Valley. What one can see from the window seat while taking off from Kathmandu is, simply put, sad. It seems that valley residents, real estate developers in particular, hate greenery and are looking to demolish anything that looks like trees.

If real estate development is to be sustainable here, then perhaps those who say they are responsible players and have ganged up as an association need to ensure there is self-regulation in this business. Else, we will be fighting to sell the last hillock. For Nepal what it also means is that conservation and sustainable utilisation of natural resources have not been internalised. Donors have lost interest in these subjects as ‘inclusion and exclusion’ and predicting another conflict have become hot topics.

One of the issues we discussed in Dehradun was man–mountain relationships. Compared to mountain people, people living in the valley are far removed from nature. This is perhaps why they don’t have any qualms in being part of the destruction of nature. This may also explain why felled trees aren’t replaced in Kathmandu, or Gurgaon for that matter, and their residents are happy to convert rivers and rivulets into open sewers.

The architectural landscape seems to be changing everywhere and protruding rebars have become contemporary styles. Indian architect Gautam Bhatia describes them as Punjabi Baroque, Marwari Mannerism, Bania Gothic, Anglo-Indian Rococo, Sindhi Hacienda and so on. We have our own Trigonometry Landmarks: buildings with more than four corners, chowk malls (traditional chowks that have been converted to shopping complexes) and heritage pasals (shops fronting traditional facades). As far as our surrounding valleys and the hills along our highways go, the day will not be far when you will actually have to go on a ‘tree hunt’.

But the next big question is: in order to make cities sustainable, is it not necessary to have an efficient transportation system that does away with private car ownership to a large extent? This may not be music to the ears of the automobile industry, but the taxi pods experimented with at Heathrow airport could give us some pointers. It took us nine hours each way to cover 240 kilometres from Delhi to Dehradun, courtesy of the jams created by people who don’t want to follow traffic rules.

Amitabh Pande, who was in conversation with the Beed on Unleashing Nepal noted that road rules are understood differently in South Asia. We Go, Look and Stop. The problem in Nepal is that each urban centre is aping the development model of Kathmandu, which means unplanned growth that puts much pressure on urban infrastructure. The problems have been extensively written about and have featured in many donor reports, but when will we actually start implementing plans? While we talk about energy shortages, donors continue to fund an inefficient NEA. Melamchi is the best project we have for now. But politicians turn a blind eye to ghettos developing on the river banks as they are their vote banks and money banks. Self-sustained new townships along the lines of what have been developed in some parts of the world could be the answer. This Beed prefers to keep his cards close to his chest, however. Anyone is free to dream up their own sustainable cities.
Tourism

Annapurna air

W e have come a long way since a Gypsy Moth piloted by LVS Blacker made the first ever fly-by of Mt Everest in 1933. Blacker survived an open cockpit and icy gale-force winds in his flimsy canvas-winged biplane to become the first person to look down at the top of the world.

But it took former UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld to popularise what has come to be known as the ‘Mountain Flight’ when he was allowed by King Mahendra to take his unpressurised DC-3 to Khumbu and along the Annapurnas. Hammarskjöld, a keen photographer himself, took the stunning black-and-white pictures that appeared in the National Geographic of January 1961.

The biggest draw of Visit Nepal Year 2011 could be Pokhara’s mountain flights

Today, there are up to 30 Everest-view flights a day during peak season from Kathmandu. Everest is still the big draw, but for the thrill of a lifetime and to really rub shoulders with the mountains, Avia Club Pokhara (http://aviaclubnepal.com/) offers sightseeing flights that fly not just past the mountains but amidst them. Avia offers flights in open cockpit ultralights or its tiny two-seater Aeroprakt, which can be chartered for a half-hour or one-hour sightseeing jaunt north of Pokhara.

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Ultra-marathon

RICHARD BULL

“I think that’s the hardest one-day event I’ve ever done in my life, and I’ve done some,” said Rob Cousins, the British endurance-adventurer who once ran 213km in one go. He was referring to the 4th Annual Annapurna 100 race, which took place on March 27. The race heads from Pokhara all the way to the Poon Hill and back to Birethanti, and is now down from 100km to 71km. It’s still a bone-crumber.

My day began with a pleasant 2km morning wake-up jog around Lakeside before we swerved abruptly up the steep 700m to Sarangkot village. The locals, as elsewhere, were out in force to wish the runners “Best of luck!”, “Very good!” and even “You’re last!”

The track to Kaskikot offers stunning, only-in-Nepal views of Machapucchare and Annapurna II and IV, as seen from 12,000ft above the Mardi Khola, and the January 1961 National Geographic photo (top left) of the same mountain, taken by UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld from a DC-3.

Trekking? Try running up to Poon Hill and back

The track to Kaskikot offers stunning, only-in-Nepal views of Machapucchare and Annapurna. After losing hard-won altitude, the runners finally arrive in Birethanti – arguably the real start of the race. Birethanti is both the 31km point and 71km finish. In
Instigative journalism seeks to provoke events, rather than just report them.

However, instigative journalism perhaps best describes the techniques adopted by Hearst to provoke the population into action. As the very name of Hearst, wrote historian Stephen Crane and artist Frederick Remington to Cuba to report on Spanish atrocities, To Remington’s request that he be called back as there was no war in Cuba, his boss cable back: “Please remain. You furnish the pictures, I’ll furnish the war.” The year 2000 BS began with a sensational photo of instigative journalism. In a front-page report, Kantipur Daily alleged that the Nepal Army was contemplating a ‘soft coup’ to pre-empt the dismissal of its chief by the Maoist-led coalition government. The NA public relations outflank told the story seriously enough to issue a denial the same day. It termed the report “imaginary and illusory.”

Himal Khubapatrika, a Nepali newspaper, responded with a provocative caption on its cover to accompany a cleverly manipulated image of Pushpa Kamal Dahal in military regalia. Other print media ran equally confrontational opinion pieces. The subsequent polarisation of public opinion, it could be said, led to the dismissal of the army chief, his restoration under presidential orders, the resignation of the prime minister and the formation of an anti-Maoist coalition. Politics has been going around in circles ever since, with President Ram Baran Yadav at the centre.

The Kathmandu establishment loves President Yadav’s penchant for Hindu rituals and his barely disguised anti-Maoist politics. But as the day of reckoning, May 28, 2010, nears and the possibility of completing the constitution in time recedes, everyone is feeling apprehensive as far as the president is concerned.

Premier Nepal recently urged the head of state to exercise restraint. The media have adopted a hostile tone. Constitutionalists close to UML have stopped defending presidential consultations. Even Himal Khubapatrika ran an editorial sometime ago requesting President Yadav to calm down.

Ever since his vocal opposition to the Mudhes uprising, President Yadav hasn’t been very popular in the Tarai. Now Palazari too seems to have lost some of their initial enthusiasm for him. But one journalist has stood by the president throughout, defending all his actions and inactions with commitment and zeal. In his writings of Birgunj-based reporter Chandrakishor, a whirl of the mission journalism of yore still can be found. He is often guarded in offering his views, but even his circumspection has the old-world charm of when it was unbecoming of a journalist to praise a politician openly. Chandrakishor is my choice for ‘Journalist of 2066 BS’ in ‘The Year of Print’.

Instigative journalism undeniably rules the roost in Nepali media. For the old timers, the mere survival of mission journalism in some form is reason enough to celebrate.

Clay feet Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal’s government is flaying at the edges as opposing voices within its own party, grow more strident. Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Anandadebi) withdrew support from the government on April 4, saying the government had failed to forge political consensus. Minister of Supply Rajendra Mahato of Nepal Sadbhavana Party threatened to leave the government, accusing it of not honouring its eight-point agreement with the United Democratic Madhesi Front. There are also voices within the NC, the most vocal of which being Supply Minister of UML’s allies, calling for Nepal’s resignation, and the Maoists have once more raised the spectre of a no-confidence motion. Huddled in, the prime minister saw an opportunity to save face with a sensational photo of instigative journalism. In a front-page report, Kantipur Daily alleged that the Nepal Army was contemplating a ‘soft coup’ to pre-empt the dismissal of its chief by the Maoist-led coalition government. The NA public relations outflank told the story seriously enough to issue a denial the same day. It termed the report “imaginary and illusory.”

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“Diplomatic pressure”

Early this week, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal conciliated to authorities that the decision to commission an Indian company to print Machine Readable Passports was influenced by “political and diplomatic pressure”. The statement appeared to confirm suspicions of irregularities in the bidding process, and prompted the filing of two public interest litigations challenging the decision on the grounds that the government prosecute the concerned NA personnel. The subsequent process, and prompted the filing of two public interest litigations challenging the decision on the grounds that the government prosecute the concerned NA personnel.
Annapurna air

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Annapurna, after losing hard-won altitude, the runners finally arrive in Birethanti – arguably the real start of the race. Birethanti is both the 31km point and 71km finish. In
between comes a seemingly endless 2050m climb via 3080 steps up to Ulleri, the course up to the famous Poon Hill viewpoint, and back down again. The high hilltops were blushing red with rhododendron, making for an extraordinarily beautiful distraction from the rigours of the trail. But despite the challenging course, the race was won in just 7 hours 30 minutes by Ram Kumar Khatri of Tribhuvan Athletics Club, who took home Rs 50,000 in prize money. No Nepali women entered but the first woman home was Moire O’Sullivan from Ireland, in 12.15. Forty competitors, mainly from the army and police, took to the trail with a number of local villagers and a hint of international flavour.

First run in 1995 with collaboration from British cricketer-turned-walker Ian Botham, artist Jan Turner and ex-Gurkha Ramesh Bhattachan, the Annapurna ultra-marathon has only taken place in 2000 and 2009, due to political upheavals and the difficulties in finding sponsorship for such an offbeat sport. This year’s event was rescued from the brink by Roger Henke and the Summit Hotel, which stepped in as the major sponsor at the last minute. Henke, who is himself a keen trail runner and was the first foreigner to finish in 10.30, said, “I wanted to develop the race and turn it into a trail race because I believe that it has a future from an adventure tourism perspective. I convinced my board to sponsor this year’s event and use the experience and contacts for a better event next year. We want much better international exposure and a bigger pot of prize money that can support the training of local athletes.”

There’s a lot of enthusiasm for the talent and potential of Nepali runners. Rob Cousins has teamed up with Ramesh Bhattachan to train a couple of promising mountain runners for the prestigious Davos ultra-marathon race in Switzerland, the Nepal of Europe.

“That race is a very good comparison to what we’ve just done. It’s less climbing and less altitude and the fastest runner finished that in 7 hours compared to 7.30 here. It compares very well. For these runners to be able to run that fast, at that altitude, up those steps and just keep on going, in that time – and still look good and fresh at the end – I think it’s spectacular.”

For this runner, who certainly didn’t feel or look fresh by the end, it was as much about competing as it was about eating and drinking along the way. “Khanus! Khanus!” ordered a senior member of Ghorepani mothers’ group, offering biscuits, Chinese apples and hot noodle soup. Ah... of course mothers understand everything.
Presidential line

Editorial in Nagarik, 6 April

 nephritis

President Ram Baran Yadav has initiated discussions with political parties at a time of political fluidity. He has told the prime minister that there may be an agreement. A few days ago, there was controversy over the president’s remark that he had a ‘guardian’ role. Some criticised him for having political ambitions.

Maoists attack media

Nepal Samacharpatra, 6 April

Nepal Media Society has condemned the disruptions in the distribution of Rajdhani daily, and asked the government to provide security to the media. Two Maoist-affiliated staffers at the paper who had fake certificates threatened to kill staff and set fire to the office, and have not allowed the distribution of the paper for the last week.

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Editorial in Nagarik, 6 April

President Ram Baran Yadav has initiated discussions with political parties at a time of political fluidity, raising hopes that there may be an agreement. A few days ago, there was controversy over the president’s remark that he had a ‘guardian’ role. Some criticised him for having political ambitions.

If the new constitution isn’t written by May 28, the CA will be automatically dissolved. There are two options: write it on time, or extend the term. The parties have no option but to agree on provincial boundaries, state restructuring, and the integration of Maoist fighters. Who gets to be in government is not a big issue. The people want peace, law and order and development. We want a short constitution that reflects the aspirations of all, but it can’t be a collection of political slogans. If the parties can’t do this will they take moral responsibility? Or will they just blame a rival party?

The Newars and others in Kathmandu and the people of the Madhes are all fortunate. Either way they win. How about us indigenous people living in the remote corners of the mountains? We are cursed by birth and by the neglect of the state. Our land has no value and we can’t even farm on it. Now with these new provinces, we may even be restricted in our movement. What kind of constitution are these people writing, if it tears the country apart? It is going to create enmity not just between Bahun-Chhetris and others, but also among the indigenous people. The draft on ethnic federalism is a huge mistake.

Ethnic-based identity politics is leaving the country astray. Opposition to federalism is growing by the day. Any state structure can have good or bad aspects, it is the rulers who need to be honest. We are wedged between regional powers India and China and are trailing behind because of leadership failure. By splitting the country along ethnic lines, the country will be pushed towards destruction, not development.

Nepal has set up the highest ever biogas plant to turn livestock refuse into methane. The plant is located at 3,850m at Kyangjin Gomba in Langtang, and works even in freezing temperatures. There are now four experimental biogas plants in Langtang, and many cater to the increased demand for energy from tourism.

Vacancy Announcement

Rato Bangala Foundation announces a vacancy for an Administration and Finance Officer. Please check the website www.ratobangala.org.np for details. Please bring your curriculum vitae; a 500 word stating essay on your personal history and strength; and the application form to the Foundation office by 18 April, 2010. Forms will be received from 11 am to 2 pm.

Best biogas

Gorkhapatra, 3 April

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MRP scandal

Big umbrella: Nepal’s security

Small umbrella: Madhav Nepal’s security

Abin Shrestha in Kantipur, 7 April

MRP scandal

Opinion by Phurpa Tamang Hyalmo, Rasuwa, in Nagarik, 31 March

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Ethnic provinces are impracticable

Harshajit Lama, NCCA member, Kathmandu

Why was the Constitutional Committee meeting postponed? The Study Committee led by Agni Kharel is studying the draft proposals of the thematic committees. There are contentious issues to be resolved, which takes time. The CA will soon resume.

Do you think the constitutional committee will be drafted on time? The Interim Constitution has stipulated two years to draft the new constitution. However, it all depends on how seriously stakeholders take it. If the political leaders sort out their differences, we can still expect the new constitution on time.

How is it possible that there are still differences on fundamental issues of state restructuring and forms of governance? The Maoists and UML proposed 14 provinces based on ethnicity, which is wrong. This is impractical in a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural country. Besides, the country cannot sustain 14 provinces. Therefore, 6 to 7 provinces based on population would be ideal for us.

Coming from a Janajati community, are you not afraid of losing elections if you oppose the idea of ethnic provinces? The future of the country matters more than my winning an election. What is the point of writing a constitution? Multi-ethnicity is the reality of the country. Janajati’s votes alone would never have elected me as a CA member. I got votes from all communities. So I am not in favour of ethnically based provinces. This is just a slogan to trick the people.

Can the constitution work if we do not address the demand of identity? Adopting a mixed proportional and direct electoral system can encompass the issue of identity.

If the CA cannot meet the May 28 deadline, what will be the status of CA members? From time to time, we hear the public will not accept us as CA members after May 28. The leaders should take this seriously and act to meet the deadline. The constitution should be written on time.

Tamu province will ruin Tamus

Chandra Gurung, RPP (N) CA member

Why is your party demanding a referendum to decide the fate of the monarchy when the Interim Constitution settled on the monarchy, federalism and secularism long ago? Our party has taken the constitution-writing process seriously as it is a historic task. This is an opportunity for people to write their own constitution. Constitutions were written in the past but the CA should come up with a constitution that people can call their own. Article 157 of the Interim Constitution states, ‘any matter of national importance should be made through referendum.’ On this basis our party has been demanding a referendum to decide the fate of the monarchy, federalism and secularism.

But pro-republicans think your demand is regressive. Whatever we are demanding is in line with democratic norms. It is not fair to refer to it as an anti-federal, anti-democratic move. There are clearly two schools of thought regarding federalism: those who consider it a means to progress and prosperity and those who think it will break up the country.

Which category do you fall into? We have been demanding a referendum to decide on it. We accept the verdict of the people whatever it might be. The people’s decision should be inscribed in the constitution.

How should we interpret the charge against you of attempting to reinstate the old regime? This is a baseless allegation. Change does not mean all established norms and values should be destroyed. Change means creativity. But the annihilation of all matters of national importance in the name of change will ultimately bring destruction to this country. The 12-point agreement signed in Delhi does not talk about the abolition of monarchy but the end of a tyrannical monarchy.

What about the demand for a Hindu state? Our country is the land of the origin of eastern civilisation. There are Christians and Muslim states where there are Christians and Muslims. Why can’t a country where 85 per cent people are Hindus be declared a Hindu state? More than a billion people worldwide are Hindu, this is our identity. No one raised voices against Hinduism during Jana Andolan II. The decision came all of a sudden under the influence of foreign forces. But it is against our identity. Therefore, we have been demanding it should be decided on through a democratic process.

How? The question of ethnic identity is being raised instead of the religious identity of the past. This is an absolutely wrong move. The way communal issues are being raised in the name of ethnic identity, this will disintegrate national unity and ruin the social fabric, pushing the country into civil war. Consequently, Nepal could be the next Nigeria or Uganda. We need to be cautious about the possibility of such a situation in Nepal.

Do you think you will get votes by opposing federalism in the future? The demand for economic, political and social rights was raised as the state denied those rights in the past. We demanded representation of Gurungs at all levels of the state. But in the name of identity, a conspiracy is being hatched to ruin Tamus.

The judicial system committee has probably not guaranteed the position of chief minister for Tamus.

“It doesn’t mean we should pick up anyone from the street for the post of chief justice.”

Akheel Ahmad Sah, MPP/C member, Kapilbastu

Why is constitutional writing on the backburner? The Constitutional Committee should have prepared an integrated draft from the concept papers submitted by thematic committees by now. But the committee that comprises top leaders from the big parties failed to do so as they are busy with party activities and foreign trips. This is why the constitution-writing process could not gather momentum.

The Judicial System Committee, of which you are also a member, proposed that anyone outside the judiciary service can be picked for the post of chief justice. How rational is that? Yes, we proposed that anyone from within as well as outside the judiciary service could be eligible for the post of chief justice. It does not mean we should pick up anyone from the street for the post. Since parliament is accountable to the people, it would be better if a mechanism under parliament appoints the chief justice.

Are you saying the judiciary should be under parliament? The judiciary will be under a mechanism of parliament. This will discourage corruption and delay in service delivery in the judiciary.

What kind of democracy will it be where provinces are created on the basis of ethnicity and the judiciary is under parliament? The provinces should be created on a regional basis, not an ethnic basis. People within the provinces should feel they really have a stake in the provinces. Having the judiciary under parliament is aimed at discouraging corruption and irregularities.

Will the constitution be written by May 28? The big political parties are reviving for power, which has put the constitution-writing process at risk. People will surely point at us because of their inability.

What will you do if the constitution is not drafted by May 28? I will follow the party’s decision. I will resign if the party decides to do so. There is no point resigning alone.
Puppet theatre

The long and short of the MRP (Middlemen Refundable Passport) saga is that we are now not going to get the new passports even by June. Which means the only alternative is that if we can’t have passports printed in India, Nepal may have no choice but to carry Indian passports. A certain institution can’t be named because the case is now sub judice (Latin: “We want our share”) has just put a spanner in the works and sabotaged the whole deal so we will be deprived of the only document that proves that we are citizens of a sovereign nation. ICAO gave us 10 years to make new passports, and we couldn’t even do that. We now have till 2015 to convert all MRPs to e-passports with chips, but the Ass bets his left buttock we’ll botch that one too.

The latest from the Nepal Taekwondo Federation after Dipak Bista broke down and cried at the press con before his Singapore trip is that our illustrious martial artists vandalised the Khel-Koot Mantralaya and roughed up the karmacharis. The reason: members of the Taekwondo Federation were not selected for the Singapore tournament so they vented their ire by physically assaulting the doors, windows, chairs and tables of the Ministry of Youth and Sports to practice their gyeokpa. Said a Federation spokesperson: “They didn’t listen to us so we were forced to do todfod.” Instead of being called a Democratic Federal Republic, Nepal should just be renamed a Tae Kondo Federation. This govt sure has its priorities right. The latest cabinet decision is to award a concessionaire a permit to set up a mall inside Singha Darbar. We all knew there is a supermarket epidemic in Mallanandu, but somehow the government secretariat had seemed to be immune to it. Now, civil servants will have access to a 24-hour convenience store, cyber café and a commie seri.

Nepal Police has belatedly decided to force overweight cops to shed kilograms by forcing them to attend Ram Dev’s mass yoga. But that’s never going to reduce their girth. A better idea would be to re-assign them to a food-deficit area in the Far West not yet served by road or air.