

Ready, steady, no?

The wait will be over by Friday midnight, whether there is an agreement or a disagreement on extending the CA tenure.

If there is no agreement, the CA expires on Friday midnight and so does the Interim Constitution. This will create a constitutional vacuum that could push the country to confrontation.

The Maoists have refused to support the government's proposal to extend the CA's term, demanding the prime minister's resignation and a national unity government first. The government needs a two-thirds majority to amend the constitution and extend the CA, for which Maoist votes are required.

During Wednesday's meeting with Maoist Chairman Pushpa

Kamal Dahal, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal turned down the Maoist demand. Nepal has long maintained that the Maoists should name a prime ministerial candidate acceptable to all, following which he will quit. However, the Maoists have been unable to name an alternative to Dahal.


"It's not about the package deal, it's about the prime-ministership. This will continue until a candidate is named," says Ramnath Dhakal, CA member and chairperson of the State Affairs Committee.

The Maoists desperately want some position in the state mechanism.

Currently, NC and UML are holding all the major positions: Constitutional Committee chair, president and CA chair. The government (conspicuous in the absence of Maoists) has nominated chiefs and commissioners of constitutional bodies as well as the governor of Nepal Rastra Bank. It's no wonder the Maoists feel hard done by.

Maoist CA nominee Hari Roka asserts that the Maoists should be given space in the state mechanism simply to balance power. But the current coalition refuses to forsake power. "PMNepal's

statement against the CA and all the government nominations say it all," he says.

So what will happen if the CA is allowed to expire? CA Chair Subhas Nembang has been issuing warnings that both prime minister and president will cease to be legitimate once the CA expires. A caretaker government will take over, after which we will be operating in a constitutional void. But some lawyers argue that the parliament will remain intact even if the CA expires. Truth be told, we haven't been here before. 

Dewan Rai

GET THE MESSAGE: The APF circumnavigates the newly renovated Swayambhu as part of its morning drill



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

POLITICS ABHORS A VACUUM

Till press time on Thursday afternoon, the politicians of Nepal's three main parties were doing what they do best: bicker on the brink.

For a while the uncertainty was about whether or not a constitution would be written on time. That doubt has now been replaced by whether or not the CA's tenure will be extended. There are few, even among the feuding parties, who don't want an extension. It's just that they've put a lot of conditions on each other, which is why things are stuck. The extreme right and extreme left are the ones who, for different reasons, would like the CA dead and buried.

For the Nepali people, midnight 28 May 2010 will represent failure, either way. Whether the CA is extended or not, the political leadership squandered a brilliant opportunity to write a new constitution on time. This was a chance the people gave the leaders through

the 2008 elections that helped establish the most inclusive legislature ever in our history. It made the people truly sovereign and brought in a process that allowed an ordinary citizen to become the country's head of state.

All this will be demolished if the CA is allowed to die, or the constitution is not written. To let this happen would be a desecration of the people's trust. We'd just be replacing feudal rulers with feuding rulers. Not extending the CA will only benefit the totalitarians, the military and militants, and war-mongers who want to take the country back to conflict. Nepal's hard-won democracy will itself be under threat.

However, even if the CA's term is not extended we shouldn't let the peace process unravel. Legally, we will still have the interim constitution and the prime minister could announce his resignation just before midnight and carry on in a caretaker capacity.

The Maoists have blundered by painting themselves into such a corner that they stand to lose either way. If the CA is extended it will be seen as a defeat of their strategy

of making it conditional on the prime minister's resignation, and if it is not extended they will be aligning with the royalists to block a people's constitution.

It is our belief that neither the Maoists nor the other parties want the CA to be dismantled when it was so easy to extend it, and give the process one more chance. The parties have 24 hours to agree that it is not important who heads the government as long as they dismantle the Maoist fighting force, make a public commitment to abide by past agreements and forge a new constitution in six months. It's a win-win face-saver for everyone.

During the course of Friday we will know if our leaders are more responsible than we gave them credit for. This write-up comes with an expiry date: by Saturday morning it will have been overtaken by events.

KaD

Engage the monarchy

GUEST COLUMN
Biraj Bahadur Bista

In the last few months, the former king has visited various Tarai towns, drawing significant numbers of people wherever he has been. It was similar when he travelled across Nepal five years ago. I remember him walking from Kupondole to Jawalakhel then. The streets were packed with people. Some addressed the monarch as 'sir', others as 'hajur'. Some asked for autographs, others offered flowers or shook his hand. Some chanted slogans, yet others were mere spectators. They represented a myriad of perspectives on the institution of monarchy.

Soon after, I travelled to Jumla and got to talking with some Maoist youngsters. They told me they had gone to Surkhet just to see "what the monarchy looked like" and some of them had even planned to throw cow dung at the king, but desisted. In contrast to rallies

organised by political parties, it seemed as though those people who came to see the institution of monarchy did not do so on the basis of ideology or party membership. If that were so, then RPP (Nepal) would have reaped the benefits in the CA elections. This phenomenon tells us that at its base, the institution of monarchy is not political. More recently, however, these crowds appear to be motivated in part by the ideology of Hindutva. This could have a negative impact on the future of Nepali politics.

The present coalition is indifferent to the fact that it has ousted the monarchy and doesn't even consider engaging it as a cultural body to build a new Nepal. This alienating attitude has led the monarchy to seek refuge in potentially dangerous ideologies. Recall the recent visit by Kamal Thapa and Khum Bahadur Khadka to India, following which they declared that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad would do anything to restore Nepal's monarchy.



Better to engage the monarchy culturally than risk it being exploited by dangerous ideologies

The monarchy is first and foremost an institution that played a part in building the 'imagined community' called Nepal. Benedict Anderson says a nation 'is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'. We are Nepali because 250 years ago the monarchy brought together all ethnicities under the sphere of a sovereign Nepal. In the minds of the people, there is an affinity between being citizens of Nepal and the institution that created it. The turnout to see the former king indicates that the monarchy's embedded identity still exists. But it would be a terrible mistake to mistake this identity for a political force. It would be wiser to engage the monarchy culturally rather than alienate it and unleash an unpredictable political force.

This is all the more important given Indo-Nepal relations since 1947. India has always played a

major role in the shifting of coalitions within Nepal, and has gained more than Nepal has from these historical transitions. Nepal's incumbent establishment has always neglected to engage outgoing or minor political forces. This failure has left Nepal vulnerable to alienated groups seeking the patronage of foreign powers. The institution of monarchy could be similarly used by Indian political forces.

The monarchy will most likely be left out of the belated constitution to come. The process of building a new nation requires all sections of society to be actively engaged and trusting of each other. In the making of a new Nepal, the monarchy should be given a cultural role to bring together different ethnicities, religions and ideologies, extending the message of unity. Such a cultural engagement would benefit the Nepali nation, and would also nullify the risk of a disgruntled monarchy being used by foreign powers. 🇳🇵

The author is a Phd candidate in the political science department of Seoul National University.

ON THE WEB
www.nepalitimes.com

GET WITH IT
I agree with you that the revenue model of web publications and blogs is yet to evolve ('Online incline', #503). And the effort seems minimal. It's lame for those who have content and traffic but have not been able to try out different revenue channels. They have not been able to optimise their content properly and thus to monetise it.

If social media is used properly it could double traffic and also contribute to revenue at news sites. Bloggers like us generate almost 60 per cent of our revenue from social media. So I think basically Nepali web publishers and blogs lack Social Media Optimisation (SMO) and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO).

Pradeep Kumar Singh

SOME IMPROVEMENT
I am happy that the young generation is

so interested in Lumbini ('Buddhaland', #503). Fortunately, there has been some development at least. Many of the workers in Lumbini are from the nearby villages. And they get rewards, scholarship funds for their children, health funds as well as compassionate funds.

Bhaddamanika

AN OLD PROBLEM
We got into this mess 15-odd years ago when the Maoists started their violent campaign ('War games', #503). All the parties hoped that the Maoist violence would enable them to further their own agendas and that the violence would have no negative impact on them. They are only now realising that political development cannot come through violence and have belatedly decided to take a stand.

Jange

BHUTAN'S LESSONS
There must be some truth to what the Beed

has observed in Bhutan ('Himalayan experiments', #503). Maybe Nepal can get some things right by following Bhutan's successful economic strategies. Like their hydropower projects that aim to generate 10,000 MW by 2020 (Nepal can generate far greater power), starting a holding company like Singapore's Temasek to own and manage government investments and make it more accountable, or protecting its environment to lure high-end tourists, among other things. We should also follow Bhutan in lowering taxes for cars, especially hybrids and electric, since we don't have local manufacturers to protect.

Fugee

THANK YOU
So many thanks to Ms. Tsering for her optimum effort on this restoration project ('Renewal: a time for change', #503). Nepal severely needs people like you.

Manoj Aryal

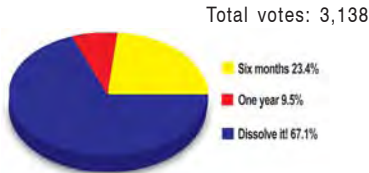
On the blogs
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My City
The steps up to Swayambhu have turned into Armed Police Force's training ground



Weekly Internet Poll # 504

Q. How long should the Constituent Assembly be extended for?



Weekly Internet Poll # 505. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com
Q. Do we need a new constitution at all?



Flex-ible



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

At the time of writing, on Thursday morning, there has been no deal between the parties.

This has not been reported on enough but there are many non-Maoist forces – right-wing parties as well as sections of NC-UML – who do not want an extension. They believe the CA has been a source of strength and legitimacy for the Maoists and provided it access to state power. Any constitution prepared by this CA will therefore favour the agenda of the Maoists and marginalised groups. This school points out that if the objective of this process was to ‘weaken and tame’ the Maoists, and if that has not happened, what is the point of continuing with it? The more the Maoists hedge bets on extension, the happier this lot is.

But their options are now limited since the government has officially tabled the amendment proposal, shifting the onus onto the Maoists. The

degree of Maoist flexibility will now be crucial since, contrary to rumours, it does not appear that Madhav Kumar Nepal will resign before an agreement on issues.

The debate on the CA within the Maoists is revealing. At the most recent central committee meeting, Kiran and company essentially said the CA has been hijacked by the ‘reactionaries’; there was no point in staying on in the process; the party should prepare for the next stage of revolution, change its line and go back to armed conflict; anything else would be a betrayal.

What is striking about this view is there is absolutely no understanding of the existing ground reality, and no alternative plan. It is like, as left analyst Shyam Shrestha says, talking about an October revolution without even having prepared for the February revolution. Yet it finds a degree of support within for two reasons. One is the dogmatic indoctrination that binds many even now. The other is the need felt by many to keep up a ‘revolutionary’ image, especially when you know someone else will do the tough job of arguing a more considered line.

Prachanda’s original paper considered traces of this thought, emphasising that the party is being pushed to a war and that the other side, prodded by India, is not interested in the process anymore.

He had however thought through some of the implications of not getting the CA extended. Arguing that it would break the political stagnation and lead to new alliances, Prachanda said that the party had not learnt how to fight the ‘People’s War’ before it started it; it learnt on the job. Similarly, a new situation will arise in the absence of extension that the party can take advantage of. The organisation will remain intact; the framework of the peace process will remain as long as UNMIN is here; cadres will get a boost; the other side will face serious political and legal challenges; and the next few months could either prepare the ground for a new deal and thus ‘revival of the CA’ or be a period to prepare for the next confrontation.

It was left to Dr Baburam Bhattarai to talk about the achievements of the past few years, and that the core objective right now was to institutionalise the ‘federal democratic republic’ and other goals like social justice and inclusion. The CA was the platform to do it, and it was crucial to give it another chance. Letting it end would only embolden those groups who were opposed to these goals, even as the Maoists would be blamed for being ‘anti-peace and anti-constitution’. While agreeing that they had to ask for the PM’s resignation and not cave in unconditionally, Dr Bhattarai stressed the need to exercise ‘maximum flexibility’ – the line that prevailed ultimately.

How the Maoists play this at the end will be interesting. Conventional wisdom suggests they will give in unconditionally and couch it in terms of protecting the gains of war and the movement. But given the internal strains, and their feeling of being under siege, this will not be an easy decision. An unconditional extension by the Maoists cannot be taken for granted.

After this crisis is over, the Maoists should reflect on their internal fractures, lack of clarity, and lack of experience of open politics and how that has cost them dearly in the past year. They should also assess the balance of forces and recognise it is time to fulfill certain peace process commitments, especially on the PLA, and reframe strategy according to what is achievable and not achievable at the moment. Otherwise, even if there is an extension, both the party and the country will keep going round and round in circles. ■

The Maoists may have to step back to move forward



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IN WITH THE NEW: A plotting development at Hattiban, Lalitpur.

KIRAN PANDAY

Urban crush

DEWAN RAI AND SUVAYU DEV PANT

Rampant real estate development, or plotting, has left giant craters at the base of Mt. Shivapuri, threatening the local ecology and the valley's river network.

The plotting is taking place very close to Shivapuri National Park, which it could damage as it raises the risk of landslides at higher altitudes. "We're very much aware of the problem, but there's little that we can do as the plotting is occurring outside the park boundaries, so is not within our jurisdiction," says Megh Bahadur Pandey of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation.

The story is the same at other locations on the periphery of the valley floor. If left unchecked, the trend could cause huge environmental problems, like the disruption of river networks and large scale soil erosion, to name a few. "At the rate at which we are disturbing the natural system, we're simply asking for trouble. The damage caused by the heavy soil movement could be disastrous. It's a pity, as the Kathmandu Valley used to be among the most beautiful in the world," says urban planner Bharat Sharma.

The problem isn't plotting per se but its haphazard growth, which is a result of grossly inadequate regulation. Shockingly, there are no land zoning regulations that dictate what can be built where. Such regulations are commonplace in most other parts of the world. "Besides some old, inner city areas, you can build buildings and develop plots anywhere you wish. There are no land zoning policies, but they are in the works," says

than 50 ropanis or any residential areas. At least three per cent of the area in residential developments must be open, and the roads must be at least four metres wide. Kathmandu district alone has issued 102 permits to housing companies. The Urban Development Committee has itself completed 12 projects in the service of organised urbanisation, and has pooled 305 ropanis (just over 10 hectares) of land for the purpose.

Haphazard real estate development threatens environmental disaster

Keshab Neupane, spokesperson of the Urban Development Committee, which is in the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works.

What regulations do exist are meagre. Real estate developers are first issued a building permit from either the district project implementation committee, if they plan to develop less than 50 ropanis (1.67 hectares) of land, or the urban development committee in Kathmandu, if they plan to develop more

There are also few laws that govern real estate transactions, leaving the door wide open for swindling brokers, who often take commissions from both buyers and sellers. Additionally, the fact that developers tend to pool land purchased from locals (often farmers) makes government intervention difficult. "Developers will buy land from locals and begin construction without first developing infrastructure. If we intervene,

they go to court saying we have violated their civil freedoms, and they usually win the case," says Shiva Hari Sharma, deputy director of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC). The DUDBC has drafted a real estate act that would resolve such problems, but this has been stuck in parliament for the last two years.

In the absence of effective real estate regulation, a solution must be sought elsewhere. Initiatives to tighten regulation in the banking sector have done well to reduce real estate investment. By the beginning of the current fiscal year, banks had invested close to a quarter of their portfolios in the real estate sector. "Ever since the Nepal Rastra Bank and Finance Minister Surendra Pandey began to tighten financial regulations in December, land transactions have ground to a halt. Ninety per cent of new property hasn't been sold," says broker Keshab Simkhada.

Financial regulations may slow the growth of urban sprawl, but they won't bring order to it. If we want Kathmandu to retain some of its charm and environmental integrity, that is no alternative to a concerted effort by land use regulators to get their act together. 



उज्यालो ९० नेटवर्कमा

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Full circle FM



FOURTH ESTATE
C K Lal

The mid-nineties witnessed an FM boom in Nepal, and today over 250 broadcasters are in business. In Pokhara alone, six FM stations compete for listeners. Being the oldest, Annapurna has built up a stable following among discerning listeners and upscale advertisers. Gandaki FM is a relative latecomer and has tried a different tack. It mainly caters to the taste of the working class and the rural audience. This could be why it is known as the media arm of the Maoists.

Gankadi FM came into being three years ago thanks to a group of small entrepreneurs.

The group has now entered print media. Their logic is simple. They started with radio because of the ease of entry and low take-off costs. This established their presence and created audience loyalty. Television brought advertisers and revenue. Going into print is a means to obtain voice and respectability in the community. It may have something to do with the Brahminic culture of revering the printed page, but there is no denying that the editors of newspapers are accorded more respect than even hugely popular radio or television anchors.

Community radio began with a bang, but its influence is now on the wane. Most FM broadcasters lack the wherewithal to produce

begins to play, listeners tune to stations broadcasting music. Audiences are not as gullible as communication strategists in Kathmandu think.

Overt political affiliations, too, have also dented the image of community radio. Unlike commercial media that have to maintain a non-partisan facade, local FM stations do not even bother to hide their political preferences. A tiny party like Rajendra Mahato's Sadbhavana faction has a string of FM stations in the central Tarai. Even in Kathmandu, where UML cadres staff most local radios, Radio Mirmire does not have to declare its politics, its listeners know it to be a Maoist mouthpiece.

Commercial FM radios too do not seem to be doing all that well. The 'national' claim of

The influence of community radio is now on the wane, but some are diversifying their portfolio to survive



KIRAN PANDAY

Its marketers soon found out that despite their impressive audience size, advertisers did not take them seriously. So they decided to enter television broadcasting.

Gandaki Television operates out of a cramped studio, but the programs it offers more than make up for the lack of physical infrastructure. The news is shown in five local languages in addition to Nepali and English. Its executives claim that they have more viewers in Gandaki Zone than any national or international channel.

interesting programs, and are reduced to relaying Ujyaalo or Nepal FM material produced in Kathmandu. Commentaries and features are taken from donor-funded and syndicated content providers like Communication Corner, Antenna Foundation or independent radio producers.

Financial assistance from donors did ensure the survival of FM radio initially, but it has damaged their credibility. Despite the gloss in sleekly produced pieces, the moment an INGO-sponsored program

Kantipur FM is mostly notional: it is merely one of many choices on offer. With the airwaves jammed with channels, listeners have no brand loyalty.

The community radio revolution of Nepal has come full circle: FM stations have to compete for a share of the same advertising pie that sustains commercial broadcasting. The Gandaki FM group has responded with a media mix to thrive in the marketplace; others may have to create their own survival strategies for the cutthroat media wars to come.

THIS WEEK

Dr Mystery

Bhakta Man Shrestha, executive director of the BP Koirala Memorial Cancer Hospital in Bharatpur, went missing under mysterious circumstances on Tuesday evening. He was last seen driving out of Chitwan Hospital, where he was performing an emergency operation, at 10:15pm. His briefcase was discovered along the Narayangadh-Mugling road in Darechok VDC on Saturday, and his car was discovered abandoned in Pokhara on Wednesday. The police initially feared that he was



dead, but a civilian probe carried about by the Nepal Medical Association (NMA) to aid investigations claims he may yet be alive. According to members of the probe, Shrestha's family now says he will return home in the next couple of days. However, much about the case – including Shrestha's current whereabouts, and the circumstances of his alleged abduction – remains unclear. NMA closed all hospitals except for emergency services on Monday in protest of the police's allegedly lackadaisical investigation, but resumed some services on Wednesday.

Make or break

It has been a make or break week as the Big Three raced to reach an agreement in order to avert a constitutional crisis. While the ruling parties want the Maoists to agree to a comprehensive deal – which would extend the CA's tenure, expiring on Friday, and resolve the major political disagreements in one stroke – the Maoists insist that the government must resign first. On Sunday evening, Maoist lawmakers Dev Gurung and Ek Raj Bhandari filed a bill in parliament against the extension of the CA's tenure under the current government. House meetings from Monday through Thursday were pushed to Friday morning in order to allow the parties more time to reach a deal. On Wednesday, the parties intensified talks, meeting in the morning and again in the evening, but failed to break the deadlock. Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal also met Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood, and had a one-on-one meeting with Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, during which Nepal reaffirmed that he would step down if a comprehensive deal were agreed on. Despite the persisting disagreements, party leaders are confident that a deal will be signed during Friday's House meeting.

Buddha Jayanti

Buddhists around the world celebrated the 2554th birthday of the Buddha this week, as religious processions thronged Kathmandu's streets. On Wednesday, President Ram Baran Yadav said the Buddha's teachings were more relevant than ever, as "we need mutual reconciliation, consensus, understanding and coordination to resolve [current] problems." A special function has been organised in Lumbini, the Buddha's birthplace.

Nepalis attacked

Scores of Nepalis have been chased away from Meghalaya, India by members of the indigenous Khasi group. Early this week, Khasi tribesmen killed 17 Nepalis in Meghalaya. By Thursday, nearly 300 Nepalis fleeing the violence had returned to Nepal. The attacks on the 40,000 strong Nepali community in Meghalaya began after four Khasis were killed by police fire during a border dispute with Assam. On Sunday, the National Human Rights Commission wrote a letter to its Indian counterpart demanding that the rights of India's Nepali-speaking community be protected.

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TOTAL
Peace of Mind

Just questions



These days, Nepal’s problems appear so overwhelming that writing a column to explain, analyse or understand one aspect of any of those problems becomes an act of quiet despair.

How many times is anyone to write about brazen political incompetence, of crumbling states of infrastructure, of the economy drip-fed by remittance and aid, of the nation supposedly run by foreign powers, of country-stopping quarrels among groups over picayune matters, of the apathy of the state machinery towards those who are poor and vulnerable, and of the future of a young population held hostage by doddering old netas who seem intent on politicking for another 30 years?

Amidst the varying degrees of politics-induced *dukha* that Nepal’s have faced, it’s tempting to put on a cheery face, wax eloquent about Nepal’s innate resilience, and continue to hope for a democracy responsive to citizens’ concerns. But with the rising political certainty that has meant many of the young and the able have effectively given up on the country and left en masse, columnists’ celebrated capacity for resilience is hardening into collective resignation and fatigue. “Let politicians do what they want, as long as my narrow personal or commercial interests are safe and sound,” seems to be the unspoken mantra of those who have given up being a part of a better Nepal in their lifetime.

We all know the answers. How about some questions for the Constituent Assembly and its members?

- As the two-year term of the 601 elected and unelected Constituent Assembly members ends, perhaps it’s better not to indulge in answers and ask these open-ended questions about a way forward:
1. If the CA’s tenure is extended, what guarantee is there that it will complete the process of writing the constitution within a year? Who foots the bill? How? How much?
 2. Is there anyone, a person or a group, who should no longer be in the extended CA if it gets extended for their stark failure of leadership to get the constitution drafted and ratified? Or, is this failure partly due to the lack of a mechanism to hold any individual or party responsible, so they can continue on their merry way at the expense of domestic and foreign taxpayers’ money, time and patience?
 3. Do elected netas even understand the importance of a constitution as a document that lays out the guidelines for all activities that are to be carried out in Nepal? Trade, commerce, foreign relations, development work, local decision-making processes – all these and more cannot operate on the whims of politicians and local lords. Do CA members, collectively or individually, understand this?
 4. What moral responsibility should the plethora of agencies that have sprung up in the last two years to ‘help’ the CA and CA members write the constitution bear? They flew CA members around the world and across Nepal to understand the finer points of constitution-making, and to listen to grassroots voices. Now that the deadline is over with no constitution in sight, shouldn’t they be reflecting on whether their resources were used for the most pressing priorities or for ‘nice to have’ filler activities that amounted to so little?
 5. When the Interim Constitution was amended several times to suit the party-political needs of the day, was it not a clear signal to the rest of us that this CA viewed its role not as one with a clear job description and a firm deadline, but one that allowed for immense flexibility and political expediency? Given this, should we be surprised that they’ve failed to deliver what they were put together to do?
 6. Other than lamely asking for an extension, is there a way non-political citizens who just want to live and work in a rule-of-law driven country can express justified outrage in Nepal?

Himalmedia COO

Effective 1 May 2010, Sunim Tamang has been appointed Chief Operating Officer of Himalmedia Pvt Ltd. He will lead the company’s strategy to accomplish its year-on-year growth of the top-line revenue of its brand portfolio, including *Himal Khabarpatrika*, *Nepali Times*, and *Wave*.



Sunim brings over 17 years of professional experience from a variety of sectors including Hospitality, Value Chain Promotion and Logistics and also possesses a keen eye for the media industry. Prior to his appointment at Himalmedia, Sunim was a member of the Senior Management Team of DHL Express Nepal.

Himalmedia would like to extend a warm welcome to Sunim.

Ranbir & John Players

Surya Nepal is delighted to announce actor Ranbir Kapoor as its new brand ambassador for John Players, the trendy apparel brand for men. The John Players New Spring Summer campaign featuring Ranbir Kapoor will bring vividly alive both the personality of the brand and the new collection.

John Players is a premium menswear brand from Surya Nepal that encompasses a complete and vibrant wardrobe of formals, casuals and party clothes. The brand has a strong and growing retail network of 10 exclusive John Players stores across the country, of which six are in the Kathmandu Valley.

Pepsi Football Mania

Pepsi’s Football Mania campaign runs from 21 May-11 July, and gives its consumers the chance to engage with the brand in refreshing new ways.



The promotion for ‘Pepsi Football Mania’ is an (Under the Crown) promotion that will run on Pepsi glass bottles. Consumers will need to collect 3 crowns featuring Didier Drogba, Lionel Messi and Thierry Henry as well as 1 Goal Crown after which they have to SMS their name to a dedicated number to be eligible for a lucky draw. The grand prize winner will win a Hero Honda Karizma ZMR at the end of the promotion. There are two Samsung 32” LCD TVs to be won every week in addition to Nokia mobile phones, Timex wristwatches and other merchandise.

Samsung scores

Him Electronics Pvt Ltd, the official marketer of Samsung Electronics in Nepal, has introduced a new campaign to liven up the football season. ‘Made for Football’ includes a chance to win a 32” Samsung LCD Television every day through a lucky draw that will be broadcast live on Avenues Television. The company claims Samsung televisions, with brilliant picture quality and a new level of intensity, are tailor-made for watching World Cup 2010.

Mobile banking

Kist Bank launched a mobile banking service this week. Two buses equipped for the purpose will travel across the Valley and in Kabhre, Nala, where clients can open an account or make deposits, withdrawals and transfers.

Dabur’s winners

Saroj Ramtel of Budhanilkantha won the Dabur Nepal monthly bumper prize from the ‘Score the

Real Goal campaign’. Ramtel won a 32” Sony Bravia LCD TV. Meanwhile, Rajan Pageni was announced as the prize winner for sending the highest correct SMS in the sixth week of the draw and won a 22” Sony Bravia LCD TV. Ten other SMS winners won MP4 players.

Weather proof

Berger Jenson & Nicholson Nepal Pvt Ltd formally launched its WeatherCoat All Guard – a rainproof formula that makes use of a unique silicon-enhanced formula – at Godavari Village Resort. Using state-of-the-art technology the WeatherCoat All Guard provides long-lasting paint protection even in extreme tropical conditions, preventing microbial growth and preserving the exterior. Get it before the monsoon!

Tranquility spa

Tranquility Beauty Academy is not just about pampering. A key objective is to employ and train women from disadvantaged communities, including victims of domestic violence. But if you fancy pampering after all, call 4420424 for details on Tranquility Spa locations.

Silver Mountain

Silver Mountain School of Hotel Management (SMSH) celebrated its sixth Graduation Ceremony on 14 May at Soaltee Crowne Plaza with a lavish ceremony and cultural program organised by its junior students.



This year SMSH sent 70 Hospitality graduates and 14 chefs into the world of hospitality. Like previous graduates, the new crop of SMSH grads will find placements in resorts, hotels, cruise lines, airlines and restaurants across the country.

Insurance for life

Prime Life Insurance organised a workshop on life insurance for social security for the business bureaus of media houses. Actor Rajesh Hamal has been appointed brand ambassador. As the ‘Zero or Three’ campaign notes, life insurance has three clear benefits: savings with good returns, financial security to beneficiaries in case of possible eventualities, and tax savings.

Sony kicks off

Nepa Hima Trade Link Pvt Ltd gets in on the act with ‘Sony’s FIFA World Cup Free Kick Offer’. Buy a BRAVIA LCD TV to be eligible for multiple scratch coupons and you are guaranteed a prize, and may even bag a BRAVIA LCD TV, a home theatre system or Sony’s latest Alpha DSLR camera.

Going downtown

Downtown Housing Company Pvt Ltd has launched Downtown Apartments, located at Khumaltar, Lalitpur. Grand opening offers include apartments from Rs 1,799,000 upwards, with 0% interest on EMI.

CG’s LG

CG Impex (under CG Electronics) has as the authorised distributor of LG mobiles in Nepal launched five new handsets: the GB195, GU230, GU 285, GS290 and GS500. Every set comes with a 1 or 2 GB memory card and every fortnight there will be a lucky draw with a bumper prize of gold worth Rs 100,000. Look out for the ‘LG Mobile Sun Chandi Offer’.



COMING HOME: Manjushree Thapa unveils her new novel *Seasons of Flight* at Ramalaya, Panipokhari, Sunday

Reaching America

So this country of emigrants finally gets some immigrant literature in English. It's only fitting that *Seasons of Flight* comes from Manjushree Thapa, perhaps the most accomplished of Nepali writers who have published fiction in English.

Seasons of Flight is the 'zigzag' tale of a young Nepali woman, Prema, whose life follows a butterfly-like trajectory in every sense of the word. She flits from her village in eastern Nepal to Kathmandu, then to a job in the west of the country, and thence to Los Angeles, courtesy of the green card lottery. She flits from her job as a forester in Nepal to restaurant work and taking care of an elderly lady to conservation again. She flits also from person to person, Nepalis to emigrant Nepalis to Americans, from her lover Rajan in Nepal to attachments both serious and casual in America. And unsurprisingly, she is dissatisfied with her lot.

The book puts one in mind of Thapa's most recent collection of short stories, *Tilled Earth*. Not simply for its smooth, practised prose and the abundance of charming, touching episodes. But also because of the way the novel is put together. The short chapters of *Seasons of Flight* are morsels unto themselves, illuminating as they do particular aspects of *Nepalipan* abroad, such as Prema's encounters with Americans ignorant of Nepal, and the mundaneness of working menial jobs to get by. But does this add up to a substantial repast along the well-worn lines of immigrant literature?

One cannot help but think Manjushree Thapa, herself prone to considerable migratory flight, is addressing herself rather more to

Manjushree Thapa's latest novel will speak to those who have sought a destiny apart from what the Nepali milieu offers them



an audience outside Nepal. The very first chapter, 'being nepali', suggests as much. Many Nepalis will nod and smile as they read about Prema's encounters with foreigners who think Nepal is Naples. But is evoking the familiar enough to provoke deep reflection on why and how people migrate?

Perhaps the biggest gamble Thapa has taken in *Seasons of Flight*, however, is on Prema. This self-centred young woman and her odyssey to seek out something more permanent form

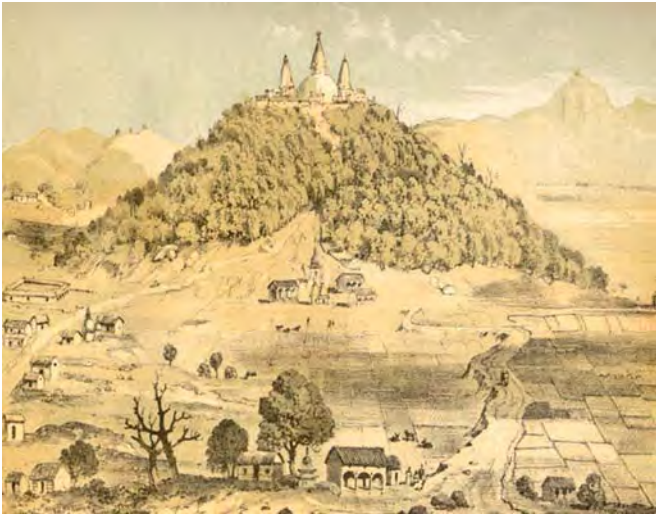
the lynchpin of the novel. Prema fills the narrative, but comes across as a little two-dimensional, an impression not helped by the stilted speech Thapa furnishes her with. It's telling that Prema finally begins 'connecting' with the wider world through her elderly charge Esther (who she cannot have a coherent conversation with) and her doppelganger, the rare El Segundo butterfly. One suspects some will admire her free-wheeling independence while others will be turned off by her self-absorption, and this empathy or lack of it will determine how readers perceive the novel as a whole.

Seasons of Flight is a serious attempt to delve into the journey of life across time, space and human society. Undoubtedly it will speak to many Nepalis who have experienced the pleasure and pain of leaving one's home behind and seeking another. It will also reach those who may have wondered, however fleetingly, what the lives of the Other in their own cities are like. Thapa manages to capture the nuances of America and its variegated social and physical landscape, as seen through the eyes of Prema. What invisible lines lie between the native and the interloper, and how fluid are these identities? As an addition to the corpus of immigration literature, *Seasons of Flight* makes for absorbing reading. 🇳🇵

Rabi Thapa

Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight* is published by Penguin/Viking and is available at major bookstores in Kathmandu.

Hardback price: Rs 638



DANIEL WRIGHT

Sandcastle city/ quicksand nation

WAYNE AMTZIS

(on the banks of the river, naked children are building houses of sand – Sarubhakta)

Dank cries, interrupted prayer, even the self-arisen stupa, Swayambhu, in *the Form of Light*,¹ sinks in on itself, though resplendent, ashamed. In the rank Kathmandu dawn as the city-in-play aspires, a nation-on-hold conspires. *Aspire. Conspire.* How the currents cross!

Where hollow spires rise from makeshift foundations, sandcastle banners lure all comers. *Get in! Get out!* before quickening sands gulp you down. Let storied sandman dollars float you away – to the promised land, to the glorious Gulf, go. Or better yet, grab a khukuri-pass to London or a lottery ticket to ride to Queens and beyond.

From rock-scrabbled trails, with far-flung stride to a subway straddled walk-up, like a hawk from locked-down boarded-up villages, glide. Then California dreaming bide your time, safe and far from gut-wrenching tides that turn here every day.

Sandcastle dreamer, quicksand schemer, take a farewell glance all around at what's been done, not done, undone – the gone paddy, the multi-tiered warrens are no mirage. The city's swamped in garbage, its rivers, scrawls of stench. As the tide sweeps out, Swayambhu, its gilded light cloaked in eye-stinging haze, sinks in on itself... In incensed dawn, at every corner, smoke coils from tires burning and night after day, the coming age, in *the Form of Might* readies itself, fierce and unyielding, as its devotees gather, torches in hand

¹The Swayambhu-purana affirms Kathmandu was created when the Bodhisattva Manjushree cut through the southern rim of the valley with his divine sword Chandrahas, Destroyer of Evil. When the primordial lake that filled the Valley drained away Swayambhu-in-the-Form-of Light was made accessible. *Nepal Mandala*, Mary Shephard Slusser.

EVENTS

Civic Concerns Workshop, a forum for young professionals and students to discuss issues of concern for the youth. *29 May, PIC, Heritage Plaza, Kamaladi, 4004016*

Paaniphoto, Gurukul will be restaging Khagendra Lamichhane's Paaniphoto for two final shows this weekend. *28-29 May, 5.30pm, Gurukul, Old Baneswor*

Saturday's Farmers Market, a weekly do in Kantipath that is rather different from all the farmers' markets in town with lasagne, pies and Mediterranean treats along with organic fruits and vegetables. *Every Saturday, 9am to noon, 1905 Restaurant, Kantipath*

Water Colour Art Session, learn how to draw and paint flowers in watercolour, *Studio Petal, Pulchowk, www.studiopetals.com*

Quiz Night at Sal's Pizza, there will be prizes and ego gratification for those in the know at Sal's bi-weekly quiz night. Everyone else will just have to settle for some good food and a lot of fun. *30 May, Sal's Pizza, Lazimpat, salspizza.2ya.com/*

Himalayan Hash House Harriers, a running club with a drinking problem, meets every Saturday to run a course around the Kathmandu Valley, *aponarch.com/hhhh/*

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

Shrek: The Final Chapter, watch the final installments of the franchise in which a domesticated Shrek tries to relive his life as it would have been Far, Far Away. *12.30, 3.20 and 6.30PM everyday, Kumari Hall, Kamalpokhari*

The Recollections of the Lonesome Traveller, a solo exhibition by Korean artist Maia Ruth Lee depicting the different metaphorical identities of the traveller. Her works draw inspiration from her many journal entries written over time. *Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, 11am-6pm, till 3 June 2010, 4218048.*



MUSIC



Darjeeling Music Carnival, some of the best Nepali musicians have their roots in Darjeeling. Pay a visit to the Indian hill station (in spirit) for two days this weekend. Artists include Abhaya and the Steam Injuns, Robin and the New Revolution, and Mantra. *29-30 May, 1pm onwards, Bhrikuti Mandap Funpark, Tickets Rs 150 for the weekend*

Paleti with Rabin Sharma, a third generation singer of Nepali modern 'adhunik' music, will make his solo debut at the monthly Paleti event. *28 May, Nepa~Iaya, Dillibajar, 4439786*

Albatross Return to Rock, rock returns to the House of Music, where Albatross had their reunion gig a few weeks ago. *28 May, 7pm, House of Music, Thamel*

Sunday Jazz Brunch, barbeque, live jazz music and lots of beer for the lazy summer afternoons. *The Terrace at Hyatt, every Sunday 12-3pm, 4491234*

Ladies Night Out at Lakhey, enjoy free shots and dance the midweek blues away with music by the resident DJ RiPS. Don't forget their Lebanese food. *Every Wednesday, 7pm onwards, Lakhey, Darbar Marg*

GETAWAYS



Ride & Rope, two days of adventure and adrenaline with a 30km bike run along the trails of Shivapuri, camping on a riverside and abseiling down some dramatic waterfalls and canyons. *Over 14 only, 29-30 May, 2111505 for registration, Rs 9,800*

Relax Package, stay at the Hyatt for Rs 6200 plus taxes for one night's accommodation for two including breakfast at The Café. Package is valid till Sep 30. Only for local residents and Nepali citizens for a maximum of 3 nights stay. *Please call 4491234 or 4489800.*

DINING

1905 Restaurant, feast on roasted delights within this converted royal residence. Though it is right beside a busy road, the walled compound has a quiet ambience and green surroundings, making it an oasis within the city. *Kantipath, 4215068*

Cosmopolitan Café, located in the heart of Basantapur, offers arguably the best chicken sizzler in town. Frequenting by famed guitarist Hari Maharjan, spot him there and you might get an impromptu performance with your meal. *Basantapur (along Kathmandu Darbar Square), 4225246*

Lhasa Bar, enjoy a beer or a splash of a cocktail at this springboard for excellent young musicians starting out on the Thamel circuit. *Thamel, 985101043*



Arabian Nights, taste the culinary delights from the Middle East at The Café every Friday. Also serves a vegetarian feast on Tuesdays. *The Café at Hyatt, 6.30pm onwards on specified days, 4491234*

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*

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, Bhagawatisthan (near Bhagawati Temple), 4417670*

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

Himalayan Java's Summer Splash, Java is known for its coffee, but it is offering a selection of chilled drinks to keep you cool in the summer including kiwi lime, lychee lime, blended orange and lemonades. They will let you sample some for free. *Thamel, opposite Himalayan Bank*



Vesper Café, has a quaint outdoor patio good for leisurely weekend brunches. Serves good salads and steak-wraps but at a trendy price. *Jhamel, open daily 11am-10pm*

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

Everest Steak House, an old-school joint for everything steak. A sanctuary for meat. *Thamel, near Chhetrapati Chowk, 4260471*

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



Love and betrayal

When the BBC World Service Trust premiered a radio docu-drama called *Katha Mitho Sarangiko* (Story of the Sweet Sarangi) two years ago, the series was so popular it was aired in 70 FM stations across the country. Through the adventures of a Sarangi player (played by Prakash Gandharba), the series delivered a subtle message about the co-existence of different communities in post-conflict Nepal.

Dilu Gandharba is back, now as a guest in a Tamang village where he meets Phurwa, a young woman who starts life with an ambition to improve her life through marriage; but her quest for the perfect husband sets her on a path to hell and back.

The last series, aired during the Madhes Uprising, explored the relationship between Dilu and Sukindar, a dholak player from Janakpur. The new series, called *Phurwa's Tale*, tries to portray the people and the ups and downs of contemporary Nepal. This year the emphasis will be on love, marriage and friendship, and understanding the relationships between men and women in a changing Nepal.

"The gap between the material expectations of people and their own reality has vastly increased over the last 20 years, and this has put people's marriages under strain," says Fiona Ledger, who developed the concept for the series. "Added to that the role of women is changing. They are getting better educated and want more choices in their lives. This leaves men unsure of their status and not surprisingly, conflict can break out in a marriage."

Katha Mitho Sarangiko airs on CapitalFM, ECR FM and on 103 at 8.15pm Friday, and on Radio Sagarmatha at 7.30pm Monday.

Fad for foodies

'Slow' is the mantra of François Driard's life. He recently started the Farmers Market in Kantipath with Shobha Rayamajhi. "People have forgotten the real way of living, and now they want everything fast," he says. "They don't spend enough time while shopping for groceries, or cooking their food. Everything is done in haste, surviving in this world has become a race."

Driard knows a thing or two about food, and the love and labour good food demands. As the co-owner of Himalayan French Cheese in Tokha, he has been perfecting the art of making Nepali cheese with a traditional French recipe. "Good food is about time. Slow is about discovering more," he says.

At the Farmers Market at 1905 in Kantipath, you can buy Driard's Himalayan Cheese, as well as other goodies from farmers and foodies like him. So far, it has turned out to be a platform for small-scale farmers to offer their specialties to consumers directly. The pâté, cheeses, honey,

jams, sausages and organic vegetables on offer are truly impressive.

"We wanted people to get together, socialise and just make the right choices about the food they're going to buy," Driard says. "The market is unique because it's one of those rare places where you can interact with the food producers and understand what you are consuming, as compared to just shopping and not even knowing what's in the food."

To make an outing to the Farmers Market truly memorable, 1905 also serves brunches made with organic produce while a live band plays in the background. Wholesome brunches and weekly shopping in one outing: could you ask for more on a Saturday morning?

The Farmers Market takes place every Saturday from 9am to 1pm. Patan residents can visit the market at the Summit Hotel.

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TICK TOCK: Leaders of the Big Three hold talks on ending the current political deadlock and extending the CA tenure on Wednesday.



JUST ANOTHER DAY: A vendor sells vegetables as members of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities stage a sit-in in front of the CA building on Tuesday demanding the CA's extension.



PEACE: Devotees dancing in front of Swayambhu on the occasion of Buddha Jayanti, Thursday.



PURE POETRY: Standard Chartered CEO Sujit Mundul (left) launches his book of verse, 'Confluence', at Yala Maya Kendra, Monday, in the company of writer Sanjeev Uprety and poet Manjul.



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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

This week's premonsoon showers have been full of sound and fury, signifying not much. But the showers have dumped nearly half of the May quota of rainfall making it a normal month. This is good news for the Kulekhani reservoir and for the early reduction of loadshedding. This satellite radar composite on Thursday morning shows the lingering moisture from the Bay of Bengal cyclone building up into huge storms along the midhills, and this is being pushed by the westerly jetstream. As long as the westerlies are forceful, the real monsoon won't arrive. Expect hot humid afternoons this weekend.



FRI	SAT	SUN
		
30-18	31-19	32-20

Circus slave

CLARE HARVEY

Ten years ago Sunita Karki, 18, (pic, front right) left her home in Itahari in the Tarai to work in an Indian circus:

“My parents were always fighting, and then one day when I was eight, Mother just left, leaving Father to cope with five children. Without her it was a real struggle for Father to support us on his income as a casual carpenter.

Looking back, I know I shouldn't have taken on the burden of responsibility – I was the youngest – but I wanted to do something to help Father. When a friend of his suggested I could work in an Indian circus, I jumped at the chance.

Father and his friend took me to meet up with a circus across the Nepali border. I was very excited, it all seemed so glamorous. Father wasn't sure, but I had my heart set on it, so he reluctantly signed the contract releasing me into the care of the circus owners.

I cried when Father left, but I was happy to be there. I thought I could have a good life with the circus.

How wrong I was.

I soon learnt that myself and the 30 other girls were effectively slaves. Kept in a guarded enclosure, we worked 19-hour days. Food was rationed and we were beaten for any mistakes we made while training or performing. Only occasionally



ESTHER BENJAMINS MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

“I thought the circus was glamorous. How wrong I was.”

were we given the Rs 50 (Indian) meant to be our monthly salary.

One time, when I'd been training on the trapeze and slipped, the trainer didn't even wait for me to get out of the safety harness, he just beat me, right there, with a long stick, as I was hanging in mid-air. I remember thinking, how much worse can this get?

Then one day, when I was 13, everything changed.

We were just sitting down to our morning meal when we were told to get changed into our outdoor clothes immediately. We were quickly ushered outside, and split into small groups of two or three girls. My group was taken to a field nearby and left there. We'd been told

some bad men were trying to steal us from the circus and traffic us into prostitution. We spent most of the day there, with nothing to do, and nothing to eat. When evening fell, we began walking to a nearby village to look for somewhere to spend the night. As we walked, a van suddenly overtook us and stopped. Two men got out. We were

so scared. We thought we were being kidnapped. We screamed for help, but we were bundled into the back of the van. Inside, we found other girls from the circus. None of us really understood what was happening.

It was only much later, when we had given our statements to the police, seen the circus bosses being questioned, and talked with our 'kidnappers' (who were in fact field staff from the Esther Benjamins Memorial Foundation), that we realised we had been rescued: our life in the circus was over.

I was overjoyed to be able to go home and see my family. I cried; we all did, it was so emotional. But things had changed so much. My brothers and sisters had all grown up and were working at the local factory. I had only just finished third grade when I joined the circus, but Esther Benjamins Memorial Foundation gave me the chance to complete my education, and provided me with food and a place to live. I'm now 18 and have just taken the SLC exam.

When I see people I was at school with who are already at university, I regret all those wasted years in the circus. But I got a second chance to do something and be somebody.”

For further information on the Esther Benjamins Memorial Foundation contact Shailaja on 5560521 or email jeeva_cm@hotmail.com

United we fall

Our leaders sold us a Ponzi scheme. Can we trust them to run the country?



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Indu Nepal

Once upon a time in a kingdom far away lived a generous king. One day, a sage presented him with a chessboard as a gift. The king had never seen such a thing and offered the wise man a reward of his choice. The sage asked for a grain of rice on the first square of the chessboard, two on the second, four on the third and so on, doubling the amount each time. The king, frankly insulted for having been asked for what he thought was a meagre amount, quickly agreed only to realise that he would fail to grant the sage his reward. It would have come to 18,446,744,073,709,551,615 grains of rice (roughly 62 billion metric tonnes), many times more than what the arable land on Earth can produce.

This is because of the power of exponential numbers, which is the

principle by which networking businesses like Unity Life-Assurance International (which has finally been closed down) operate. They will tell you can earn money by recruiting new members to the company, but not that there are not enough people on the planet for everyone participating in such a venture to profit.

The formula was not invented yesterday, but it seems too much to expect our leaders to understand it. Therefore, they did what the complacent king would have done.

President Ram Baran Yadav presented a letter of appreciation to the head of Unity Life-Assurance International. Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal presented garlands. Foreign Minister Sujata Koirala wrote a letter of recommendation hoping Unity would make its business delivery more efficient. The Minister of Commerce Rajendra Mahato lauded the creative way in which Unity was operating. Maoist politburo member Lil Bahadur Thapa said a Maoist government would adopt Unity's 'nation-building strategy' into the national five-year plan and enlist 10 million Maoist supporters as Unity members.

The masterminds behind this Ponzi



scheme plastered these recommendations onto a glossy newsletter next to images of skyscrapers so they could present the package to hapless villagers, menial workers and daily wage labourers, some of whom sold their belongings and took high-interest loans to become members.

Unity sold dreams. It said it had plans to buy 300 Boeing 747s. It was going to make Nepal fuel-independent within ten years by juicing Jatropha berries. It was going to utilise the 'wasted' hydro potential of Nepal to produce 7,000 MW of electricity. "You can join us today to earn these benefits or five years later. We are going to run the country," a Unity representative told a housewife in Pokhara. "And we have endorsements from all these leaders to prove it."

For four years, while Unity duped 650,000 people into giving up almost 10 billion of their hard-earned rupees, no one bothered to check if it had the required paperwork to conduct any of these

businesses. There are no regulations for networking business, they said, but what about the banking and insurance plans it was selling? If our leaders found it too difficult to understand how a Ponzi scheme works, they should have just tried the alternative, and simpler, strategy of not endorsing a business running illegally.

Networking businesses are not based on the value of the company; they feed off the value of the relationships that sell such schemes. Unity milked the trust between friends, neighbours and relatives. After banning network businesses this week, the government has said that it will prosecute Unity honchos. But in endorsing the company, government ministers and political leaders are already accomplices to their malicious deceit and should be held responsible for it.

Robbing Karnali



TOOFAN NEUPANE IN JUMLA

In Gargyangkot, Jumla, Hari Thapa and his entire family spend four months from April onwards foraging for medicinal herbs in the jungle. This is the livelihood of most families in the huge far-western zone of Karnali, for medicinal herbs are the primary resource of this region.

But Karnali’s herbs are only benefiting unscrupulous traders and the corrupt officials who facilitate their business at the expense of locals. Far from locals having a prerogative over the use of their own resources, they are compelled to offer valuable herbs to government officials even to obtain the quotas of rice and salt they are entitled to. Local businesses are not far behind, and will not hesitate to accept such herbs at

dirt-cheap prices in exchange for the daily necessities cash-strapped locals cannot afford.

Licenses to collect medicinal herbs such as yarchagumba and jatamasi are distributed all at once by district forest officials and, curiously, do not specify when and where and how much medicinal herbs may be collected. After paying a fee between Rs 2 to Rs 20 per kilo, the traders obtain licenses and marshal locals to collect the herbs they

Karnali’s valuable herbs are only benefiting unscrupulous traders and corrupt officials

require. At the airport, they contrive to pay only a third of the required customs charges. According to an airport official, “There is no accounting for those rare herbs smuggled out under other names.”

The profits are astounding. If a licensed trader obtains a kilo of jatamasi from collectors for Rs 100, this is already worth Rs 175-200 in Jumla itself. Even before the jatamasi reaches Indian markets it is worth

Rs 350-400, and the residue following oil extraction for herbal remedies fetches Rs 80-100 (for incense). Effectively, traders pay off collectors by selling off the residue and walk away with a 300 per cent profit. Hari Thapa says, “It’s like we’re simply being paid by the hour rather than for the herbs that we collect.”

The state has always been secretive about the Karnali trade, so it is difficult to trace the supply chains to India and China and gauge what the volume of this trade is. Jumla’s forest department estimates that 73,411 kg of herbs were extracted from the district in 2008-9, bringing in tax revenues worth Rs 2.2 million. But a forest official admits, “This is probably just a quarter of what is actually extracted.”

Nor is this trade sustainable. Ekraj Giri recounts how until a few years back one only had to walk three hours up from Jumla’s, Khalanga, to pick jatamasi. Recently, Giri walked two days to Gididaha and only managed to collect a kilo of the herb in three days. The famed yarchagumba, once abundant between 3,350-5,000 metres above sea level, has almost disappeared. Other herbs are now being collected even before they flower and seed. Mohan Pokharel of Jumla’s Department of Plant Resources warns: “If current trends continue, then stocks of medicinal herbs could be exhausted within the decade.”

So far government has paid little attention to controlling the illicit trade. Non-governmental organisations and multinational companies have been more proactive in attempting to establish their rights over medicinal herbs. The trade in medicinal herbs will only benefit locals in the long run if there is more control over collection, and if government supports and encourages farmers to take up the cultivation of these herbs as cash crops. 🇳🇵

A photograph of a man in a black tank top climbing a light-colored rock face. He is looking upwards with determination. The background is a blurred view of a mountainous landscape.

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- Wednesday - Campus Plus - collegiate life ; Appointments - careers and jobs
- Thursday - School Times - everything kids should know
- Friday - Green - environment matters
- Saturday - Property Plus - weekend two pager focusing on real estate

African women deserve more

GRAÇA MACHEL

JOHANNESBURG – Africa is again high on the global agenda, and this time for all the right reasons. As the kick-off to the World Cup in South Africa approaches, people are seeing not just South Africa but our entire continent as equal partners in this extraordinary global celebration.

So, as the world's eyes turn to Africa, we should take the opportunity to showcase the key role that Africa's women are increasingly playing in the continent's success.

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's election as President of Liberia, the first woman elected to run an African country, was symbolic of the progress of women across the continent. We are proud as well that women make up more than 50 per cent of MPs in Rwanda – the highest proportion in the world. South Africa and Lesotho are just two other African countries that sit near the top of the gender-equality league table.

It is women as well who are helping to calm tensions and heal Africa's terrible wounds of conflict and violence. Women are in the lead in conflict resolution, in reconciliation, and in drafting the legal and constitutional framework to secure peace and prevent abuses.

In the media, civil society, and in communities up and down the African continent, women are taking on major responsibilities. There is a huge amount more to do, but women are winning the fight to have their voices heard and help shape solutions and map priorities.

Education is the bedrock for progress and educated women will empower Africa, so the focus now must be on those countries, such as those in Africa, that are failing to close the gender gap. One of the major problems highlighted in the just-published Africa Progress Report, prepared by the African



Women are a force for reconciliation after civil conflict, but haven't been rewarded for their efforts

Progress Panel, is the gap between government plans and change on the ground.

Another area where we have seen little progress is in harnessing women's full talents and potential in the formal economy. Women's economic contribution is, of course, undervalued in many places around the world, and especially in Africa. Women are truly the motors of Africa's economies. Yet at every turn, their contribution is downplayed and their ambitions are obstructed. Women find themselves cut off from training and support. And they can face discrimination from the authorities and suppliers.

But it is in women's

treatment, deliberately and accidentally, by the financial sector that the most damage is done. Women receive, for example, only 10 per cent of the credit given to small farmers and less than 1 per cent of total loans to agriculture. Yet they are responsible for growing 80 per cent of the food on our continent. Inheritance rules dictating that land – and its proceeds – can be passed down only through the men of the family have put women at a terrible disadvantage.

The discrimination continues, despite overwhelming evidence showing that women are more likely to invest business loans wisely and to meet repayment schedules. Even micro-credit

schemes often seem to lend less to women than to men in the same circumstances.

Nor are these problems limited to small businesses. The African Women's Economic Summit, which I attended recently in Nairobi, was electrified by the story of a woman who had set up her own construction firm in Cameroon. Her capital needs run into hundreds of thousands of dollars. Yet, when dealing with financial institutions, she faced the same obstacles and outdated attitudes familiar to the smallest businesswomen across the continent.

In order to reach the Millennium Development Goals, women must be roped into the

formal sector. This requires innovation in the financial services and products on offer, which in turn requires that women – locally, regionally, and internationally – are helping to formulate the solutions. If governments and key stakeholders can lift the barriers that prevent women from playing their full role in our economy and societies, the future is bright – not just for women but our entire continent. 

Graça Machel is a Member of the Africa Progress Panel, President of the Foundation for Community Development, and founder of New Faces, New Voices. She is married to Nelson Mandela.

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Bangkok's lesson

Editorial in *Kantipur*,
21 May

कान्तिपुर

The street protests by the red-shirts in Bangkok have been forcefully suppressed by the Thai Army. Demonstrators had occupied busy commercial thoroughfares in the city centre, but retreated in the face of army manoeuvres to evict them, ostensibly to prevent further bloodshed. A potential civil war was averted. Nonetheless, 76 people lost their lives and over 2,000 were injured.

The red-shirt demonstrators were supporters of exiled ex-prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra,



RSS

comprising both rural Thais and the working class of the capital. The current crisis was precipitated in 2006 when Thaksin was stripped of powers

through a coup indirectly supported by the monarchy. In subsequent elections, proxies of Thaksin were elected but in 2008, anti-Thaksin, middle-

class, urban yellow shirt protestors forced the government to resign. The red-shirts had hoped to achieve the same by forcing the resignation of Democrat Party Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's government. Street politics is nothing new in Thailand but it didn't have the desired result this time around.

The Thai and Nepali contexts may not be the same but there are some parallels to be drawn between the recent protests in both countries. Both sets of protestors took control of the streets. The urban protestors were from the working class in Bangkok and in Kathmandu. Both protests failed to achieve their objective, and the lesson is the same.

Both protests demanded that democracy be broadened to include the most marginalised sections of society. But the use of violence by the Bangkok protestors provoked the government to respond with force, compelling them to retreat. If Nepal does not adopt a politics of consensus soon there is still the risk of a similar confrontation here. Our politicians should learn from the anarchy in Bangkok, avoid confrontational trajectories, and focus on extending the Constituent Assembly. As time runs out for this institution, there is fear, tension and confusion in the air. Let's find a consensus while there's still time.

Hands off

Editorial in *Nagarik*, 26 May

नागरिक

The behaviour of the EU parliamentary delegates, who hope for a serious approach towards diplomacy and global affairs on the part of Nepal, runs counter to diplomatic protocol. It is an affront to Nepal's sovereignty for these delegates to plan to meet armed groups and Tibetan refugees without informing the Nepali government. The EU parliamentary delegation arrived in Nepal on Sunday for the eighth inter-delegate meeting. The delegation had planned to tour a Tibetan refugee camp and meet controversial armed groups without so much as a by your leave from the foreign ministry. It was only through the Nepali Embassy in Brussels that

this came to light. The Tibet question is one of utmost importance for Nepal. International laws and humane considerations require Nepal to be responsible for the refugees here. Nepal also has to consider the seriousness with which its northern neighbour China looks at the issue. The EU delegation would be well aware of this. To go ahead and plan to meet Tibetan refugees despite this is unfortunate and worrying. The same applies to meeting armed groups; it breaches diplomatic protocol, and the foreign ministry should demand a clarification. The EU delegates should ask themselves if they would tolerate similar actions in their own countries. The EU delegation has, in recognition of the Nepal government's concerns, belatedly



announced that it will not be meeting representatives of Limbuwan or Khumbuwan. The Nepal government, too, has asserted its diplomatic prerogatives by informing the delegation of its concerns. Foreign and diplomatic representatives should not make unilateral decisions on Nepal's internal affairs, particularly with

regards to sensitive issues. It is necessary to put a stop to the trend of increasing foreign influence in Nepal. To help Nepal is not to interfere in Nepal's internal affairs, and finally there is some awareness of this. This latest incident has also served to remind top government officials and politicians not to breach diplomatic protocol.



Madhav Kumar Nepal: Didn't you say it was your own baby?
Pram: Constituent Assembly
Pushpa Kamal Dahal: Resign first!

कान्तिपुर Batsayan in *Kantipur*, 23 May

Donations from birth

Hari Narayan Gautam in *Rajdhani*, 25 May

राजधानी

It's not unusual to see funds raised during festivals or cultural programs with the objective of investing in social services. It's also fairly common when a child is born for people to give presents to the family. But in a village in Parbat district, it is virtually a legal requirement for families with newborns to donate money for social causes.

In Shivalaya-5, it is mandatory for well-off couples who have had their first child to donate money to the local mothers' group. The funds are subsequently used for the common good, for instance by supporting pregnant women and children from poorer households. "A newborn child becomes a member of society," says the chairperson of the mothers' group Buddhi Kumari Shrestha. "The funds are being raised so as to enable them to help the society they live in."

The mothers' group also raises funds from weddings and *lahures* returning from abroad. The group contributed Rs 170,000 towards the Rs 1.2 million cost of a five-room community building. The building is not only used for the meetings of the mothers' group, but will also host cultural and religious events and programs for the upliftment of women.



KIRAN PANDAY

Whither constitution writing?

From the start, constitution-writing has been mired in disagreement. To date, only three committees' draft papers have been passed unanimously. Those committees whose papers made the grade are: the Committee for Rights of Minority and Marginalised Communities, the Committee for Determining the Form of Constitutional Bodies and the Natural Resources and Means Committee. There remain key differences on the form of governance and the judiciary system as well as state restructuring. Additionally, there are 50 disagreements about choices of name, raising issues of political correctness, such as whether to call the conflict an armed rebellion or a people's war.

While it may make sense to extend the CA's tenure in the light of such differences, the decision-making process has not been democratic. The fringe parties have been virtually ignored in the discussions involving the Big Three. "People have been left helpless, without any option but to accept what their leaders decide. The political leaders have taken advantage of this and imposed their decisions on them," says NC CA member Gagan Thapa.

Advocate Sher Bahadur KC feels an extension isn't even legitimate since the CA has failed to fulfil its mandate. Article 64 of

Contrary to popular belief, the CA members have actually done a lot of work. It's their leaders who are mostly to blame for the CA's failure

the Interim Constitution reads, 'Except otherwise dissolved earlier by a resolution passed by the Constituent Assembly, the term of the Constituent Assembly shall be two years from the date of its first meeting.' The CA can be extended an additional six months in case the task of drafting the constitution is not completed due to the proclamation of a state of emergency in the country.

It didn't have to be this way. CA chair Subhas Nembang may have been able to expedite the process had he taken political parties into confidence earlier and


invoked certain constitutional provisions. For instance, the interim constitution clearly called for the formation of a state restructuring commission, but it was only towards the end of the CA's tenure that parties agreed to form one.

Contrary to popular belief, a considerable amount of work has actually been done. CA members collated opinions from across the country and drafted the concept papers to the best of their knowledge. The CA secretariat claims 80 per cent of its work has been completed.

UML CA member Agni Kharel, who is also a member of the Constitutional Committee, recalls that they had initially narrowed down the differences to eight points. When the political differences deepened, they had to vote on 99 issues before submitting the papers to the CA. "We should have decided on the modalities by which the constitution was to be drafted, this would have made things much easier," he says.

Once the battle lines were


STALLED FUTURE: The Constituent Assembly, which expended a total of Rs 1.4 billion in two years.

drawn within thematic committees, CA members could not rise above their parties' interests, which hampered the forging of a consensus on fundamental issues. Unfortunately, their leaders proved equally unable to guide them towards the fulfillment of their mandate. 




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Two seconds to midnight

All the tv coverage this past week of ex-kingji being chased by paparazzi in Nepalganj, and giving tv interviews, made some fellow-Asses nostalgic for the bad old days when Nepal was still a Himalayan kingdom.

Now, if only KingG was humble, low-key and simple as he is now (“I suffer load-shedding and water-shortage just like everyone else”) perhaps the country needn’t have thrown the **babyking out with the bathwater**. But one does get the feeling that the once-divine king is still looking for divine intervention to put him back on the throne.

Babusahab told his interviewer he wasn’t going to be drawn into making political statements, but went right ahead to say he was double-crossed by the political parties...and maybe a certain neighbouring country that begins with the letter ‘T’? Just like the late Girjau breathed his last without disclosing what the ‘Grand Design’ was all about, perhaps we will never know who stabbed who in the back in 2006. The Mule’s educated guess, however, is that during the crucial maharajah-to-maharajah meeting between Karan and Gyan on 22 April, KGBBSD received a



message from Man Mohan (Singh, not Adhikari) guaranteeing that if he restored parliament the monarchy would be retained. The ex-avatar of Vishnu obviously feels betrayed, and with support in public opinion polls for a return to the monarchy now in the single digits, is appealing to higher-up authorities in the Hindu pantheon.

But we digress. This week’s real story is **what is going to happen on Saturday**. What to do if the Assembly goes into a coma on Friday at midnight? Will the CA be rushed to the ICU? Will the three parties

commit euthanasia and pull the plug? Will it be revived only to go into relapse? Do they all want it dead, but are too afraid to say so for fear of public wrath?

To find out, the Ass posed as a fly on the wall at one of many tripartite meetings this week between the three leaders of the triumvirate. Here is an unofficial transcript:

MKN: I’ll step down, but only if you agree to extend the CA term.
PKD: Nope we will only extend the CA term if you resign first.
MKN: OK, I’ll give you my word. Cross my heart.

PKD: Can you put that in writing?
MKN: Only if you put it in writing that you will extend the CA.
PKD: Nope. No can do.
MKN: Then, no can do, too.
RCP: The prime minister won’t resign until you demobilise and return our stolen property.
PKD: But he just said he’s ready to step down.
RCP: We won’t let him.
MKN: Oh yes, I forgot, I won’t step down until you empty the cantonments and disband the YCL.
PKD: All right, let’s start again. You have to resign because I have to be PM before we agree to extend the CA. We also want all our fighters integrated into the Nepal Army and we want a consensus government from now on, not a majority government. And, by the way, I want a refill.
MKN: (fills PKD’s cup) Agreement first, then resignation.
PKD: Resignation first, then agreement.
BRB: (clearing throat) If I may just interject here. What if we all agree to extend the CA, Madhavji resigns and I take his place?
PKD: No way, Jose.
RCP: Yeah, no way. When Madhavji steps down, I take his place.
RBV: (makes grand entrance amidst fanfare) OK boys, it’s two seconds to midnight, off to bed. Leave it to me now.

The **Bajuwa Bajes** of the Baddie central committee pale in comparison to the trans-Atlantic war that has broken out over the Nepal revolution between the Revolutionary Communist Party

of the USA (RCPUSA) and the World People’s Resistance Movement Britain (follow WPRM-Britain on Facebook). American Maoists, interestingly, seem to be more hardline and brought out a critique of the comrades in Nepal, terming them ‘revisionists’. In commie circles accusing someone of ‘revisionism’ is like calling them the offspring of female dogs. Which is why WPRM has lashed back with a 5,000 word anti-Yankee-Maoist diatribe containing hard-hitting sentences like: ‘These infantile “communists” who have miserably failed both in practice and theory, virulently spew forth their resentment on anyone with whom they are in the slightest disagreement. Can this be to cover up their many failures and gain some attention so as to overcome their isolation, both in the US and abroad? The first and the most important problem is grasping the ideology of the proletariat, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. In this context, the UCPN(M)’s ideological development by adopting the method of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution to involve working class and the masses in major two-line struggles within the Party, provides guidance to grasp the proletarian ideology.’

WRPM: 1, RCPUSA: 0.
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