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Curtain raiser

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T

he most uncertain part of the uncertainty over 28 May is not that we won’t have a constitution (we will probably have a stopgap draft and extend the CA’s term by six months just to buy time). The real danger will be how to manage the expectations of people who are impatient for buy time). The real danger will be how to manage instability and public apathy.

If you really get down to it, except for the politically-inclined in the capital and the district capitals, the majority of Nepal’s couldn’t be bothered whether a constitution is written by 28 May, or of what kind. Talk to the tens of thousands waiting cheek-to-jowl to apply for jobs in South Korea (see p2) and the common refrain is: “Who cares?”

What a majority of Nepalis want is to be left in peace, to earn enough at home so they don’t have to sacrifice their dignity and pride to work in dirty, dangerous and difficult jobs in the desert. They want to earn enough to feed their families, send children to school and have affordable health care.

The delayed constitution-drafting process opens up a Pandora’s box of issues from ethnicity-based federalism to state structure, and leaves them in open-ended limbo. Most countries have ethnic groups with constitutions, but have institutions to manage them and address long-standing injustices and discrimination. We are now having to deal with the demands of 103 ethnic groups and 93 languages at a time of acute political volatility, to deal with the demands of 103 ethnic groups and 93 languages at a time of acute political volatility, to manage them and address long-standing

Instability and public apathy.

The risk is that in a vacuum of a constitutionless polity, virulent multi-ethnic violence will replace the class war that ended in 2006. All the precursors are in place: political fluidity, the lack of visionary and hopelessness about the future, and an unresolved peace process that is now just a ceasefire.

It is plain to see that power, resources and salaried government jobs are monopolised by a few ethnic and caste groups. The Maoists articulated the grievances of the marginalised and successfully channelled it for recruitment during the war. In the 2008 elections, they charismatised it again. This time to get votes. Most Nepalis who don’t know about how Lenin and Mao used ethnic autonomy not to devolve power but to centralise it through totalitarian state systems were easily duped.

Now, identity politics has become too hot even for the Maoists to handle. All four militant-minded ethnically-defined groups that exist today splintered off from the Maoists because they didn’t find the party radical enough. There could be more. The Bahun-dominated Maoist leadership can’t put the genie back into the bottle and donor-supported ethnic pressure groups have replaced political parties as sabre-rattling agenda setters. A morally-bankrupt political class is swayed by those who have the most radical slogans. By default, the agenda for identity politics today is being set by NGOs not by the elected representatives of the people.

It is imperative for the main political parties to analyse where ethnicity-based federalism will take us. This needs to be done before the Constituent Assembly, not in the streets with strikes enforced by violence and terror. It is the instability at the centre just going to be multiplied by 14 with added sectarian and communal flavour? Already, we see overlapping territorial claims over proposed provinces. Ethnic groups themselves have split into sub-groups, all clamouring for their own province. Maybe it is as just as well we don’t have to decide all this in a hurry before 28 May. A delayed constitution is better than a fatally flawed and undemocratic constitution.

**ONE MORE MONTH**

This country is too important and unique and beautiful to be lost to the madness of a few megalomaniacs, murderers and liars ('One month to go' - Editorial, #551). I suppose the events of the past few years, they will result in:

- Discredited leadership
- Destroyed credibility of the state
- Destruction of the basic faiths which form the basis of a nation
- Brokendown economy
- Destroyed momentum of economic growth
- Lost intellectual capital
- Muffled voices of reason against the overwhelming cacophony of populist incitement
- Quality of political participation is limited to hoodlums now
- The present system, and from the voices we hear, the coming system's inability to instinctively and reflexively adapt to change.

- The lunatic fringe being gated into the fold because of the weakness of the gatekeepers of sanity
- Victimhood gaining currency as the symbol of new virtue and goodness
- The global media may have turned its back on the Bhutanese refugee situation, but the United States of America has not. After 15 years of Bhutanese government obstruction of the basic human rights of their Nepali-speaking citizens, the US led an international humanitarian effort that has led to third-country resettlement for tens of thousands of displaced Bhutaneses, those who want to move on with their lives in a new setting. The vast majority of those resettlements have been to the USA. While it is very unfortunate that the government of Bhutan has refused to recognise their legal obligations to let their own citizens return, the American action means a new and hopefully brighter future for many who would otherwise still be languishing in refugee camps.

**GETTING NOWHERE**

Its time to change the slogan of Nepal Tourism Year ('Getting nowhere', #551) to "I dare you to visit Nepal." "Are you man enough to visit Nepal?"

**GROSS NATIONAL SHAAME**

Yes, Bhutan ranks first in terms of Gross National Shame. No civilised country would otherwise still be languishing in refugee camps. The Global media has turned its back on the Bhutanese refugee situation, but the United States of America has not. After 15 years of Bhutanese government obstruction of the basic human rights of their Nepali-speaking citizens, the US led an international humanitarian effort that has led to third-country resettlement for tens of thousands of displaced Bhutaneses, those who want to move on with their lives in a new setting. The vast majority of those resettlements have been to the USA. While it is very unfortunate that the government of Bhutan has refused to recognise their legal obligations to let their own citizens return, the American action means a new and hopefully brighter future for many who would otherwise still be languishing in refugee camps.

**GET FACTS STRAIGHT**

No point in blaming the president ('Get the facts straight', Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites. The facts straight’, Ashutosh Tiwari, #551). When a researcher assures you, he believes the result of several other authors who he cites.
This nation survives on the money sent back by the same people whom it has failed to provide for as fundamental rights. It is ironic that this nation survives on the money sent back by the same people whom it has failed to provide for. The strategy of successive governments has been to manage Nepal’s growing unemployment with mass exodus, not just of the working population but the critical mass that keeps a check on the political leadership.

Thousands of Nepali men and women, youths and adults alike, flock to apply for Korean language tests at three centers in the capital this week, in hopes of being recruited for South Korean jobs. An estimated 60,000 are applying for 7,100 vacancies from Nepal in the 3D category: dirty, dangerous and difficult.

The daily queues for passports at the Foreign Ministry and the huge lines of people at the four venues indicate that despite reports of exploitation, cheating by middlemen, low pay and hardships, Nepalis are more desperate than ever to get out of here.

“Bideshinu rahar hoina, badhyata ho,” sums up Surya Man Lama, 21, a private-college graduate. That is the general refrain up and down the line: we don’t like to go abroad, we are forced to. Lama says there is no reason to stay back because he sees his seniors loitering in the neighborhood unable to find jobs.

Over at the Labour Department, an official seemed encouraged that there were new job openings for Nepalis in South Korea: “The labour laws are better in South Korea than in the Gulf countries, which is why we have taken the initiative to provide youths with opportunities for employment.”

According to 2011 ILO report, almost 40 per cent of Nepal’s population will come of working age in the next 15 years. But the government looks more eager to drive them out instead of providing them with work and security at home. Article 18 of Nepal’s interim constitution defines rights to employment and social security for all citizens as fundamental rights. It is ironic that this nation survives on the money sent back by the same people whom it has failed to provide for. The strategy of successive governments has been to manage Nepal’s growing unemployment with mass exodus, not just of the working population but the critical mass that keeps a check on the political leadership.

From a carpet-exporting and rice-producing nation, we have become traffickers of our own people. Nepali women who go abroad to work as domestics are often subjected to abuse and forced into prostitution while young men recruited as security guards by “manpower” companies often find themselves smuggled into war zones in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Five hundred Nepalis fly out everyday from TIA to work in foreign countries. No one has ever counted the numbers who go overland to India. Around 20 per cent of Nepal’s population work abroad at any given time. Their meagre savings (because few earn what they are promised by the middlemen in Kathmandu) barely pay for the money they invested to go abroad. So they are forced to stay until they salvage their outlaw.

It has become fashionable these days to talk of peace and the constitution, as if writing the constitution in time or finding a way to integrate the armies will resolve the problems that are forcing the tens of thousands of people in the queues to flee the country. The plight of Nepal’s youth is not just a result of existing political stalemate but a by-product of consistently bad politics in the last two decades of democracy.

Most of these young men and women are from the districts, farmers who till the foundation of the New Nepal that our political leadership has been ranting on about.

It’s tempting to say: last one out turns off the lights. But there are no lights to turn off.

Lost to the land

Lost to the land

BY THE WAY

Anurag Acharya

nepalitimes.com

Helping workers abroad, #552

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An investor-friendly Nepal

Suraj Vaidya was elected president of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) last month. Vaidya, whose slogan was ‘Change for Prosperity’, talked with Nepali Times on what changes he intends to lead in the private sector.

Nepali Times: What are your priorities for FNCCI?
Suraj Vaidya: Our first priority is to develop a private sector-driven economic agenda within six months. The agenda will be approved by the political parties and then we will work with the bureaucrats to implement it. Secondly, we want to be pro-actively involved with the government in resolving the energy crisis. Regarding labour issues, we want to partner with the trade unions and develop on the recent landmark 11-point agreement. Our focus will be to look at productivity when deciding on wages and to provide social security with flexibility. During the three years’ time we want to brand Nepal as an investment opportunity, especially for our growing neighbours. The bottom line objective will be for FNCCI to be of service to our members.

How are you going to make Nepal investor-friendly with load shedding, militant unionism and extortion?
Opportunities for investment are greater because when things are tough, the government is more willing to cooperate and give incentives to investors. Our government needs to realise that we have to be more competitive than other countries in what we offer to investors. The trade unions are aware that everyday 500-1000 people migrate for employment and that the environment has to improve if they want to secure jobs. But what sort of investment incentives can we offer when things are so bad?
The government needs to look at the kind of incentives that south Asian countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India offer in terms of tax drawbacks, excise and VAT reduction. We have to put the nation first. We have to change our focus from short-term gain to long term benefits and make the risk worth it. The budget should be a development program rather than revenue driven program.

What is the way out of this burgeoning balance of payments deficit with India?
India is growing at an enormous rate and our trade with India is large. We especially need to look at what we can export to India and focus on niche markets. Agriculture, herbal products, energy, water management are some of the areas that Nepal can be competitive in. We also have opportunities in developing the service sector for the Indian market. One area that Nepal has unique opportunity in is creating a trade route between India and China, we have to take advantage of our geographic position.
Ramesh Shrestha, owner of a cyber café in Tahachal, has his shutters pulled down half the time even on a weekday. His generator sits silently in a corner: the petrol shortage has removed his safety net against load-shedding. He often uses the weekend to queue for petrol or search for cooking gas, but mostly returns home empty-handed as these too are running dry.

Shrestha is certainly not the only one whose business has been severely affected by the energy crisis. Major industries have experienced a hike in their costs of operation last quarter. Two out of 10 biscuit factories in Sunsari and Morang have closed due to the staggering cost of raw materials, while energy cuts have made it impossible for them to compete against cheap imports.

Fuel shortages have curbed half of the city’s public transportation. A manager of a five-star hotel in Kathmandu argues: “I cannot compromise the quality of our hotel’s service even when there are 16 hours of load-shedding. And this in the end can increase our cost of operations by four times.” His hotel spends Rs 7 million a month to buy extra diesel.

Increasing costs could be managed if only companies were able to maintain their sales. But every seller is also a buyer, and with high costs eating away household income, consumers are only window shopping. Most retailers (except, perhaps, those selling batteries, inverters and generators) admit that sales have slid down by at least 20 to 30 per cent in the last few months. Why would anyone purchase a new car knowing that it takes hours to fill a tank? And what’s the point of television ads when viewers can’t tune-in? The ripple effect on the purchasing pattern of the consumer has resulted in slumped sales, and a deep depression among traders and manufacturers.

The situation, coupled with political instability and expectations of bandas this month, dampens economic motivation in the country. Businesses lose incentive to compete when the state fails to provide and maintain basic infrastructure.

Precautionary measures must be taken before the country slips into a serious case of stagflation, when the rate of inflation exceeds economic growth. Within two months our 3-billion-rupee credit line with Indian Oil will be exhausted and we will be in the soup again. This winter, no new big power plants will be added and demand will have risen, so look out for only four hours of power a day.

Nepalis understand that a long-term solution lies in hydropower potential. But we also know that the government’s ambitions to generate 2500 MW of electricity by 2015 can only be met with political stability and open investments in the sector. There are few signs of that happening.

Save up
Syakar Company is doling out discounts of Rs 5000 to Rs 8000 on Shine, Stunner, CB Unicorn, CB Twister and CB Unicorn Dazzler motor cycles under its Honda Grand scheme, available at all Honda showrooms.

Fair and golden
Fair and Lovely is offering 10 gold coins and 15 mobile phones every week on the purchase of 25g and 50g packs of Fair & Lovely Max Fairness, Ayurvedic and Multivitamin. Buyers can participate by sending an SMS to 7733 with the 8-digit code printed at the bottom of the pack. Bumper prizes include Bajaj Pulsar 220cc F and TVS Wego.

All in
Alastair Timothy from New Baneshwor, has won the first prize of the ‘AllOut Ghareful Offer’ by SC Johnson, makers of AllOut, Baygon and Mr. Muscle products. Timothy is taking home a 21” television, a refrigerator, a microwave oven, a DVD player and a food processor.

Second generation
International Marketing Services launched the Samsung Corby II. Specs include 3.14-inch TFT-LCD display screen, a 2 mega pixels camera and WiFi capability.

Growing NMB
NMB Bank announced its financials for the third quarter of this fiscal year. The bank has earned a pre-tax profit of Rs 252.5 million, with 69 per cent growth.
Who cares? When those with responsibility behave irresponsibly

Just when one thought that our battered political parties could do without another round of unsavoury episodes, we have had more last week and the one before that. These come after the arrest of lawmakers from MPRF and Nepali Janata Dal on allegedly tampering and selling their diplomatic passports, the trial of a UML parliamentarian for taking bribe, the nabbing of an NC Constituent Assembly member in a gambling den in recent days due to lack of treatment and attention. This is not just irresponsible, it is criminal misconduct.

The dispute at the hospital is about who should be the next executive director of and have access to its resources (read: cash). Doctors came to Kathmandu to lobby for their appointment. The previous executive director, Bhakta Man Shrestha and the temporary incumbent Laxmi Narayan Singh are seeking, and getting, the blessings of their respective political backers—patients be damned. Both Shrestha and Singh should be removed.

Ambassador Ansari, a UML cadre, was already involved in allegedly cheating money from the widow of migrant worker Ramesh Subedi of Jhapa district who had died in Saudi Arabia. The insurance company there paid the compensation but the ambassador, instead of forwarding it to Subedi’s widow, kept it himself. The ambassador escaped any punishment from his party bosses, but now he has done it again. Current UML Prime Minister Jhala Nath Khanal has done nothing over the second one. Foreign Secretary Madan Bhattarai who hasn’t done much more than pay lip service. Shocking, but unfortunately not surprising, when culture of impunity and lack of accountability is so high.

You want to hear more? Maoist CA member Inframati Yadav was caught stealing electricity to power her water pump by making an illegal hookup to powerlines. She was let off after made to pay fine. Bijaya Gachchhadar, chairman of Madhesi People’s Rights Forum (Democratic), has been sheltering notorious underworld don, Ganesh Lama. Some UML mid-ranking leaders and cadre are putting pressure on police to release the arrested criminal and notorious don, Dinesh Adhikari ‘Chari’.

CA members Bishwendra Paswan, Rukmani Chaudhari, Buddha Ratna Manandhar and Sadrul Miya Haq have not only obstructed the meetings of the Constitutional Committee called to settle disputes on some of the fiercely-contested contents of the constitution, they have now held parliament’s plenary itself hostage.

In addition to the failures on the constitution-drafting and peace fronts, the political parties are piling on the misery of the people and some of the recent events demonstrate these are not some accidental situations or something over which the parties have no control. On the contrary, these are full, on-your-face “we don’t care” attitude and actions.

damakant@gmail.com
From Jatra Café in Thamel last weekend, a fusillade of sheer, nonsensical syllables broke the white noise of the city streets: “Fümms bö wö tää zää Uu!” American poet Bob Holman recited the opening line of “Ursoneate” (or “Primeval Sonata”), a 24-minute sound poem by Dadaist artist Kurt Schwitters, who challenged conventional poetry in the 1920s.

The International Iowa Writers Program, organised by the US Embassy and Quixote’s Cove, hosted workshops by contemporary big wigs of the American literary scene like Holman. Part cultural exchange, part mission empowerment—the Iowa Writers did more than share tips on their craft, they discussed current movements reshaping self-expression in the US—namely, ‘spoken word’ and ‘transmedia’. The workshops also revealed a need to preserve minority languages and the dearth of opportunity in the literary arts in Nepal.

‘Spoken word’ or ‘slam poetry’ began in Chicago in the mid-1980s. Typically, poets perform their pieces before an audience in an Olympic-style competition complete with judges and eliminations. Mirroring the Dadaists’ return to oral traditions in its most primitive form, ‘spoken word’ stresses the poet’s sound and body as part of the poem.

Nepali writer Yuyutsu Sharma, who dubs Holman ‘the king of slam after Allen Ginsberg’, joined the workshop and drew comparisons between ‘spoken word’ and ‘asubabita’, the Nepali tradition of spontaneous poetry.

A specialist on endangered languages, Holman encouraged participants to use poetic tradition to preserve the 100 or so languages in Nepal. “Half of the world’s languages will be lost in this century. And when you lose a language you lose a system of consciousness, a whole way of thinking,” he says.

At a screening of his web series VERSE: A Murder Mystery at the Bakery Café in Sundhara, American documenter Ram Devenini discussed a new age of mass media where technological innovations are democratising filmmaking and giving voice to the wider public.

Devenini says that his digital SLR camera, a Canon 5D, is “revolutionising cinema, and the use of web series is allowing a lot of filmmakers to subvert traditional distribution and go directly to their viewers.”

A group of middle-school students from the Madrasa Islamiya School surprised the Iowa Writers and attended the second day of workshops. The day before, the troupe took a detour from the official program to the local school giving lessons on prose and poetry. Students created acrostic poems with Holman and poet Nathalie Handal and learned about plot and character development with author Joshua Ferris. The visit at the Madrasa formed part of the English ACCESS Microscholarship Program, a seven-year-old initiative by the US State Department that facilitates afterschool classes for underprivileged, ‘non-elite’ adolescents in over 70 countries.

“English is a tool that provides access to better living conditions,” explains Regional English Language Officer at the US Embassy, Fife MacDuff, and says that literacy in English allows access to “information, better jobs, communication, and negotiation.”

Until an even-playing field is realised, English will continue to dominate global commerce and culture, a fact that serves an ironic note for Holman: “On the one hand, I’m working on endangered languages, but I’m doing it by using the bully language, the language of the oppressors.”
problems organized by Youth today. 14 May, 8.30am to 10am. In front of Constitution Assembly Building, New Baneshwor

Outdoors Grind, a pool side dance party organized by Party Nepal Outdoors. 26 to 29 May, Riverside Spring Resort, Kunastha. Rs.3500

The Conference of the Birds, a play by Studio 7 Productions. 13 May, 7.15pm, Naga Theatre, Hotel Vaja, Bijwadi, Swayambhu, Rs.700, 4271545

Boudha Stupa Restaurant & Cafe, enjoy wood-fired pizza with a superb view of Boudha stupa and free wifi, candlelight dinner options are also available for the romantics every full moon night. Boudha, 2130881

Brono Billy, a new restaurant in town offering Tex-Mex and Indian dishes. They make their own corn tortillas, which gets a big thumbs-up. But really, we can’t wait to try their Margaritas. Pushob opposite Namaste Supermarket

Milke Coffee n Cocktail Cafe, coffee house during the day and a cozy lounge serving cocktails at night, try their yarchagumba and molecular cocktails along with the famous Starburbs. Woodland Complex, Durbur Marg

Lahka Chulo, try the tender steaks and Thai-style salads. Jamsaithele

Alfresco, for homemade pasta and other lip-smacking delights. Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 4273999

Dhaka, for an excellent range of North Indian delicacies, try their unbeatable Kashmiri Goost. Thanpathal

Jatra at Bu keba, authentic Newari cuisine in the city’s newest organic eatery, all through May. Sanjana

Dechenling, the place to head for Bhutanese and Tibetan cuisine, their yarchagumba and molecular cocktails along with the famous Starburbs. Woodland Complex, Durbur Marg

Cosmopolitan Café, located in the heart of Basantapur, this cozy café offers arguably the best chicken sizzler in town. Basantapur

Casa de Cass, out-of-Kathmandu dining in cozy surroundings with attentive service, what more could you ask for? A martini, of course. Hanabishan

Comfort Zone, expansive restobar that needs to be full to come into its own. A decent range of cocktails and barbequed meats should keep you glued to the massive screen at one end. Comfort Zone (rooftop of Bank of Kathmandu), Thamel.
**Kicking it in Nepal**

Nepali footballers pull their socks up as Richmond Mavericks FC, a semi-professional football team from the northeast of England, arrives this week for plays offs against local teams. The tour is being coordinated in Nepal by nepalayala in collaboration with Kathmandu Khel Mandal (KKM).

“We are glad to welcome the Mavericks to Nepal,” says Binay Singh Pradhan, the tour manager. “I am confident that our players in Nepal will enjoy playing and interacting with the visiting players.”

The Richmond Mavericks’ squad is aged between 20-29. Star players include the two centre-backs, Dan Johnson and Jason Newall, and former Middlesbrough FC youth player, Adam Dunwoodie. While in Nepal, they will play four matches, two in Kathmandu and one each in Butwal and Pokhara.

Let’s be clear, this is no boutique purveyor of Newari tidbits. The straight-up table-and-chair on concrete tableaus will earn no accolades for ‘ambience’, either. But for the range of its snacks and the value of money it offers, Newa is a real haven within the overpriced milieu of the tourist district, and it’s a few cuts above your average bhatti in terms of fare, service, and hygiene.

Maheshwor Dai and his boys are happy to serve up the usual fried rice et al, if the usual is what you want. But it’s the unusual that intrigues. Tongues, lungs, marrow and brain, stewed or fried, accompany heartier fare in the form of baras, as well as juicy sekwa, fiery sukuti, spreads of samay baji, and tart tama. Offal is a staple of Newari cuisine, although it is yet to be more widely accepted. But if your average Nepali doesn’t blink when faced with a plateful of fried intestines or liver, why stop there? Jibro tareko (fried intestines or liver, why stop there? Jibro tareko (fried intestines or liver, why stop there?) is slightly chewy but goes wonderfully with a squeeze of lemon; phokso (lungs) are crunchy and soft when done just right; and the creamy texture of tishyo (bone marrow) is unique. It’s more difficult to describe the taste of these buffalo parts without counterparts from other animals, but save for the tongue, they are neither dark nor strongly flavoured. Perfect for the adventurous non-Newar.

If you look beyond the beach then you’ll find aia works doubly well at a baras over roomali rotis, aila over Red Label, can be cajoled into sampling the unusual fried rice et al, if the usual is what you want. But it’s the unusual that intrigues. Tongues, lungs, marrow, brain and stomach, stewed or fried, accompany heartier fare in the form of baras, as well as juicy sekwa, fiery sukuti, spreads of samay baji, and tart tama. Offal is a staple of Newari cuisine, although it is yet to be more widely accepted. But if your average Nepali doesn’t blink when faced with a plateful of fried intestines or liver, why stop there? Jibro tareko (fried intestines or liver) is slightly chewy but goes wonderfully with a squeeze of lemon; phokso (lungs) are crunchy and soft when done just right; and the creamy texture of tishyo (bone marrow) is unique. It’s more difficult to describe the taste of these buffalo parts without counterparts from other animals, but save for the tongue, they are neither dark nor strongly flavoured. Perfect for the adventurous non-Newar.

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Typhoid season

In the latest online issue of the Lancet Infectious Disease, our team from Patan Hospital working together with Oxford University published an article based on the findings of a randomised controlled trial of two drugs in typhoid fever.

Typhoid, which is spread by fecal oral transmission is rampant in the developing world, and there is an ongoing problem with drug resistance. This study was the largest clinical trial (844 patients were recruited over a period of three years) on typhoid fever to date.

Appropriate dosage of Gatifloxacin was administered for seven days in a once day dosing for patients suspected to have typhoid fever. Gatifloxacin in the study was compared with the oldest drug used in the treatment of typhoid fever, chloramphenicol. There was no difference in the efficacy of these two drugs in the time taken (four days) to bring the fever down. However, unlike chloramphenicol which needs to be taken four times per day for 14 days, gatifloxacin needs to be taken only once a day for seven days. Clearly most people will favour taking a drug once a day for seven days rather than four times a day for 14 days. Our conclusion was that gatifloxacin should be the preferred drug in the treatment of typhoid fever in the developing world.

Gatifloxacin attracted attention several years ago when in an elderly Canadian population who were administered the drug for an infection, it was shown to increase or decrease the blood glucose, thus causing some patients to have symptoms of diabetes or low blood sugar (hypoglycaemia). As a result in North America, this drug was removed from the market. However in our Nepal study the average age of our patients was 16, and unlike the elderly Canadian population our patients did not have any co-morbidities (that is, accompanying medical problems like kidney disease). Furthermore we tracked the blood sugar very closely in our population cohort, and there was no obvious blood sugar problem as noted in the elderly Canadian population.

This story of Gatifloxacin is a good example of how a useful and affordable drug should not be discarded just because it is found to have side effects in a completely different patient population in another part of the world. Indeed we are running out of antibiotics to treat life threatening infections like typhoid fever in tropical countries.
Mind your Ps

Poverty, politics, power, petrol, pani, pakhes

is for People, right? Poetry? No. Nepal has plenty of both, but this week I’d like to look at the Ps that make living here a Phew! at the end of the day.

There’s Poverty, of course. Be you in the city or in the sticks, no amount of natural or cultural beauty can long distract you from the deppressing realities that the majority of Nepalis have to face everyday. Those who think they can insulate themselves from the poor people around them are deluded; until they take an active interest in improving the lot of those less fortunate, their comfort zones are mere eggshells. Poverty in Nepal has been the breeding ground for much of our latter-day……

……Politics, which too has come to define modern-day Nepal. We’ve moved on from court intrigues for aristocrats into parliamentary and backroom shenanigans that only represent an improvement in that there are more holders of sharpened stakes at play. Politics in Nepal fascinates and repels at the same time; in the last two decades no other activity has been the repository of so much hope and so much despair, yet we (no thanks to the media) continue to obsess over it as if everything else were incidental or dependent upon it. The inability or, indeed, reluctance of our politicians to move beyond grasping, self-referential endeavours has meant basic services have been chronically neglected. Far from freeing Nepalis from poverty, politics has condemned us to a lack of……

……Power, Petrol and Pani (excuse the stretch). Without electricity to work by, never mind enjoy the quality of life one expects of the 21st century, or even alternate sources of fuel, how can we ever hope to move out of the dark ages? The irony of course, lies in Nepal’s unmentionable reserves of hydropower potential and the fact that the Himalaya are referred to as the ‘water towers’ of Asia. Faced with such difficulty in securing what people take for granted in the West, no wonder then that from the beatific inhabitants of a mythical land of never-ending peace and love, we have degenerated into veritable……

……Pakhes. Yes, this is true of half of us in a literal sense, living as we do in the corrugated half of the country. But a pakhe is not just a country bumpkin who knows not what to do with the bright lights of the city. Transplanted or born and bred in our cities, he is the everyman pakhe who makes a ticker-tape parade of something as humble as a chewing gum wrapper, the neighbour (and his dog) who thinks nothing of blasting his bhajans (and barks) around the hood at 6 in the morning, he is the jam in the traffic, the anti-samaritan who laughs at your misfortune, and yes, even the sophisticate who lives in Osamamesque seclusion from the community around him. Poverty, politics, power, petrol, pani, pakhes, all feed off each other today. Tomorrow, we may untie the knot of one or the other, freeing us up to deal with the rest. Until we do, deal with the Pressure. Time for some Pranayam?  

SOCIETY

KALAM
Rahi Thapa

Times

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Online censorship on the rise

WASHINGTON – In the midst of a street uprising that was blogged, YouTubeed, and Twittersed in minute-by-minute cyber blasts the Egyptian regime tightened controls on the Internet in late January in an attempt to choke the revolution. Egypt’s Internet Service Providers (ISPs) finally restored the Net, but Hosni Mubarak’s desperate deployment of information control adapted to social networking sites is part of a growing global trend. Efforts to control and censor the cyber commons, from blocking Web sites to imprisoning bloggers, is used by a growing number of even democratic governments around the world.

“In authoritarian states, such efforts are partly rooted in the existing legal frameworks, which already limit the freedom of the traditional media,” says a recent study by the US-based Freedom House. China, with the world’s most sophisticated state apparatus, Iran, Venezuela, Egypt, and Tunisia, are among thosefingered as guilty.

“But even in more democratic countries such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, and the United Kingdom Internet freedom is increasingly undermined by legal harassment, opaque censorship procedures, or expanding surveillance,” the study adds.

On Monday, the U.S.-based Committee to Protect Journalists released a report on the “Top 10 Tools of Online Oppressors” in commemoration of World Press Freedom Day on May 3.

“These techniques go well beyond Web censorship,” said Danny O’Brien, CPI Internet Advocacy Coordinator and author of the report. “Combined, these digital attacks undermine our universal right to seek information.”

The list includes such good old-fashioned tactics as imprisonment and violence against independent and opposition journalists, to high-tech methods of censorship like Denial of Service cyber-attacks and so-called Internet “kill switches” similar to Egypt.

More than two billion people have access to the Internet, a number that has doubled since 2006, so once well-defined journalistic lines between spectator and contributor, source and correspondent are blurring, equally amplifying the threat of online censorship to press freedom.

The NPCP's new media report, with special reference to Nepal, was released on May 3, 2011.

Bloggin’ bout

DEWAN RAJ

C redited for sparking the Tunisian Revolution and bringing down the Mubarak regime in Egypt, 2011 has been the Year of the Blogger. In Nepal, blogs are transforming the way urban Nepalis get their information.

Nepal’s bloggers also have officially kicked off with king Gyanendra’s coup on 1 February 2005. Newspapers were under direct military censorship, FM radios were not allowed to broadcast news, so bloggers stepped in to fill the information gap even while the ISPs were still closed.

Nepal’s most popular Nepali language blogging site, My Sansar (www.mysansar.com.np), began at that time and has grown into a citizen journalism aggregator. Blogs usually have a credibility problem because of anonymous postings and gossip, but My Sansar is seen by many as an antidote to a mainstream media which are compromised by political and corporate bias.

My Sansar recently exposed the newly-appointed State Minister for Finance Lyarkar Lama, who turned out to be of Tibetan origin holding fake passports from three different countries. The mainstream media followed up on the news, and Lama was forced to resign.

The Nepali tweetosphere

RUBEENA MAHATO

“O”hama says Osama Dead,” someone tweeted, and instantly there were hundreds re-tweeting the news. There was still nothing on local tv breaking news yet, and not a peep on the newspaper websites. Welcome to the world of tweeters.

Last month, social media in Nepal was abuzz with messages demanding the reinstatement of the finance secretary who resigned due to political pressure from Finance Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari. The social media campaign embarrassed the finance minister, prompting him to call a press conference in his defense. Social networking has arrived in Nepal, with Facebook subscribers now exceeding 1 million and the number of those tweeting rising exponentially with the spread of smartphones.

The community of Twitter users in Nepal tweet anything from usual rumblings to profound political commentaries and hardly anything of national and global importance escape the lively discussions on twitter timelines.

Although the number of people who say they regularly use the Internet is still below 10 percent, the large diaspora population and the spread of 3G phones is suddenly making the technology cheap and accessible to many.

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Language used to be a barrier because of Roman Nepali typing, but use of Devanagari keyboards is spreading. Aakarpost (@aakarpost), a regular tweeter says, “If I got confused about something, I post it on Twitter and then often someone from the community tweets back the solution.” Nepali tweeters have also become an alternative and timely source of “breaking news” for peers living abroad. Last week’s ban on My Sansar, for instance, was discussed all over Nepal tweetersphere with updates from people across the country.

Twitter has become a venue to initiate social work and jumpstart robust discussions. “Tweet for Cause Nepal” (@fncNepal) recently raised funds among Twitter users to donate food for the orphanage Palitra Samaj Sewa. Similarly, Twitterdebate, an initiative by Twitter users in Nepal, hosts weekly discussions every Saturday, the topic for which is decided from among the participants themselves.

“We are also planning to set up an after debate support group, for specific topics, if required,” Anand Nepal (@bananthenepal) told us. “In the early days, I used to tweet about ‘what I was doing’, but these days I generally tweet about ‘what I think’,” Aish Adhikari (@abishdah), a doctor at BPKIHS, Dhulikhel says.

While the new media is giving activism a new shape, the conflict between alternative and mainstream media is becoming only more apparent. Recently, there was a huge uproar in both media about a national daily that published unverified tweets. Twitter users argued passionately about the violation of private space and the dangers of being quoted out of context.

And this time around, it was bloggers and tweeters who advocated for values and ethics in journalism.
"I wasn’t sure if the issue would be taken seriously," admits My Sansar’s reclusive founder, Umesh Shrestha (below), “but we see the established press taking their cue more and more from the blogosphere.”

Shrestha has earned a reputation for his nocturnal working habits, but says there are no time zones in cyberspace. He started blogging in 2005, when he was laid off from his job in Channel Nepal Television after the king’s coup. Initially, he maintained personal musings on politics and current affairs under the nom de blog, Salokya, which he still uses.

Despite his non-technical background, Shrestha quickly established a Nepali niche on the Net. The number of unique visitors of My Sansargrew exponentially, reflecting the hunger in Nepal and abroad for a different perspective on current affairs. On a good day, these days, My Sansar gets 60,000 visitors.

He skipped his exams to webcast from Narayanhiti as king Gyanendra held a press conference before leaving the palace in June 2008. He introduced live blogging during the five-day Maoist strike last May.

Shrestha has also used his blog for rendering charitable services. Donations collected through his blog have been funding the education of a girl from Parbat district, and library projects in four districts.

Young Nepalis prefer the immediacy and spicy content of blog sites, and traditional media has been slow to pick up on this trend. "I prefer reading blogs because they give me the missing links in the story ignored by the mainstream media and they do it with wit and style," says Sandip Pokhrel from New Baneswor, who follows blogs regularly.

Shrestha has his finger on the pulse of readers like Pokhrel, and says: “A little more analysis and playful language are what attract readers to blogs.”

Blogger Ujjwal Acharya says the mainstream media is given too much credit for credibility. “News in the mainstream media is not always true either,” he says, citing the example of the Anuja Banita story last week. “When you read a blog, it is in the back of your mind that you are reading a blog and you don’t fully believe the post. Mainstream media holds the authority that everything they say is true.”

Taking their cue from My Sansar, many young Nepalis have started their own blogs. But there are challenges because with wider access, the long tail of individual blog sites is just getting longer and longer.

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The balance is tilting away from mainstream media to citizen journalism.

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The Gajurel tape

BBC Nepal Service, 4 May

Voice of CP Gajurel speaking to a cadre training session in eastern Nepal: “We will join the government to prepare the ground for a people’s revolt. We will take the ministry that helps us fulfill our objectives. I can tell you that the home ministry is much more important than the defense ministry at the moment because we are preparing for state capture. As we launch the fight for class struggle, it is the police who could create barriers. The army is not the issue now, we will take it on at the end. The Nepal Police and Armed Police Force are the first security agencies we will have to confront. Therefore, we concluded that the home ministry would be crucial in achieving our goals. That’s why we have been insisting for home ministry. We have not specified it in our agreement, even our enemies have not understood this. But RAW and CIA have figured it out and you can be sure they will get the NC and UML to oppose us.”

Politicalised FNJ

Nagarik, 5 May

The convention of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) concluded with the most of the old faces back in office. The showdown at the Nepal Academy on Wednesday exposed the politicisation of the journalist profession. From the onset, there was a clear division among the journalists affiliated to the Maoists, UML and NC. Sushil Koirala is said to have personally suggested a panel take on the UML and Maoists. Ironically, they were all running the election with the same slogan: free, fair and professional journalism. The voters from the districts, camped at various guesthouses were supplied with delicacies and liquor by the parties. The byzantine amount of money spent by candidates has ensured that journalists no longer have the moral ground to write about corruption among politicians. Unless FNJ is made into a common forum for all the journalists, it will become a political club without professional integrity.

Death of terror?

Editorial in Naya Patrika, 4 May

After eluding the world for 10 years, Osama Bin Laden has been killed by American forces in Pakistan. American President Barak Obama in his address to the nation called it victory over terrorism. But instead of celebrating his death, people in the West should ask themselves difficult questions like why Osamas of the world are born? And for what vested interests are they created? The people in the West should understand why an ally of the Cold War became a foe in its aftermath. What forced this man to turn against those who trained, armed and mobilized him. Bin Laden killed a lot of people in the name of jihad, for which he was condemned and hated all over the world including Muslims. But Americans and their allies who trained him and his mujahidin have a share of guilt to own. His death might have brought relief to the governments around the world, but the world has yet to see the death of terror.

Not against peace: Kiran

Mohan Baidiya interviewed by Ganga BC in Kantipur, 30 April

Kantipur: Your proposal has been sidelined by majority in the central committee, what is your take on the decision? Mohan Baidiya: Although Chairman Dahal’s proposal has been passed by majority, we have agreed on incorporating the main theme of both the proposals in line with constitution drafting and integration of the PLA.

What was your note of dissent then? Chairman Dahal has mentioned in his proposal that we have to complete the peace process and draft the constitution in order to defeat counter-revolutionary forces. My insistence is that there are other ways to defeat counter-revolutionary forces.

How will you carry your note of dissent ahead? We have already developed a mechanism to take any note of dissent to the party’s grassroots. So it will move ahead accordingly.
I

n 2007, after a long flight to Nepalgunj, a 16-hour drive over

muddy and rugged roads, and a two-hour hike, we arrived at the

Bajhang district hospital only to find no doctors; the only staff nurse was

preparing to quit.

The entire hospital was run by

village health workers and auxiliary

mid-wives. A middle-aged woman

with three children stood at the

hospital entrance.

“Where were your children
delivered?” I asked.

“In my yoth,” she answered,

(“Where else do you think, lady?” was her tone.)

“Did anyone assist you—a midwife,
your mother-in-law?”

“No.”

“How did you cut the umbilical
cord?”

(“With my hasiya, of course.”)

She had had enough of my silly

questions and hurried off.

Since 2007, there has been progress

in maternal health in far western

Nepal. In Bajhang, the Nick Simons

Institute (NSI) supports the district

hospital through the Rural Staff

Support Program, providing an MDGP

doctor who can carry out caesarian

sections ever was carried out in

Bajhang, saving the life of a mother

and family. Rajni’s family has tried to convince her to

move to Kathmandu or Pokhara. But she is determined to stay on.

Mother and children, who

wouldn’t work anywhere else. Krishna Kadayat,

a city-educated

medical

student, and her husband, Ramesh, work in Achham.

Krishna works for a UNICEF-supported

program to get communities to reduce malnutrition

and looks after three VOCs. For two weeks in a

month, she trains women volunteers and treats

children stunted by malnutrition.

She is moved by the heart-breaking poverty,

illiteracy and discrimination in Achham’s outlying

villages, but says she is glad to be doing her bit.

“Of course. He is hard, but that is a given. It is

what I do that gives me real self-satisfaction,”

she says.

Sarita GC is from Palpa and works with Rajni.

She graduated in nursing and public health, and has

worked in many of Nepal’s least-developed

districts. She was inspired to take up public health

after seeing the condition of children there.

Sarita GC works in Achham and has been

trying to convince her brother to move. Her

brother is in Canada and she feels all have

comfortable jobs in Kathmandu.

Asa what keeps her going in Achham’s

dirt-poor villages, Sarita replies: “Using my

skills and knowledge to help save the lives of fellow Nepalis gives me a feeling of tremendous

fulfillment. I don’t think I would get that in any

other job anywhere else.”
Yay! We will only have 11 hours of power cuts from tomorrow. FNJ office-bearers (right) will be happy they can keep phones charged. Others, like baddie CA member Indramati Yadav, will be happy she can steal more electricity for her irrigation pump in Saptari. There is just so much we can do with five extra hours of power, if we let our imagination run wild:

1. We can now pump more water directly from the mains and take the whole tole dry by depriving everyone else of their fair share of H2O.
2. Watch five more hours of junk tv every day to take our minds off politics.
3. The 45 megawatts produced by household and office generators all over the country will have five extra hours of power, this could be hooked to the grid and exported to India and we can use the money to pay IOC for continued diesel imports to power our generators during load-shedding.
4. Buy things you hadn’t because of excessive load-shedding: electric toothbrush, electric cigarette, electric blanket, rechargeable vibrator.
5. Organize more bands in May so we can save on petrol imports and splurge that money on extending the life of the CA.

It looks like your name needs to begin with the Nepali ‘क’ for someone to give you a jhapad. Rumours abound that after seeing Jhal Nath Khanal elevated to prime minister soon after receiving a tight slap on his gala in Sunsari, Baddie CA member Jhakku Subedi convinced the Teen Kune coffee shop owner to slap him twice and leaked that to the press. Com Jhakku was, however, disappointed not to see his name on the list of the expanded cabinet. He was overheard saying: “What does one have to do these days to land a juicy ministry, get lynched?”

And over at Paris Danda, all hell has broken loose over Com Mahara being transferred to home away from home. Annual Man was so miffed he even resigned from the Peace Ministry. Com Deb had steam coming out of his ears, and got three other baddie ministers to refuse to take their oaths. PKD must have known what a bad idea it was to get his henchman, Com Ugly Sapkota, to be info and communication minister in Mahara’s place. If his intention was to get the internationals to trust him, nominating someone accused of war crimes was not the way to do it.

CP Sir has done his own Skahitkhor Tape. Speaking to People’s Volunteer Bureau training in Dharan recently, he said the reason the Baddies desperately wanted the APF and the Nepal Police was to “facilitate a people’s revolt and takeover of state power by force”. Ahem.