In the run-up to the fifth prime ministerial election, the Maoists' last-ditch attempts will focus on the Madhesi alliance. But Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal appears to have conceded defeat already. Speaking at the Central Committee meeting on Thursday, he blamed the activity of national and international forces for the Maoists' inability to form a government.

The meeting concluded with a decision to continue dialogue with political parties, and the next meeting has been scheduled for 19 August, a day after the fifth round of voting. “We will hold talks with other political parties to form a consensus government within the current provisions,” Maoist spokesperson Dinanath Sharma told reporters after the meeting. He added that they would also discuss amending the parliamentary regulations.

The UML, on Wednesday, once again decided to remain neutral in the fifth round of voting, barring the possibility of a national consensus government. The meeting also endorsed a nine-point paper emphasising the need to detach the Maoists from their paramilitary structures as a basis from which to move towards a consensus. The UML has been urging both Dahal and NC's Poudel to withdraw their candidacies.

This is far from certain at this point. NC vice president and prime ministerial candidate Ram Chandra Poudel ruled out any possibility of backing out from the prime ministerial election, following a request from the Maoists for a joint withdrawal of candidacies.

Despite public statements on the necessity of a national consensus to move ahead on the peace process and constitution writing, such stances are little more than strategic plays for the Maoists, NC and UML: it really means government under one's own leadership. While the Maoists have decided to hold dialogue to push for a Maoist-led government, the NC and UML have made it clear they will not accept Maoist leadership unless the party is completely detached from its paramilitary wings. Given the Maoists' fundamental disagreements with the Madhesi alliance, not to mention the more royalist sections of the CA, such a consensus seems as far away as it was on 21 July.

Bogged down
The alleged threats by an Indian embassy official against a TNMP-turned-Maoist MP have dominated the headlines this week. If true, it goes against the norms of diplomacy and the international system, not to mention civilised human behaviour.

It also provides an excellent opportunity to really think through the context of the multi-layered relationship between Indian officialdom and Nepali politicians.

The case itself is a symptom of much deeper malaise: flawed Indian policy, and a Nepali political culture which is shockingly dependent on external patronage.

In mid-2000, India decided its security interests were at stake when the Maoists acted against the army chief. The Indians helped rally all the political forces in an alternative alliance. Since then, the core objective of Indian policy has been to keep the Maoists out of politics.

Everything else is secondary. They have been aided in this task by the Maoists themselves, who have failed to assure the balance of power correctly.

To achieve this, India has had to engage in an almost unprecedented degree of micro-management. This has involved keeping the Maoists busy in various projects, punishing those who do not fall in line, managing disputes, providing regular advice to the government on how to deal with the Maoists and in recent years, holding the Maoist alliance together.

In the process, India has alienated many actors, and is accused of undermining democracy. In one newspaper (‘Following the paper trail’, CK Lal, #514), it is questioned if the rules of the citizens of one country be able to govern themselves and preserve their sovereignty without direct interference from other more powerful neighbours. Kantipur has presented the issue this way, but it did not.

So the readers are left with the impression that if Kantipur is treated better by India, it may be a good thing for the country, and should be the end of the matter. Actually, that may not necessarily be in the people’s best interest; Kantipur’s interests, that of a representative newspaper, may not exactly align with that of the larger interests of the nation.

Sadly, in Nepal it has become sophisticated, and autonomous, way to predict the future is to create it. Publisher’s Note, #514). And the best way to predict the future is to create it.

However, the move to impose some kind of a ban on the Maoists may not in itself be a bad thing. But it is also making them cynical about democracy: citizens are not just blaming politicians, they are blaming the value system of democracy itself. This holds serious long-term perils for the country’s future.

Disagreeable politicians are all saying we shouldn’t be holding forth, mostly to blame everyone but themselves. Long-term perils for the country’s future. This holds serious value system of democracy itself. This holds serious long-term perils for the country’s future.

The never-ending elections would be hilarious by now, if not for the cost. The Maoists courted the Indian financial support against the king. The Maoists then tried to get India to exert pressure on Nepal to resign and pave the way for a government led by them after the elections.

A section in Kathmandu has idealised last year’s ‘democratic alliance’ as a model. It was the Indian establishment that enabled this alliance. To do that, they used coercion, inducement, and persuasion, just as now. Those who supported the alliance cannot wash their hands of the tactics that led to its formation when such revelations come to the surface.

Individual politicians across the spectrum are deeply enmeshed in this network. They solicit funds regularly, and for the purpose of trying to buy or use Delhi or a wing of the embassy to undercut their own rivals within their parties, and in return promise to play along with the larger Indian game.

This allows bureaucrats to take the politicians for granted and treat them crudely when they step out of line. At best, the present case may make Indian officials a bit more careful. But unless India feels the costs of its present approach are unacceptable high, or Nepali politicians develop a more mature political culture, it will be a matter of time before we see another round of these kind of duplicities.

For this, the political forces that do not need violence to attain and remain in power must stick together. And there’s the rub. The ‘democratic parties’ are so mixed in属 deal during the Madhes movement. The Maoists then tried to get India to exert pressure on Nepal to resign and pave the way for a government led by them after the elections.

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Consumer Awareness Series-1

Real & You
The Healthy bond Naturally

Let us first thank all our discerning consumers for making Real the No.1 fruit juice of Nepal by patronizing it. We sincerely value this special bond with our consumers. We however request you to be a conscious consumer and keep in mind the following:

Please shake well before consuming

See the best before period & date of manufacture before buying

Do not buy if the pack is leaking, wet and soggy

Do not buy if the pack is puffed

Do not buy if the pack is torn or punctured

Do not buy if the pack seal is broken or tampered

Dear Retailers, we value your support in making Real the No.1 fruit Juice of Nepal. You are our touch points with the consumers. We would however request you to be a conscious seller and keep in mind the following:

Carry the cartons and trays carefully

Do not keep the cartons and trays on the ground

Store the cartons and trays hygienically

Do not sit or put anything on top of the cartons or trays

Do not expose the packs to direct sunlight and rain

Do not store in wet, humid & unclean place

HACCP CERTIFIED

A Public Awareness Initiative by Dabur Nepal (P) Ltd.

The Company takes strong objection to the baseless allegations made on its high quality products
Mega goes for megawatts

Some banks outgrow their CEOs. But Anil Shah is in the kind who outgrows banks. In the last ten years he has been in and out of big banks like Standard Chartered and Nabil, and he now heads the newly established Mega Bank.

“I need change, and I need challenges,” says Shah in his well-appointed new office in the former British Council building on Kantipath. With its rural banking focus, Mega offers Anil Shah both of these.

Mega has 1,220 middle-class Nepalis from all over the country as promoters, and 14 partners. This is a bank with attitude: its ideology is to promote ‘financial inclusion’ among the three fourths of Nepalis who are not banking at present. The promoters are divided into six clusters named after Nepal’s mountains and they elect directors to the board.

“People often ask me who owns Mega Bank, and my answer is: the people,” says Shah. “With so many promoters and partners no one can say ‘it’s mine’.”

Mega Bank is zeroing in on small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) as part of its mission to promote self-sufficiency and job creation, and bring value-chain dynamics into the economy. It all sounds too goody-goody to be true, but Shah is deadly serious and says a

“Save for the future”

The Rastra Bank’s intervention brought stability to the market by throwing a liquidity lifeline through REPO, but it isn’t designed for long-term stability. In the long term we have to find ways to bring back deposits into the system and a more rational control over lending. After this year’s rough patch we ourselves are in a consolidation phase, but we have a stable situation.

Performance-wise it was never an issue. So there is a light at the end of the tunnel?

We’re not out of the woods yet. The core economic fundamentals are still not in good shape, there is a power crisis, GDP is stagnant, industrial production is not going up. The political fluidity is having a big impact on economic activity, the budget has not even been formulated. Government spending injects liquidity into the market.

Any chance of a recovery in the real estate market?

Real estate is stagnant, there is very little buying and selling taking place. There will always be a core demand for land and construction based on remittances. The inflow is still there, but it is being spent on assets, land and buildings. In the recent past it became a huge speculative bubble. Real estate was overplayed vis-à-vis demand. The only fear now is who will take that loss if the market comes back to its natural size: the seller, the buyer, the banks?
and more

country like Nepal must have this banking model.

"All the stakeholders—the bankers, development bankers, Ratra Bank, the World Bank, IMF—have to get together and decide once and for all what the strategic goal of the financial sector in Nepal should be. Is it only to make money and share dividends among shareholders, or is there a higher calling?" It is clear he has made up his mind about what the real answer is.

"It can’t only be about profit," he continues, warming to his theme. "Of course you have to make money, but there has to be a nation-level goal of wealth creation by eliminating the pie through long-term economic growth. Just making money isn’t enough for us."

Shah admits he came up with Mega Bank’s slogan, which is now plastered across the country: ‘Halo dekhi hydro samma’ (from flat plough to power). But no, he laughs, Mega isn’t short for ‘megawatts’.

It’s clear he’s been pitching his ideas to a lot of people in recent times. "It’s not enough in Nepal today to say we will do what everyone else is doing but better," he explains. "That’s for when everything is fine and there is political stability and economic growth. But if things are difficult, you have to carve out your own niche. You have to do something different that makes a difference."

Shah says the overwhelming response within a month of the bank’s opening from small enterprises and agro-industries in the rice business for loans proves that it is on the right track. He has just spoken to the Dairy Development Corporation about possibilities for expansion. "We would fit the Mega model perfectly," he declares. Rural lending could finance an end-to-end value chain to provide milk to the urban middle-class market.

"Mega is nothing if not practical," says Shah. "As the 28th bank in Nepal, we have no choice but to look at this model because the city is over-banked and three-fourths of the market in the country has not been tapped, Shah explains.

Shah is one of a new breed of Nepali bankers who see a role beyond banking, even beyond the economy. The financial sector has to play a part in investment, economic growth, and job creation, he says, not just for the sake of it, but to tap the full potential of the Nepali nation. "As long as Nepalis are hungry we will never have stability," says Shah. "We now have political inclusion, but without economic inclusion there will be no future for this country."

Kunda Dixit

Glass half-full

Are we beginning to see the end of Nepal’s scripting liquidity crunch?

The Nepali Rastra Bank (NRB) governor certainly seems to think so.

Yuban Khatiwada said at a seminar last week that depositors were returning to banks, attracted by higher interest rates. This has reduced the inter-bank lending rate by up to 3 per cent, and on T-bill rates, which could also translate into a lowering of interest rates on loans.

"The rise in interest rates on deposits is one of the main factors for the favourable cash situation," Khatiwada said. He was also encouraged by Nepal’s healthier balance of payments, and now wants to achieve an ambitious Rs 5 billion surplus of Rs 9 billion. He thinks this can be done because of healthier tourism receipts, and a firming up of remittances following a slowdown in growth earlier this year.

Although the banking sector is encouraged by these trends, they are hedging their bets, and there is residual nervousness in the market. Banking experts have pointed out that deposits in banks have soared by Rs 40 billion in the last three months, but half of this is said to be the result of government spending ahead of the end of the fiscal year.

Many smaller private banks are still reeling under a decline in profitability, but industrial production has suffered because of the power crisis and labour problems. Infrastructure has potential but it has a lengthy gestation period. Hydropower projects are suffering from the interest rate hike because it was not a risk factor during the feasibility studies. With the power purchase agreements done, and only a fixed revenue source, it is a Catch-22 situation. Projects already in the pipeline will probably go through, but new hydropower projects will be delayed. Bank of Kathmandu doesn’t have much exposure in the real estate market, it is lending mainly to the service sector, and it was one of the first to lend in hydropower as part of a consortium supporting the Piliwak project.

What is your future strategy?

The mal challenge now is to reinvent ourselves from lending to deposits. The strategy has to be to bring the households outside the Valley into banking and turn them from consumers to savers. We launched our ‘Save for the Future’ campaign five months ago.

West Seti closes

The 750 MW West Seti Hydro Project has decided to close down as its promoter Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation (Australia) has expressed its inability to continue funding for office operations. The company fired two thirds of its staff in February, and its project’s license expires in December.

No bonus

The Ministry of Commerce and Supplies clarified on Wednesday that a bonus will not be distributed to employees of the Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) as the company is running at a huge loss. Earlier, the corporation announced a bonus to its employees based on profits from the preceding year. It withdrew its decision after separate government directives, following which NOC’s employees’ association halted supplies for three days. They returned to work only after NOC management assured them of the distribution of bonuses ‘as per the law’.

"The agreement...was to provide bonuses as per the law and the directives from the government and the CIAA are as good as laws," said Punamchandra Dhaiai, secretary at the ministry.

"Deport him"

On Tuesday, the Parliamentary Committee on International Relations and Human Rights instructed the government to initiate a probe into the alleged threats to Maoist leader Ram Kumar Sharma by an official of the Indian embassy. Lawmakers at the meeting said the accused embassy official should make an apology and should be deported if found guilty. Sharma had on Friday disclosed that he received a death threat from an official at the Indian embassy for lobbying with Madhes-based parties for the prime ministerial election. Sharma submitted a letter to the CA Chair Sunwar requesting arrangements for his security on Sunday.

Oberthurs

The Supreme Court has refused to instruct the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to halt the process of awarding the Machine Readable Passports printing contract to Oberthur Technologies. A joint bench of Justices Khil Raj Regmi and Prakash Upadhyay ruled it was not necessary to halt the process. Nar Bahadur Khatir and Hem Mani Subedi had separately filed a writ petition before the apex court saying the government decision was flawed.

NC convention postponed

The Central Working Committee meeting of the Nepal Congress on Sunday decided to postpone its 12th general convention from 26-30 August to a later date following the fifth round of prime ministerial elections. The new convention date has been set for 17-21 September.

Is it going to be the survival of the fittest, then? Survival now will depend on holding capacity. There will be growth and selling pressure and in the near future prices may appreciate. The realty market is caught between a demand-side push and supply-side push.

And other sectors?

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The service sector is not doing too badly.
Inheritance laws are finally being taken to scrap the age-old inheritance laws that make children automatic heirs to their parents’ property. A panel led by Justice Khil Raj Regmi this week submitted a report recommending a change in the law so an inheritance becomes something bequeathed through a will rather than through birth.

The automatic transfer of property from parents to their children, especially given the rocketing prices of land and gold, has secured earnings for some people whether they have earned it or not. It has perpetuated ‘rent-seeking behaviour’ among Nepalis, wherein people do not feel the need to think of how to make money or pay their bills. Why take the risk of entrepreneurial pursuits when one can be content living off the rent from ancestral properties? This attitude has led to the mushrooming of the ‘shutter’ culture: people simply open retail stores on their ground floors, rent them out, and secure a monthly cash inflow without working at all.

In many corporate entities, the scions of the family automatically become shareholders and directors irrespective of their competencies. Ancestral land is often sold to finance lavish desires for these fortunate young people, be it the latest motorbike or resources to record an album or music video.

In a country where there’s no state-instituted social security, surely having parental property provides a necessary cushion? However, this legal provision is usually taken as bait to ensure a good after-life than to face challenges post-retirement. The inheritance law stems from the Hindu principle of chain of command, where it is deemed necessary to hand over one’s mantle (and property) to the eldest son in exchange for smooth passage after death. As Dor Bahadur Bista said, we are more concerned about the dead than the living.

We are a democratic republic now, but we are yet to become a real democracy, stuck as we are in a feudal mindset. We say we have become a secular country, but electricity subsidies are only available to temples. When we light lamps at inaugurations, idols belonging to specific faiths guard the entrance. The seating arrangements at conferences are still the same as they were during the monarchy. The king has been substituted by a head of state, but he still spends much of his time attending religious functions. It may be a transitional period, but if we are to evolve as a democratic society that is secular and equal, we need to ring in the changes.

A real democracy talks about equal opportunities and helps to foster a society where there is a level playing field. The challenge is to build a society based on merit and deeds rather than who your parents were. An inheritance law that is based on wills rather than automatic inheritance will definitely help us move towards a meritocratic society. Will-based inheritances will also minimise reckless investments in the non-productive sector. The need to draft a will should force people to plan for their properties and investments, and convince them to put their money to productive use rather than just buy land or hoard gold. The most important side effect of this change might be that people will begin to think about how much property they should actually transfer to the next generation, and how much they should set aside for philanthropic purposes. This could usher in a new era of private philanthropy in Nepal, where people make social investments in schools, hospitals or old age homes.
Regardless of how much technology has changed the way we use information, you cannot deny the joy of holding a book in your hand as you read it. The reading culture in Nepal may be in a preliminary stage, but is growing as people explore writers from home and abroad and in fiction as well as non-fiction genres.

The 14th Nepal Education and Book Fair kicked off last Friday at Bhrikuti Mandap. The 10-day fair houses 75 stalls put out by publishers, booksellers and education related organisations. The result is a one-stop shop for a whole range of literature, sure to appeal to everyone. What’s more, there are discounts and deals available.

It’s not just a family affair. Along with local stalwarts such as Ekta, Educational Book House, Mandala Book Store and Ratna Pustak Bhandar, international publishing houses such as Sage, Rupa & Co. and Penguin have also put up shop. There are also a fair number of stalls run by colleges and educational consultancies.

“The book fair has had a very encouraging response,” says Keshab Chhetri, Manager at Global Exposition and Management Services, co-organiser of the event. “The number of visitors increases every year and compared to last year we have a few new publishers as well.” A profile of the visitors indicates that a majority of the visitors are young people and students. Although the fair had a slow start, the organisers say that there are now more than 8,000 visitors a day.

In addition to the book exhibition, events such as book launches, signings, readings, interaction programs, quizzes and workshops have been organised everyday. Friday will showcase the book launch of Mangaliko Adhuro Ka, a collection of children’s stories by Khagendra Sangrula, followed by a dramatic presentation by Actor’s Studio. “This year’s book fair is more interactive,” says Chhetri, “and we think it has helped attract additional visitors.” However, some exhibitors feel that if promotion of the book fair and the events had been more extensive, many more people would have showed up. For those who haven’t made it down to Exhibition Road yet, the great minds of the world are just waiting to be picked up.

Nepali reads
Khagendra Bhattarai of Pairavi Prakashan says, “There has been an increase in readers of Nepali books as well as writers.” Jhamak Ghimire’s Jwan Kada ki Phu, Tara Rai’s Chhapamai Yuwali ko Diary, Devendra Bhattarai’s Registan Diary, Hari Bhaka Katwal’s Yo Jindagi Khai Ko Jindag, Narayan Wagle’s Mayur Times and Yug Pathak’s Urn Ko Ghoda have been listed as the most popular buys. But older favourites such as Laxmi Prasad Devkota and BP Koirala still have a loyal readership.

Nepali English reads
Books like A Journey to Kathmandu by Laurence Oliphant and Macleod in the House by Tom McCaughhey have been picked up at least in part because of their familiar sounding title. But there are also a handful of Nepali writers who write in English. “There have many inquiries about Nepali writers who have English publications,” says Raman Raut of Educational Book House. Marjushree Thapa’s Seasons of Flight as well as her earlier publications, Sammit Upanya’s recently launched Buddha’s Orphans and Narayan Wagle’s Palpasa Café have received an encouraging response at the fair.

Young blood
Young readers have boosted sales for international authors, and no surprise, the Twilight series is very popular. Nicholas Sparks, Sidney Sheldon, Chetan Bhagat, Paulo Coelho and Cecelia Ahern are bestsellers, and the olden goldies are making deals to go home with readers.

No tall tales, please
Nepalis like their reading plenty serious too. Fatima Brutto’s Songs of Blood and Sword, The End of Poverty by Jeffery Sachs, and Freakonomics by Stephen Dubner and Steven Levitt are doing well. Nepali readers also have a taste for autobiographies and self-help books.

Kid-fit
“Parents need to encourage reading habits in their children, and not limit them to coursebooks,” says Suvin Singh of Quitera’s Cove. They have brought in children’s books from international publishers Scholastic, Usborne, and Tick Tock, and the kids are loving it.

The 14th Nepal Education and Book Fair will conclude this Saturday.
It’s been a while since I’ve read a novel that’s warranted notice for the sheer volume of its subject matter. Pradeep Swar’s Beautiful People should be commended for its ambition. The author traces the lives of three sets (and more) of characters simultaneously mired in the complications of parenthood, familial estrangement, terrorism, and prolonged captivity. The action transpires in different locales, and different time periods too – I had to do a double-take to ensure that my mind wasn’t still in Moscow when the plot had already moved on to an arms deal in Iran… or was it an all-out mafia war in Italy?

Yes, Beautiful People deals with quite a lot. But it leaves a fair amount to be desired too. In spite of his imaginative capacity, Swar falls short of doing justice to his characters and plot. His writing lacks adequate insight into the intricacies of the characters’ relationships with one other and their entanglements in

**Events**

Traffic Smart, a traffic education program run by experts with lessons on safe driving and license preparation. From Sunday 15 August to 17 August, GAA, Thamel, 4414785

Kathmandu Valley Down the Ages: depicting life in ancient and medieval Kathmandu, a painting exhibition by veteran artist Hari Prasad Sharma. Till 21 August, Art Council Gallery, Babar Mahal, 984128959

Root Periscope, a group art exhibition by celebrated artists along with a lecture by art critic Mukesh Malla. Till 24 August, Sattva Art Gallery, Kupondole, 9841241790

Propagation, a collaborative painting exhibition showcasing the works of Korean and Nepali artists. Till Wednesday 21 July to 20 September, KJC, Jhamsikhel, 5013554, info@katjazz.com.np

Lazimpat Gallery Cafe, screening of Before Sunset. Friday 13 August, starts 6.30pm, Lazimpat Gallery Cafe, Lazimpat

14th Nepal Education Book Fair, a must attend for all book lovers. From Friday 6 August to 14 August, 11am to 6pm, Bhrikuti Exhibition Hall, Tickets: Rs 20, Rs 10 for students

Weekly Farmers’ Market, a market like no other with organic and gourmet food, healthy breakfasts, fresh coffee and lots of socialising. Saturday 7 August, 9am to 12pm, 1905, 4215068

8th Annual Wine Festival, be there at Kilroy’s for the best place for a great value wine in Kathmandu. Kilroy’s, Thamel, 4250440

Sunday Jazz Brunch, enjoy a relaxing Sunday in The Terrace at Hyatt Regency with barbecue and live jazz music by Inner Groove. Every Sunday from 12pm to 3.30pm, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 4491234/4489362

House of Music, Robin and the New Revolution performing live. Friday 13 August, from 7.30pm, House of Music, Entry: Rs 200, 9849243807

Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, KJC brings renowned German musician Rainer Pusch to town to share his knowledge. From Wednesday 21 July to 20 September, KJC, Jhamsikhel, 5013554, info@katjazz.com.np

**Weekly Events**

Are you planning to buy an Automobile?

*Wait till you read the Nepali Times issue of Friday 20th August 2010*

**Music**

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Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, KJC brings renowned German musician Rainer Pusch to town to share his knowledge. From Wednesday 21 July to 20 September, KJC, Jhamsikhel, 5013554, info@katjazz.com.np
international crime, and his text is fraught with structural and syntactical inconsistencies that undermine the ambition of the author. It's only in the final third of the novel that the writing gains momentum.

Though Swar's treatment of his subject matter and characters is inadequate, he does show promise as a creative writer. Considering there are so few Nepali novelists who write in English, the fact that Swar has published a novel at the tender age of 19 speaks volumes for his future. Provided, of course, that he is not overwhelmed by superficial local acclaim, and is able to access guidance to better contour his work and lend coherence to his ideas.

Supriya Sharma

Beautiful People
Pradeep Swar
Pilgrims Publishing, 225 pages
Rs 520 (paperback)

Pumpernickel Bakery, get an early breakfast or brunch with interesting choices of bread and sandwiches. Experiment with their goat cheese or yak cheese sandwiches, or have a sip of coffee in the classy indoor dining area. Thamel, 7.30am-7pm, 4291985

Saturday @ Hyatt, take a refreshing dip in the pool and sample the delicious barbecue in open air. Every Saturday from 12.30pm to 4pm at the poolside, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 4491234

Olive Garden, mediterranean food fest. Everyday, 6.30pm to 10.30pm, 131 August, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat, Price: Rs 1200 plus taxes for veg. and Rs 1500 plus taxes for non veg. call 4411918

Splash Bar & Grill, great weekend BBQ dinner, Fridays and Saturdays, 6pm to 9pm, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat, Rs 1200, 4411918

Yin Yang Restaurant, east meets west as you choose from a variety of Thai and continental dishes. Get a little spice in your life with their pad thai or green curry. If you can't handle the heat, fall into the safety net of their western dishes. Thamel, 10am-10pm, 4701510

Forever Café, nestled inconspicuously along the Thamel streets, one might easily miss out on their hidden treasures. Specialising in a variety of steaks and stroganoffs, the café offers carnivorous affairs you’ll not forget. 7am-10pm, 470078

Himalayan Java, one of our favourite places for coffee, just got bigger, with a new branch deeper in the heart of Thamel. Expect the same excellent service and quality food and drinks with a change of scenery. Food Bazaar, Thamel.

Koto Restaurant, the first Japanese restaurant in Kathmandu, serves up 25 years of history. Whether it’s the fresh sashimi, sushi, sukiyaki or tempura, their experienced Japanese and Nepali chefs are sure to impress. Darbar Marg, 11.30am-3pm and 6-9.30pm, 4220346

Café de Newa, won’t be surprised if there is a Newari mama in the kitchen churning out chhola, sukuti, kachila and bara in this restaurant right amidst the bright lights of Thamel. Try Newari delicacies like deep-fried buffalo tongue, brain and intestines. You will be blown away. Next to Kathmandu Guest House, open everyday

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

LIGHT ME UP: Locals of Bhaktapur set fire to an effigy of demon Ghantakarna to symbolise the destruction of evil as they celebrate the Gathamangal on Sunday

KIRAN PANDAY

MOST WANTED: A man shows off a tattoo of Osama Bin Laden during the National Tattoo Conference in Kathmandu on Saturday. Over 32 tattoo artists took part in the event.

KIRAN PANDAY

Gosainkunda’s highs and lows

DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

On Aug 23, Janai Purnima eve, Gosainkunda Lake (4300m) will witness the climactic enactment of one of the greatest Puranic traditions. Before we discuss the health issues of ascending to Gosainkunda for a sacred dip in the lake, a word about the origin of this magnificent ritual.

In their quest for amrit (the elixir for spiritual immortality), the demons and the gods collaborated to churn the milky ocean. Mount Mandara was selected as the churning stick while Vasuki, the king of serpents, was the churning rope. Vishnu himself took the form of a tortoise and dived into the ocean to support with his back the base of the mountain. After Vasuki had been wrapped around the mountain, the demons laid hold of one end of the rope and the gods the other. They churned the ocean for a thousand years. But the first thing to rise from the murky depths of the ocean was Kalakut, a deadly poison. This had to be disposed of before the churning could proceed. Lord Shiva, sitting aloof at a distance, was approached. He shook himself out of his deep meditation and surveyed the scene. Then he swallowed the poison in one gulp, and his throat promptly turned blue (earning him the moniker Nilkantha, or Blue Throat). Shiva needed to cool off the immense heat generated by Kalakut, so he dived into Gosainkunda Lake. In the memory of this selfless act by Lord Shiva, pilgrims take a holy dip in the lake and wash away their sins. But just like for the great Shiva, this pilgrimage is not risk free.

Starting from Dhunche in Rasuwa district, it is best to take four to five nights to reach the lake so you are properly acclimatised. You need to listen to your body and not push ahead relentlessly, disregarding the symptoms of acute mountain sickness (AMS), chiefly headache and nausea. If you don’t have a sulpha allergy, diamox will help prevent and treat AMS. You should also drink about two litres of clean water (boiled or treated with chlorine/tablet) per day to avoid dehydration. Proper rain gear and a supply of table salt to deal with annoying leech bites will come in handy. The lake area is completely packed during Janai Purnima so being psychologically prepared for some of the hardships will help. But you will be amply rewarded for your efforts.

O HAPPy HARVEST: Women of Pakhel, Lalitpur, gather the season’s cabbage harvest on Wednesday prior to its transport to markets.

MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

WEEKEND WEATHER
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Currently we are passing through the most active phase of this year’s monsoon. Usually we get four or five active cycles of rains in a four-month long monsoon. We’re now in the second cycle, albeit in rather intense form. This means August is going to be the most moist month this year, this is the third year in a row August has trumped July for rainfall due to the late onset of the monsoon. The satellite pictures show fresh clouds marching towards us from both arms of Monsoon - the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. A persistent low pressure trough is sitting along the foothills of the Himalaya, attracting these clouds. Expect another round of heavy rain in the weekend along the foothills, midhills and valleys, mostly during the nights.

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HAPPY HARVEST: Women of Pakhel, Lalitpur, gather the season’s cabbage harvest on Wednesday prior to its transport to markets.
A season to write

Neapalis writing in English have much to cheer, but need editorial and critical support

T his summer, there have been several high-profile book launches in Kathmandu, in both English and Nepali. Readings and creative writing sessions in English are now a feature of the capital’s cultural circuit rather than the exclusively expatriate activity of the past. This year’s 14th Education and Book Fair, while not quite a roaring success, expects up to 50,000 visitors through the week, up from 35,000 last year.

Are they longgone, those days when your uncle would sit down to your father at a family gathering and press on him two copies of his latest literary effort? When English-language literature was the Hardy Boys, then the latest pulp from Stephen King, and eventually Gabriel García Márquez? The advent of the Salman Rushdies and the Vikram Seths meant little to the average Nepali reader back then, and homegrown English-language prose fiction was mostly limited to children’s books and vanity ventures. At a time when Nepal was slowly but surely moving into the globalisation, it was yet to find its voice on the international literary stage.

Then along came Summit Upadhyay. With the 2001 publication of Arresting God in Kathmandu, the Indian-based creative writing professor became the first Nepali writer to be published in the West. Accolades flowed even as some Nepalis feigned horror at his earthy descriptions of small-town love and despair. Earlier that year, to lose his hero, Manjushree Thapa had published The Tutor of History. Local compilations such as Crowward Art Other Voice seemed to hint at the talent bubbling below the surface. For young aspiring writers in Nepal, it was as if the floodgates had opened.

Except it was something of a false dawn, despite the assertions of the maturing Nepali media and arts scene. In most of the decade that followed these breakthrough publications, no other Nepalis Writing in English (NWEs) made a splash abroad. The scene wasn’t dormant: Susama Joshi, Sheeba Shah, Ajit Baral and Munika Karki came out with short story compilations and novels with publishers Nepali, Indian and Irish. Nepali-language literature, too, was undergoing something of a renaissance in print and marketing. But the combined impact of this late flurry at the end of the decade was not in the same league as the

So while a push to publish NWEs at minimal cost and effort might have immediate benefits, in the long term it will stymie the growth of the industry and limit the development and reach of literature from Nepal.

‘It’s not as simple as hiring an editor or two, or convincing Indian publishers to make better use of editors. Until the media and publishers understand how a lack of content editing, copyediting and pre-proofreading can completely undermine the integrity of a project, authors will continue to fall short of the best they can be.’

Nepal’s literary circles, in both Nepali and English, compound the editorial black hole by too often refusing to take or provide constructive feedback. The wholesale exaltation of popular Western genre novels reveals an ignorance of what counts as quality, and perhaps also masks insecurities about one’s own work. If the energy and imagination of Nepali writing in any language is to get the attention it deserves, it has to earn it through the hard graft of editing.

Exposure to the wider world, of not only English-language authors but also those working in Nepali languages (through translation), could compel a more reflexive attitude towards one’s own work and that of others. But there will also have to be a conscious attitudinal shift, whereby healthy competition becomes the order of the day, both within and outside Kathmandu’s small English literary clique. Only then will the promise hinted at in the novels of Upadhyay and Thapa come to fruition.

KALAM
Rabi Thapa

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Image 1 11
Discussing the motherland is a favoured topic for intellectual Nepalis living in North America. Being Nepali is clearly a strong identity we carry with us wherever we go, so it’s only natural that we discuss the political deadlock New Nepal has been experiencing. Most often, we talk of the absence of good governance and leadership.

But when these same intellectuals decide to return home, for whatever period of time, most choose to work as researchers or consultants to the Government of Nepal, or with international organisations. As specialists from various walks of life, they make policies and plans for the development of the country. But who implements these policies? Is it the same government that they deride as incompetent?

This reminds me of a story told by Nanda Raj Shrestha in his book, In the Name of Development. One day at a cocktail party, so the tale goes, a couple of development advisors thought about doing something about the low milk production of Nepali cows. They decided to invite an animal husbandry expert to evaluate the situation. The expert concluded the organisation should fly in a few foreign bulls to crossbreed with the local cows. Accordingly, a bull was shipped in and taken to a village, and farmers were invited to bring their cows around.

The villagers and the advisors gathered around, anxiously waiting for the bull to begin mating with the cows. But hours passed, and nothing happened. The bull didn’t show any interest in the cows. The advisors got frustrated, the villagers found it funny, then got bored and began to leave. Finally, a villager muttered to the advisors that there was a sage in the village who could communicate with animals. Desperate, the advisors summoned the sage to ask the bull what was wrong with it. The sage arrived, and whispered a few words to the bull, which seemed to shake its head. When asked what the bull had said, the sage responded, “Well…the bull says it’s here to advise—not to work.”

Why is development and growth so limited to planning and policymaking? The convenience of being a consultant aside, isn’t development really about action and implementation? Why can’t intellectuals or educated specialists be implementers, frontliners, and grassroots workers? Why can’t they work to implement their own research? If they are to count on the incompetent government to act on their plans and policies, then a better Nepal is still out of reach.

SUBRATH SHRESTHA

Plans and policies aside, development is really about action

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SUBRATH SHRESTHA

Who implements?
A trilateral agreement with India and China may be the only way to move forward together

Win-win-win

While we were busy with our endless FM electioneering, an Indian journalist was paying attention to the Chinese decision to invest $200 million to upgrade a dry port in Gyirong, a Tibetan town not far from the central part of Nepal’s northern border. Calling Nepal a basket case incapacitated by political infighting, this Times of India journalist chastised his own government for not paying attention to these huge opportunities in the north.

Nepalis are well aware of the rising economic prowess of China and India on the world stage, and we love to talk about our strategic location. But to translate our rhetoric into reality, we need to have a strategic vision, followed by a set of double policies.

For such a vision, we need to make sure our regional politics are tied to our economic development strategies, and that we can promote interests that are mutually beneficial for all parties involved. To that end, Nepal needs to persuade its two neighbours to sign a tri-lateral agreement – Trans-Himalayan Economic Cooperative Agreement (THECA).

With rising economic trade between China and India to the tune of $60 billion per annum (more than Indian trade with SAARC countries combined), a peaceable trade corridor in the middle would be a welcome relief for the two aspiring superpowers. Numerous Indian banks are already operating in China. English-speaking Indian MRAs and engineers are penetrating Chinese markets in an unprecedented way. And the idea of a trans-Himalayan highway is not confined to romantic, visionary rhetoric, more than 80 per cent of goods in the US are transported over land after all.

Such an arrangement will be a necessity within a decade or two for the two Asian giants. Also, the Chinese decision to move south-westward through the Tibetan plateau is highly strategic. In addition to having an eye on the southern Asian market, China is interested in integrating Tibet and its vast western front, Xinjiang, with the east coast. In particular, the sparsely populated but resource-laden Tibet Autonomous Region, the size of the Western European landmass, can play a vital role in China’s continuous economic drive. China plans to build 100 dams on the Tibetan plateau. It has also built a network of 25,000 km of highways in Tibet, a spectacular 4000km railway line linking Beijing to Lhasa, a 1,000km oil pipeline, and there’s

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strategic.

In addition to having an

Alok Bohara

NATION | 13

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THECA doctrine should begin.
SHANTU CHAUHAN IN NYAYAPATRA, 6 AUGUST

My parents were kamaiyā bonded labourers. In fact, all 11 family members worked as slaves at our landlord’s house from dawn to dusk, starved and neglected. Our parents used to collect gava (young banyan leaves) from the wild and gave them to us without any food.

I was born in 1980, in Laxmipur VDC, Dang. The western Tarai districts had a custom of trading Tharu people, like animals, as kamaiyas. We had a makeshift hut in Dandaga. I had six sisters and three brothers, who were already working as kamaiyas. My sisters lived at the landlord’s. My parents were kamaiya: bonded labourers. In fact, all 11 family members worked as slaves at our landlord’s house from dawn to dusk, starved and neglected. We would often take gruel with a lot of salt as dinner and sometimes went without any food.

I was bought at the age of eight. While other children were celebrating Maghi, I was being separated from my parents. It was the end of life for poor Tharus, in mid-January, but it’s only for the rich. It was the end of life for poor Tharus, in mid-January, but it’s only for the rich. It was the end of life for poor Tharus, in mid-January, but it’s only for the rich.

Death threats

Sangita, 9 August

A gang of scavengers recently issued death threats against the prime minister, the president, the justices of the Supreme Court, government officials and the media. It seems contempt of court on the part of Charles Sobhraj’s defense team has received more attention.

A while back, Unity Life International operatives were detained by the police, though some of the main players involved, including Kasi Prasad Gurung ( prz) and Binam Koirala, remained large. On 22 July, a joint bench of the Supreme Court ruled that the company had been operating illegally, and instigated the concerned authorities to take necessary actions. Unity Life subsequently struck down.

Two weeks ago, an organization named the Nationalist Unity Front issued a press statement physically threatening a whole range of individuals involved in the exposure and closure of Unity Life International. The Nepali Bar Association strongly condemned the front, noting that “death threats against Chief Justice Ram Prasad Shrestha and Justices Balkram KC, among others, has ridiculed the idea of rule of law.

Dalit disgrace

Manika Jha in Rajprath, 11 August

Janakpur: The people of the Dom community of Harshipur-3, Dhanusa district, are prevented from using water sources as they are considered lower caste. Surprisingly, they are not discriminated against by non-Dalits but other Dalit communities. The Chamur and Mushahar communities consider Doms to be lower caste and have prevented them from accessing water sources in the village. This has made the life of the Dom community very difficult.

There are two wells here, but Doms are beaten up if they even touch them, says Surendra Malik, a member of the only remaining Dom household in the village. Two years ago, there were five Dom households in the village. Members of two households died due to lack of water and two company of his own. Now his company, Alkhanic Technical Training, employs 80 Nepalis, including 20 from Argakhanchi.

Khanal is from a simple family but has decided to use half of his savings to build this old age home. He will spend about Rs 15 million for the purpose. The 30-room building has provisions for eating, studying, playing and a room for religious purposes as well. The expenses of the home will be managed through a trust. The building is now almost complete.

Khanal has been donating his earnings for other social purposes as well. In addition to giving scholarships to students with financial problems, he has helped build a school and a temple.

Free of bondage

Shantu Chauhan in Nyayapatra, 6 August

was painful, because even if I had had other children where celebrating Maghi, I was being separated from my parents. It was the end of life for poor Tharus, in mid-January, but it’s only for the rich. It was the end of life for poor Tharus, in mid-January, but it’s only for the rich.

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Bhim Chapagai in Naya Patrika, 8 August

The milk farmers of Ilam have earned more than Rs 1.8 billion this fiscal year. They have sold 90,267 metric tonnes of cow and buffalo milk. Forty per cent of the total milk production for the eastern region comes from Ilam.

More residents of Ilam have taken up this occupation because there is a lucrative market for milk. Dhak Bahadur Karki of the Regional Directive of Animal Services says, “6001 people are currently involved in this profession from 247 animal husbandry groups.” In addition, there are another 33,000 farmers who operate independently. Those involved commercially in this sector sell milk at collection centres set up by the Dairy Development Corporation (DDC), while the Milk Distribution Project in Biratnagar refrigerates the collected milk.

The many government and private cheese factories, confectionaries and private dairies are also buyers of the milk produced. While the local price is Rs 12 per litre, the collection centres and the factories pay a rate of Rs 30 to the farmers. Nirmala Adhikari of Panchakanya VDC has one cow, and she sells 25 litres of milk a day. She says that her income from milk is higher than that from ginger, broom grass, potatoes or tea farming. She has been using the money to educate her children. Farmers in Ilam sell on average between 5 to 40 litres of milk a day.

The DDC has announced prizes to encourage the collection of high quality milk. Birkha Bahadur Tamang, one of the winners, says that investment in high quality food for cows is worth the quality of milk produced. DDC has six milk collection centres in the district, which collect 40,000 litres of milk everyday.

Interview with Baburam Bhattarai in Nagarik, 10 August

Nagarik: What is the reality of your meeting with Indian emissary Shyam Saran?

Baburam Bhattarai: He was the foreign secretary of India when the 12-point agreement was signed and the Indian ambassador to Nepal before that. It’s natural for him to meet those he knew then. I played an important role in the peace process and interim constitution writing. Chairman Prachanda was at the centre of leadership but I used to lead the talks team in practice. Although Saran came on the eve of the PM election, his concern was the peace process. He expressed his concerns about the peace process with me, and then separately with chairman Prachanda.

Did the party arrange separate meetings with Saran?

That’s right. It was the party’s decision, and I briefed them afterwards. I was taken aback by the comments made by an individual; it is also against party discipline.

Are you saying the party should take action against Barshaman Pun?

Naturally, it is a subject of discussion in the party. It is vicious to speak like that, I call it an infant child disorder, like Lenin used to say. I don’t want to give it much importance. What could be more childish than distorting the truth?

Your chairman is running for prime minister under a majority system while you support a national consensus government. But your meeting with Saran has been viewed as an attempt on your part to become prime minister.

This is a false and baseless allegation. Peace and the constitution are the needs of the hour. All energy should be concentrated on constitution writing and institutionalising past achievements; for this a consensus government is inevitable. As the biggest party, we should get the leadership of a national unity government. The process now is a majority system but the ultimate goal is a national consensus government. I am in line with the party line.

What is the way out then?

With the failure of the fourth election, we have decided to initiate an attempt for consensus. We proposed the withdrawal of our candidacies to the NC on Monday morning.

What did the NC say?

Ram Chandra Poudel did not really respond; he gave us a wishy-washy answer.
Nothing happened this week

News channels broadcasting the PM elections live from the Great Hall of the Pipal, four times in a row, have decided to ignore future rounds and switch back to their regular programming of music video call-in shows. At this rate, no one is going to give a dam. The elections will go on for the next 15 years, and the 2,717th round will be the last because then both candidates will have died of old age.

Anyway, as a service to its loyal readers and royal leaders, the Ass has here a brief summary of the strategies of the main parties as of presstime Thursday:

Kangressis: Try to woo the UML under the banner of a 'democratic front', failing which call everyone an 'obstructionist'. NC is too busy with preparations for its district party convention anyway to worry about something as inconsequential as prime ministerial elections and every kangressi neta worth his salt is shooting his mouth off. Funnily enough, it is Chakra ‘Revolver’ Bastola who has come up with the idea of a revolving prime ministership. Meanwhile Lionheart is licking his chops because Poodle doesn’t stand a chance. The Kangressis have a cunning plan: they have no plan. The Ass’ prognosis is that RCP will be so bored he will fall asleep and forget to vote for himself on Tuesday.

Baddies: PKD is still gunning for a majority by hook or by crook (mostly by crook). But he is realistic enough to know it may not happen. He is now settling for ‘Plan D’, which is to convince RCP to jointly withdraw their candidatures, then nominate Jhallu Kamred for the post. This way he assassinates two birds with one stone: gets his lapdog to be PM and bags key ministries, but (much more importantly) he sabotages BRB’s chance of being a consensus candidate in a Maoist-led govt. Which is why PKD is busy trying to cajole, arm-twist, sweet-talk, seduce RCP to step down with him. Ass’ prognosis is that PKD is headed for the Gulag.

Eh-maleys: The CentCom is veering towards backing JNK’s consensus candidacy if for no other reason than the fact that key netas will get to be ministers. The Oily faction has been reduced to writing notes of dissent. The eh-maleys know their party is in a heads-we-lose-tails-they-win situation: the party will be ripped apart whether it joins the Baddies or the Kangressis. Ass’ prognosis: who gives a rat’s butt?

Now that New York’s bars have started serving celebrity cocktails named after Mel Gibson and Lindsay Lohan, a local barfly proposes the following cocktails for Kathmandu’s watering holes:

**Awesomene Bipolar** (Mao Tai + tomato juice + Tabasco, stirred with a dynamite stick)

**Suzie Sling** (jigger of arrack + schnapps, shaken, not stirred)

**Cuba Libre Baburam Slammer** (seabuckthorn + Marmelos + Coke)

**Floor Crosser** (arrack + nimbu pani + cocktail onion)

**Royal Sunset** (Famous Grouse + kalo pad-art)

Just when Kingji thought he had laundered his image and regained his popularity, both his son and son-in-law are causing him grief. Sonny boy is back from ‘Spore and following Daddy’s footsteps to Birganj and other places, undoing many regained royal brownie points. Then he gives a no-hold-barred interview to a UML mouth-organ in which he calls for ‘new thinking’ about the country’s future. If this was still a monarchy the Ass would have said the young clown prince is in a hurry to be king. Then, in true royal tradition, both father and son were embarrassed by Raj Budder joining the Junta Dull and the very next day spending the night in the can after a drunken brawl at the Hack & Yeti.

So the two presidents never did get to meet. Bureaucrats at the MoF put in a request for the visiting president of the Asian Development Bank to meet President Ram Baran last month, but it was shot down by none other than the Financial Minister Com Suren, who said “there was no need” because it would “supersede” his meeting with a lameduck prime minister.

A news item buried in the inside pages of a daily this week that read ‘Judge grilled’ got the Ass thinking about various ingenious ways to actually grill a judge. The Donkey risks a contempt of court suit by printing the suggestions received from friends:

- judge skewered horizontally over a simmering charcoal bed
- judge grilled a la shwarma
- judge coated lightly with bhalmas ko tel and turned slowly as flames leap up and sizzle the skin

ass(at)nepalitimes.com