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 Ram Nath 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. “PM Nepal’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

WORLD CUP WISHLIST: No, it’s not about who wins, it’s about how they look on your brand new colour TV. Take our special supplement to those fancy stores when you decide to splash out.

Drive home at a lesser price Rs.18.49* lakhs (full option) instead of Rs.20.00 lakhs.

Ready, steady, no?
POLITICS ABORS 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 beach.

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. The people made the 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 degradation of the people’s trust. We’d just be replacing feudal rulers with feuding rulers. Not extending the CA will only benefit the totalitarian, the military and militias, 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 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 totalitarian, the military and militias.

Duration of this failure will depend on who gives up at what time and how carefully they write the new constitution. We have already lost five years of our democracy.

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Duration of this failure will depend on who gives up at what time and how carefully they write the new constitution. We have already lost five years of our democracy.
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.

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 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.

The Maoists may have to step back to move forward

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 refine 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.

Prachanda’s original paper considered traces of this thought, emphasising that the party is being pushed too far and that the other side, provided 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 it would break the political stalemate, Prachanda said that the party had not learnt how to fight the ‘People’s War’ before it started it; it learnt on the job.

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.

The Maoists may have to step back to move forward.
ampant 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 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 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.

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 Sirikachha.

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.

Kiran Panday

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

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

Kiran Panday

Urban crush

R

Haphazard real estate development threatens environmental disaster

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Kiran Panday
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 interesting programs, and are devoid of 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.

Commercial FM radio in Nepal is a relative latecomer and has turtles to catch up. Kathmandu FM, the oldest and most upscale advertiser. Gandaki FM invaded the market three years ago thanks to a group of small entrepreneurs.

Dr Mystery
Bhakti Man Shrestha, executive director of the BP Koirala Memorial Cancer Hospital in Bharatpur, was 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 Narayangad-Mugling road in Darchech 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 out 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 in 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 toward reaching an agreement in order to aver 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 the indigenous Khari tribe. Early this week, a Khari tribesman 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 Kharis 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.
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 guarantees are there that it will complete the process of writing the constitution within a year? Who will be the beneficiaries? 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. Did elected noses 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, 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 and also possessed a keen eye for the media. How much?
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 lamenting 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?

We welcome your questions and comments. Write to us at StrictlyBusiness@himalmedia.com

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Ashutosh Tiwari

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, Nepal 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.

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

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Himal Khabarpatrika
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Weather proof

Bergan Int'l & 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 promises long-lasting paint protection even in extreme tropical conditions, preventing microbial growth and preserving the exterior. Get it before the monsoon!

Insurence for life

Prime Life Insurance organised a workshop on life insurance for social security for the business bureau 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

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.

Going downtown

Downtown Housing Company Pvt Ltd has launched Downtown Apartments, located at Kathmandu, Lalitpur. Grand opening offers include apartments from Rs 1,789,900 upwards, with 0% interest on EMI.

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Reaching America

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

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 ‘ajigat’ 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 to another job, taking care of an elderly man, working 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 emigrants to Americans, from her lover Rajan to conservation again. She flits, fleetingly, what the lives of the Other in their own cities are like. 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.

Seasons of Flight is a serious attempt to delve into the journey of life across time, space and human society. Unquestionably 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, howeverfleetingly, what the lives of the others 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

Sandcastle city/ quicksand nation

Wayne Amtzis

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

Dank cries, interrupted prayer, even the self-assened stupas, 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. Aspie. Conspire. How the currents cross!

Where hollow spires rise from makeshift foundations, sandcastle banners lure all comers. Get it! 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 as its devotees gather, torches in hand, the Form of Might gets in! Get out!

Get in! Get out!

1 The Swayambhu purana affirms Kathmandu was created when the Bodhisattva Manjushree cut through the southern rim of the valley with his divine sword Chandranah, Destroyer of Evil. When the primumordial lake that filled the Valley drained away, Swayambhu, in the Form of Light was made accessible. Nepal Mandala, Mary Shephard Slusser.
Civic Concerns Workshop, a forum for young professionals and students to discuss issues of concern for the youth. 29 May, PIC, Heritage Plaza, Kamladhana, 4004516

Panainpho, Gurukul will be restaging Khagendra Lamichhane’s Panainpho for two final shows this weekend. 38-39 May, 5.30pm, Gurukul, Old Baneshwor

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, 8am to noon, 1905 Restaurant, Kantipath

Water Colour Art
Session, learn how to draw and paint flowers in watercolour, Studio Petal, Puchowk, www.studiotpetal.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, apomanch.com/ hhh/

People After War, permanent photo exhibition, every day 11am-4pm, Madan Puraskar, Patan Dhoka, for bulk school bookings call 5621393

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

The Recollections of the Lonesome Traveller, a solo exhibition by Korean artist Abhaye and the Steam, Serves good salads and steak-wraps but at a trendy price. thamel, open daily 11am-10pm

The Café at Hyatt, 6.30pm onwards on specified days, 4491234

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 Lakey, 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, Lakey, Darbar Marg

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, Kamladhana, 4215068

Cosmopolitan Café, located in the heart of Basantapur, offers arguably the best chicken sizzler in town. Frequent by famed guitarist Hari Maharjan, spot him there and you might get an impromptu performance with your meal. Basantapur (along Kathmandu Durbar Square), 4222446

Lhassa 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

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. Thamel, 4225246

Arabian Nights, taste the culinary delights of 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 Casa, out-of-Kathmandu dining in cozy surrounds with attentive service, what more could you ask for? A martini, of course. Hanarathawan, 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, jhamel, 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 kwi 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, 9841614776

Everest Steak House, an old-school joint for everything steak. A sanctuary for meat, Thamel, near Chhetrapati Chowk, 4360471

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

Duksang Sherpa, the BBC World Service Trust premiered a radio documentary 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 Phuria, 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 Naksimal, a dholak player from Jajarkot. 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.
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.

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.


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

CLARE HARVEY

Ten years ago, Samita Karki, 18, (pic, front right) left her home in Ratari in the Tanahun 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. I soon learnt that myself and 30 other girls were effectively slaves. Kept in a guarded enclosure, we worked 10-hour days. Food was rationed and we were beaten for any mistakes we made while training or performing. Only occasionally 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 had 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 houses 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 school when I joined the circus, but Esther Benjamins Memorial Foundation gave me the chance to complete my education, and provided 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 become somebody. For further information on the Esther Benjamins Memorial Foundation contact Shuliya on 5560521 or email jeeva_civil62@gmail.com

United we fall

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

POLITICALLY CRACKED
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 surprised, accepted. The sage then asked for a wheel, on which he had been asked for what he thought was a meagre amount, quickly agreed to only realise that he would fail to grant the sage his wish. 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 that not 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 Jagendra Mahato lauded the creative way in which Unity was operating. Maoist politician Mr Lal 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 306 Boeing 747. 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 had 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 muddled the trust between friends, neighbours and relatives. After banning networking businesses this week, the government has said that it will prosecute Unity. How? But endorsing the company, government ministers and political leaders are already accomplices to their malicious deceit and should be held responsible for it.
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.

Robbing Karnali

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

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 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.”

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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.

The Himalayan Times

As we put out all the stops, The Himalayan Times now comes to you loaded with Specials everyday. Spicing up your routine life, your daily is loaded with something exclusive for everyone. Easy to expect nothing less when you’ve accepted the unstoppable.
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. 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.

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, underestimated 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 60 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 microcredit 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

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 army in the face of army

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. At 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

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 of the mothers’ group, but will also host cultural programs with the objective of investing in social services. It’s not unusual to see funds raised during festivals or religious events and programs for the upliftment of class, urban yellow shirt protestors forced the government to resign. The red-shirt demonstrators were supporters of exiled ex-prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, claiming both rural Thai 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, women.

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Donations from birth

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 gatherings 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 upland women.

Hari Namrata Gautam in Rajdhani, 25 May

Madhav Kumar Nepal: Didn’t you say it was your own baby?

Pushpa Kamal Dahal: Resign first!
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 Meams 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 names, 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 NCCA member Gagan Thapa.

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.

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. 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 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 coverage this past week of ex-king G continues to be chased by paparazzi in Nepalgunj, and giving TV interviews, made some fellow-Asses nostalgic for the bad old days when Nepal was still a Himalayan kingdom.

Now, if only King G was humble, low-key and simple as he is now (“I suffer loadshedding and water-shortage just like everyone else”) perhaps the country wouldn’t have thrown the baby into 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.

Babushah told his interviewer he wasn’t going to be drawn into making political statements, but went ahead anyway. “I suffer load-shedding and water-shortage just like everyone else.”

So far, he is now (“I suffer loadshedding and bathwater.”

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