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SUBHAS RAI

10 YEARS
ROYAL
MASSACRE
1/6/2001

Editorial p2 A sad ending

The political legacy of the royal massacre

Flash back p11

A blow-by-blow account of the night of 1 June, 2011

Ketaki Chester p2

Royal cousin remembers what she saw that night

The midnight hour

As the country reaches another constitutional crossroads, it is being paralysed by a buildup of bandhas. The governance failure of the fractious parties has prompted any pressure group with a gripe to call a nationwide shutdown and get away with it.

But as we approach the stroke of the midnight hour on Saturday, the nation waits, not with a sense of hope, but dread. Nepal is a dictatorship of three parties, and although they may fight tooth and nail for power, on extending the CA their interests converge. The NC is playing hard to get on extra time only because its leaders want a berth in a new coalition.

"While the Congress stands by its 10-point proposal for extension, we will not allow the nation to slip into a void on Saturday," NC CA member

GaganThapa told Nepali Times.

At first glance, the CA may seem divided between the NC-Madhesi parties and the Maoist-UML alliance, but look closer and they have all made up their minds to vote for a last-minute extension. However, there is a cluster of ultra-radical and right-wing forces, marginalised since 2006, which are against the extension because they would benefit from the resulting political vacuum.

But between the public sabre-rattling, you can see these are the same old faces in the same old parties, bargaining for the same old portfolios. They will really need to convince the people that they deserve another extension.

Anurag Acharya



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**A FUSION SO EXQUISITE
IT'S ENJOYED BY BOTH BLENDERS
AND CONNOISSEURS.**

A SAD ENDING



Some of the lingering questions about the prelude and the exact sequence of events of the royal massacre exactly ten years ago this week will perhaps never be known. Many of the protagonists were killed, most who survived don't want to talk. But one thing is for sure: the killings left an indelible mark on Nepali politics, eventually closing the curtains on the monarchy.

King Gyanendra, soon after his enthronement told his people he was not like his brother, and made it plain he was not satisfied with just a ceremonial role. He had a visceral hatred for political parties and their leaders, who would actually have been natural allies of the monarchy against militant republicans. But the king chose to sideline them through a series of 'creeping coups' after 2002 and the final 'coup de grace' on 1 February, 2005. Politicians, civil society activists and students were arrested. The army was deployed in newsrooms to directly censor content. Nepal was an absolute monarchy again.

The Maoists, for their part, felt the massacre was a god-send. They were emboldened to telescope their revolution and within five months attacked army bases. The war intensified dramatically: more people were killed in the one year after November 2001 than were killed in the first six years of the war.

By November 2005, alarmed by the possibility of a Maoist military victory in Nepal, New Delhi brokered an alliance between the Maoists and the seven parties. Even then, most political leaders, civil society and academics were against an autocratic king not because they were republicans, but because they wanted to preserve the monarchy. They believed an absolute kingship would eventually push the country towards republicanism. Gyanendra played his cards all wrong, and it took only 14 months for a people power movement to force him to restore parliament.

The war ended, but peace was elusive. For two years the king remained in the palace and the country was a "royal republic". Nepal went from a Hindu kingdom to secular republic, armed guerrillas faced elections, won it and formed a government. The new parliament formally abolished the monarchy in July 2008.

Seven years after the royal massacre, Gyanendra held his last press conference as king at Naryanhiti. An institution that was responsible for the formation of the Nepali nation was delinked from the army that helped achieve that unification. Unlike the demise of other monarchies around the world, however, there was no climactic bloodshed. The king wasn't decapitated, he wasn't hounded into exile, his palace wasn't sacked.

Most Nepalis, despite the erosion of respect for the monarchy following the massacre, still made a distinction between the persona of the king and the institution of monarchy. But Nepal's monarchy was ultimately sacrificed to save the peace process. The Maoists needed a revolutionary cause, a trophy, to justify ten years of a wasteful war. In later negotiations, they repeatedly

threatened to go back to conflict if the monarchy were not abolished. They needed to prop up an enemy to bring down to prove that it was a victorious revolution.

The moderate political parties realised that the monarchy needed to be sacrificed to keep the peace process on track and appease the Maoists. Party leaders had no love lost for a king who had treated them like an enemy since the massacre thrust him onto the throne. In hindsight, the man who did more than anyone else to make his country a republic turned out to be the king himself. He had no one to blame but himself not just for his own downfall, but for the end of his dynasty.

King Gyanendra must have known that he had a public relations problem, and that most Nepalis still blamed him for the murder of his popular brother. He tried to remedy this over the years and in his last press conference, but by then it was too late. The public mood was that it was just too much trouble to keep the monarchy.

The Maoists had portrayed the monarchy as the root of all evil, and promised things would get better with a republic. Three years later, most Nepalis feel the abolition of the monarchy hasn't made much of a difference. It may be tempting to take this to mean that the people are so fed up they want the monarchy restored. That isn't likely because of the personal unpopularity of the ex-king and his son. Even if the crown was somehow reinstated, the last king is likely to continue to be more of a divisive figure than a unifying one.

Ten years later, the most surprising thing is how quickly most Nepalis have forgotten that this country was ruled by a monarch. The massacre seems like it happened in the distant past, a fairy tale with a sad ending. It is as if we all want to forget this tragic part of our history and want to move on.

But move on to what?

KD

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

AVOID A VOID

How can any one justify 601 lawmakers for a tiny country like Nepal that is always begging for foreign aid? How can anyone justify the exodus of Nepalis to look for jobs in foreign lands where Nepali girls are raped or sold in brothels? How can any one live with 16 hours of power cuts and water supply one day a week? This editorial ('Avoid a void', #554) is as worthless as the leaders of Nepal. Talk about jobs, talk about security, talk about prosperity, not giving more time to worthless politicians. Its a matter of time, soon people will take matters into their own hands. Just wait and watch.

Krishna Prasad Gyawali

You are asking CA members and politicians to apologise for their past mistakes and get along. Well, haven't they done it thousands of times already? They failed to fulfill their mandate, and that is not a small mistake. They should be held accountable and should be punished. If even you journalists start forgiving them, impunity will grow in Nepal. They should be made to forfeit a percentage of their salary as long as the constitution is not finished.

Bimalesh

Poor editorial. After five years of mayhem, zero progress, maximum corruption, power struggle, Shaktikhor tape, phone tape and all kinds of deceit, lies, and waste of billions of rupees here comes the media to say: everything is wonderful and on track. May Pashupati Nath put some sense to these so-called civil society and media leaders. Completely disappointed with Kunda Dixit's editorial.

Sameer

I am left speechless. It left a very bad taste after reading this editorial. Kunda could have come out arguing for an extension for CA without making any excuses for these ba*****. Kunda needs to go and study other examples and see how a media needs to write an editorial to shape public opinion to help a country move forward in institutional building. This is completely a wrong approach he has taken in his editorial.

Suman

Good to know that giving more time to the incompetents, will make them competent. Good to know that pressurising the incompetents, will make them competent. And presumably, giving scope for action to the incompetents, will make them deliver what is desired.

K K Sharma

Well said, Kunda Dixit, give them hell.

Eric

No more extensions. These selfish rascals will do nothing for the nation, if they extended the term for 10 years, they will fight for the post for nine years and 11 months...and then in the last month they will start lobbying for an extension.

Balak

"NO"

The people have rejected ethnic states, as JB Pun states ('No', #554). How can an ethnic state fit in a secular country where 4,000 VDCs have a multi-cultural population mix are so diverse? The people are much wiser than dollar-farming activists and their masters.

DG

This poll has really upset the Maoists and those who support their deluded ideology. I congratulate Himalmedia for its research on our views about ethnic based federalism, Well done.

Rishav

It's the same old story. If there is a poll result that you don't like or doesn't coincide with your point of view, you just call it biased. The only people who want ethnicity federalism are euro-funded hot heads.

Janardan

ANI CHOYING

What an inspirational story ('Ani's school', #554), thanks to Tsering Dolker Gurung and Nepali Times for doing a special on Ani Choying, my favourite person in Nepal. I will make sure I get the book and the album.

Kiran L

May there be more Anila like Ani Choying to give opportunities to those who deserve most. Om.

Kamal

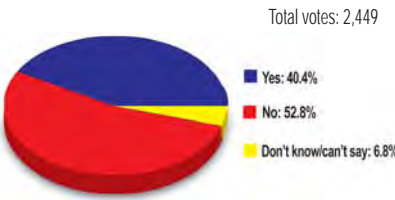
CORRECTION

Bhumi Restaurant and Bar was incorrectly named Bhumi Resto-Lounge (#554).



nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Poll # 555

Q. Will the peace proposal of Nepali Congress help resolve the deadlock?



Weekly Internet Poll # 556. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. What do you think about the SC's decision regarding the extension of CA?



The games they play

Political debate, like politics in Nepal, has reached an all-time low



BY THE WAY

Anurag Acharya

Nepali politics has come full circle in the last year. In fact, we are back to square one. The protagonists have undergone a role reversal, but the hurdles that obstruct the process remain the same.

A year ago, the Maoists were against the CA extension. It said extending the CA 'as it is' had little relevance because that would neither facilitate a new constitution nor conclude the peace process. By 'as it is' the Maoists meant the existing political alignment between the UML-Nepali Congress and the Madhesi parties.

The Madhav Nepal government then had a solid backing from the NC and the Madhesi parties. But numerically, the coalition was still in a minority and needed Maoist support to extend the CA term. The Maoists had demanded the resignation of the Madhav government as a condition for extension. The CA session convened at midnight before the deadline expired and extended the CA term after Madhav Nepal finally promised to step down.

But the parties failed to form a consensus government even after Madhav Nepal's resignation. Instead, it took 17 rounds of elections in a severely divided house to elect Jhal Nath Khanal as prime minister. The Maoists and MJF (N) joined the government after their internal squabbles over the portfolios. The NC, bitter about its loss stayed out of the government.

So what has changed in the past year? The peace process is still in disarray and the CA deadline will expire in less than 48 hours after this paper goes to press. The NC with its alliance of fringe parties is refusing to extend the CA term 'as it is'. They are demanding the resignation of the Jhal Nath government as a precondition.

It is not surprising, therefore, that cynical politics has bred a cynical media. The op-ed headlines and comments from readers (including in this paper) indicate that political debate, like politics in Nepal, has reached an all time low. It has become more fashionable to reject or mock an idea that may or ought to change



BIKRAM RAI

things for the better than to engage with the idea critically and come up with alternatives.

This may be because of the resentment and resignation the people feel towards the existing political culture. The disillusionment is manifested on the streets, in radio phone-ins and in the social networking sites. But this discontentment is being exploited by opportunistic and reactionary lobbies to convert it into political brownie points.

In New Baneswor, it is becoming difficult to identify pro-constitution lobbyists from anti-republic reactionaries, royalists from republicans. The alignment of the so-called 'democratic forces' with avowed anti-republicans inside the CA has muddled the scene to an extent that people are no longer sure who is sloganeering for what.

The government has come up with a 46-week calendar to justify a one-year extension. The calendar proposes 12 weeks for public opinion collection when even the door-to-door nationwide public opinion survey of 4,000 respondents by this paper last month was completed within a week. Four weeks to deliberate on the amendments and eight weeks to discuss them in the house is simply a waste of time. No wonder the government's proposal has been opposed by its own coalition members.

The CA and its members cannot hold the nation hostage for another year. If the government had charted out a 12-week time frame for completing the peace process then taking another 12 weeks to sort out contentious

issues and come up with a workable constitution would have been more acceptable. We don't need a perfect constitution. It should be forward looking and flexible enough to incorporate people's

aspirations even in the years to come.

As the deadline gets closer, it is becoming clearer that the drama in New Baneswor is less about the extension of the CA (make no mistake, everybody wants

an extension) and more about the power sharing in its aftermath. The number game has begun. There are no winners yet in the political score-keeping, but it is clear if this drags on we will all be losers. 🇳🇵



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GREEN SCENE

Little green store

The shop where green is not just the colour of money

Take a left at Jai Nepal cinema and head towards Hattisar, and you'll come across a small green store on your right: ecoKendra. True to its name, the shop showcases environment-friendly products including renewable energy technologies, organic food, natural fibre products and recycled goods. The store has been recently opened by Ecoprise, a company that focuses on environment-friendly products and solutions.

"While setting up solar systems in rural areas and showcasing our products in trade fairs we met many producers of organic goods," says Bhuwan KC of Ecoprise, "we decided to give them a platform for their products."

After several months of networking and research, Ecoprise was able to gather enough interested producers to start a store. ecoKendra sources its goods from various parts of the country: orange juice from Phidim, herbal drinks from Kalikot, apple brandy from Jumla, bel juice from Siraha and coffee from Argakhanchi. Trendy hemp bags and sandals from Rolpa and Darchula fill the racks.

All products have organic certification from National Association for Sustainable Agriculture (NASAA) in Australia or Nepal's Department of Food Technology and Quality Control. ecoKendra is trying to obtain international certification for all the products it promotes.

The store has a fair-trade value system and believes in increasing local sales by cutting down the mark-up. "We want to change the misconception that anything labeled organic is expensive and only for foreigners," explains KC. "The prices have been maintained accordingly so that Rasuwa's lentils are just as affordable as lentils in any other shop."

ecoKendra also showcases a range of solar-powered light systems. You can get a basic portable LED at only Rs 1,000. Another solar powered light system with mobile charger costs only Rs 1,650. Larger systems are also available for households and offices.

KC says that ecoKendra is not just about the ecology, but about economics. It makes economic sense to go green. "Ecoprise is a socially motivated organisation, but we do not want to depend on handouts," he explains. The organisation is also in negotiations with supermarkets to open a separate section for organic and eco-friendly products.

ecoKendra is seeking to expand its product range. KC says, "We want to be a one stop store for eco-friendly products and solutions."

Paavan Mathema

Reaching the top

Achieving professional success in Nepal needs patience and humility



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

My Nepali friends working overseas, who are contemplating to return home, often ask me: "What does it take to make it professionally as a top manager in Nepal?"

I wish I knew the answer. Luck, as in being the right person at the right time doing the right thing, certainly plays a bigger part in Nepal than elsewhere else. So does persistence. But based on my observations, I advise these friends on the opposite: what it takes to limit and unravel one's supposed managerial success in Nepal.

Not developing a thick skin: Criticising others comes easily to most people. Indeed,

carry on with your work.

Not confronting bullies and office politicians: In every organisation, there are the bullies and there are the politicians. Bullies are often easier to identify. They walk with a certain swagger. They believe that the organisation owes them a living. And they are long-timers with an ingrained sense of entitlement. Take away their entitlement, and they will lead the gang against you.

Office politicians are like



once you start working in Nepal, you will meet many 'experts' who are always eager to tell you how you should do your job. And they will not take it kindly if you do not take their advice and take your own way. They will pour criticisms, which for the most part is baseless and viciously personal.

Managers who feel compelled to react to every criticism and provide answers to every critic end up wasting emotional energy over trivial matters. It's much more prudent to take the high road: smile, thank the critics, and

hyenas—they thrive on conversational openings that help them drive wedges between groups and people. Then they drop hints, fill people's ears and take quiet delight in watching the debilitating effects of their gossip on colleagues' working relationships.

Managers who believe that they should not sully themselves by dealing head-on with bullies and politicians are rarely effective. My experience is that behind all their cunning and bluster, bullies and politicians often lose power when there's an open, candid and results-driven work environment.

Contracting a 'big-fish-in-a-small-pond disease':

Once people think that you have reached the top of your profession here, interesting things can happen. Journalists call to interview you. Glossy magazines splash your (and your wife's) photographs all over the page 3. You are invited to various evening receptions. You fly to conferences in exotic locations to present 'authentic voices from Nepal'. Soon, you start referring to political bigwigs by their first names, and they return the favours. Everyone sees you as an expert, and you like even more when they call you a *baristha* expert.

The trouble is, all this can easily go to your head. As such, it's only a matter of time before you start taking yourself too seriously. You start thinking that you really know everything and stop learning new things. You love to re-read your press clippings, and bask in your own self-reflected glory. And when you become drunk on arrogance, downfall will not be that far.

Successful managers are good at combining happiness with humility. Happiness—because the competition in Nepal is not that brutal. Humility—because no matter how much one knows, it's always small compared to what one does not know. This state of perpetual ignorance calls for a continuously learning mindset: talking to experts, taking courses, reflecting on mistakes, asking questions, admitting that you don't know everything, and always learning with a sense of an adventure.

Else, the big-fish-in-a-small-pond syndrome can inflict severe career damages. 🇳🇵

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If anyone has any doubts about the futility of bandas, as enforced by a rash of identity-led causes, consider what I heard from a kid of about ten on my way back from the anti-banda rally. Wheeling a cycle around the empty streets, he explained to his peers: “*Aja Chettri ko banda, bholi Bahun ko, ani parsi Magar ko re!*” 🇳🇵



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PICS: MARCUS BENIGNO

Deaf like me



MARCUS BENIGNO

In John Howard Griffin's *Black Like Me*, the white journalist describes his experience traveling through the segregated American South of the 1960s, disguised as a black man. Griffin intentionally darkened his skin to a passable shade and logged his experiences in a novel that would eventually draw white America's attention to the tribulations faced by marginalised African Americans.

Sarah Giri (left) of the

Nepal-Indo Deaf Art and Culture Society (NIDACS), identifies herself as 'culturally Deaf'. For the last nine years, she has worked to bring awareness to the deaf community in South Asia, and NIDACS will run Eyes Empowered Part II, a weeklong exhibition of Deaf Art by Nepali and Indian deaf artists commencing with a soirée prevue on 3 June sponsored by the Summit Hotel.

NIDACS provides a platform for the deaf community, working not as a charity for a disability group but as a repository for a culture complete with its own history, values, and most importantly language.

"Language and literacy are prerequisites of a culture," Giri says as she demonstrates

her fluency in sign language. "With deaf language came Deaf (capital 'D') culture and heritage. The hearing word is written on board surfaces, while the deaf write in space. Throughout history groups, whose rights and privileges have been denied, have come together to voice their experiences through art."

Under the genre of 'disenfranchised art,' there are two categories: affirmation art and resistance art. Giri explains, "The first is about validation and celebration where, 'I'm deaf, and so what? This is a wonderful world, and this is our culture.' And the second talks about the oppression and segregation from the dominant hearing culture and its portrayal in their suppression."

Deaf subalternity entails a paradox of isolation and dependency, where for the deaf, even the closest kith and kin are far and estranged. "The Lonely Walk" (left) by deaf artist Anirban Das Gupta paints a bright picture of a woman walking alone, representing the detachment and poignant optimism of deaf individuals in a predominantly hearing world. Work opportunity for deaf Nepalis is scarce and limited. Since 1997, Shyam Kakshapati's Bakery Café has employed dozens of deaf people in Kathmandu. But Nepal shouldn't stop there.

"The deaf are succeeding through their studies in high school and college. But the only avenue they see in front of them is a waiter, a data entry person, or as a sign language instructor. So while these opportunities give them the means to eat and pay the bills, it's limited and has become a sort of demotivation," says Giri.

NIDACS challenges corporations to invest in the potential of deaf individuals as web developers and designers, architects, and accountants.

In a second work, Das Gupta portrays the deaf perspective as an invisible minority. Giri captions the piece: "The whole world sleeps in silence, undisturbed. While under a lit corner, a group of deaf is signing. All they need to communicate is a little moonlight." ■

Eyes Empowered Part II, NIDACS 2nd Annual Deaf Art Exhibition, Summit Hotel, 3 - 10 June



EVENTS

Portrait of Everest, a photo exhibition by Jeff Botz. 28 May, 11 am, Patan Musuem, Lalitpur

Discussion on Karnali Blues, with author Buddhi Sagar organised by Himalayan readers' book club. 28 May, 3pm to 8pm, Conference Hall, British Council, Entry Rs 50, 9851076996/ 9849100300

French Book Sale, a used book sale organised by Alliance Francaise. 28 May, 10am to 5pm, Gardens of Alliance Francaise, Tripureswor

Manchester United v/s FC Barcelona, Champions league final will be screened at 3 projectors. 28 May, 9pm to 4am, Cafereena, Sherpa Mall, Durbar Marg

Outdoors Grind, a pool side dance party organized by Party Nepal Outdoors. 28 to 29 May, Riverside Spring Resort, Kurintar, Rs 3500

The Government Inspector, a play by Nikolai Gogol performed by Shailee Theatre Group. Every

Thursday till 1st week of June, 4.30pm, Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari

Call for entries for Film Southasia, a festival of South Asian documentaries. 29 September to 2 October, early submission deadline: 31 May 2011, final submission deadline (for films made after April 2010): 31 June 2011, Film Southasia Secretariat, Patan Dhoka, 5552141, www.filmsouthasia.org, fsa@filmsouthasia.org

Peace, Environment and Tourism Conference, a conference on peace, environment and tourism in Nepal organised by Global Peace Association (GPA) and Himalayan Alliance for Climate Change (HIMCCA). Paper submission deadline 31 May

Stories from the locality and Fantasized idea, an exhibition of paintings by Hitman Gurung and Laxman Karmacharya. Till 5 June 5, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited

Culturally Enlightened, a cultural tourism festival organised by Om Mahankal Film Production. 2 to 5 June, 11am to 6pm, Tundikhel Ground

Documentary Filmmaking, a six-day course on documentary filmmaking organised by Sattya Media Arts Collective. 5 to 10 June, 10am to 5pm, Sattya Media arts Collective, Jawalakhel, Application can be downloaded from the website www.sattya.org and sent to collective@sattya.org, Fee Rs 3000

Know your DSLR: Digital SLR Photography, a photography workshop organised by Sattya Media Arts Collective. June 28 to 29, 11am to 3pm, Fee Rs 1000, Forms are available at sattya.org

Katha Mitho Sarangiko, a radio drama based on social issues. This week's story follows the tale of Uma who is caught up in a circle of poverty and exploitation. Katha Mitho Sarangiko can be heard every Friday at 8.15pm, 103FM in Kathmandu valley

MUSIC

AFK Music Contest, an open music contest to young musicians below 25. Interested ones can download the forms at www.alliancefrancaise.org.np and submit it at Alliance Francaise, Tripureswor, last date for submission June 10

Fashion and Music fest, fashion show by students of IEC with musical performance by Naren

Limbu, Sirish Thapa, Bijaya Gurung and Shadows. 11 June, 6pm, 1905 Restaurant and Bar, Kantipath



Golden Moments- Tribute to Rock, a second series of Golden moments featuring artists **Dinesh and the Sound Minds**, 27 May, Factory, Thamel. **Prism**, 3 June, Bhumi Restro and Lounge, Lazimpat. **Ashesh and the Nekhvam**, 10 June, Cafereena, Durbar Marg, **Abhaya and the Steam Injuns**, 17 June, Moksh, Jhamsikhel, and the grand finale with **Soaked**, 24 June, 1905, Kantipath

International Music Week Concerts, an unique outdoor concert organised by Alliance Francaise in Kathmandu along with Service Civil International featuring students of AFK, Kathmandu University School of Music and Manandhar Cultural Group. 21 June, 3pm, Dattatrya Square, Bhaktapur

Betty Argo in Kathmandu, popular French band live in concert. 26 June, 6pm, Nepal Academy Hall, invitations only

Boudha Stupa Restaurant & Café, 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 light. Boudha, 2130681

Comfort Zone, expansive restobar with a decent range of cocktails and barbequed meats. Thamel

Milk Coffee and Cocktail Café, coffee house during the day and a cozy lounge serving cocktails at night, try their yarchagumba and molecular cocktails along with the famous Starbucks. Woodland Complex, Durbar Marg



Bronco Billy, a new restaurant in town offering tex-mex and Indian dishes. They make their own corn tortillas, which gets a big thumbs-up. Pulchok opposite Namaste Supermarket



Lhakpa Chulo, try the tender steaks and Thai-style salads. Jhamsikhel

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This Friday evening, the doors of the hall at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza will open to an instrumental concert by Upendra Man Singh. Then, the soothing voice of Deep Shrestha, singing to music played by 1974 AD, will compliment a lavish

cocktail dinner. The celebration recognises 27 years of service by the Hospital and Rehabilitation Center for Disabled Children (HRDC). “The hospital has been committed to provide quality medical service to children, regardless of their financial

Situated near Banepa, HRDC specialises in children with physical disabilities, the only one of its kind in Nepal. It focuses on reconstructive surgery, rehabilitation of children and their integration into the society. The hospital was established with support from Terre des Hommes and Friends of the Disabled.

For the children

strength,” says Dr Ashok K Banskota, who has been a leading force behind HRDC. “We now want to share our success stories, and hopefully gather some fund for the hospital.”

For those who can't make it to the hospital, HRDC conducts medical camps every month, reaching out to 40 districts all over the country. The camps screen children and provide hospital referrals with costs covered by sponsoring charities. To date, 42,000 children have benefited from HRDC's efforts. Paavan Mathema

Let the children walk 2011
A fundraising event in support of HRDC 27 May 2011, 7PM onwards
Hotel Soaltee Crowne Plaza

SOMEPLACE ELSE

Typical of upscale dining in Kathmandu, a 13% value-added tax (VAT) on top of a 10% service charge makes for a distasteful surprise at the end of an already high-priced meal. But at Délices de France in Thamel, surcharges are indicated in parentheses by the dish, allowing patrons to dodge embarrassment and make allowances. Nepal's politicians could learn a lesson or two from Délice owner and restaurateur Christine Régnier, whose menu is dedicated to transparency and wholesomeness. On the gamut of international cuisine, the mild



MARCO POLLO

Délices

flavours and delicate nuances of French cookery slump in comparison to the piquant and punch of its southern counterparts, but trump as a celebration of the purity of food. A proper degustation at Délices requires a thorough tongue bath to capture the delicate explorations of

standard Provençale faire. Délices's emphasis on quality renders a symphony of full-bodied notes, where mixed greens actually taste green. The Mediterranean platter (priced as a main course) serves a savory medley of tapenades and crostinis atop a bed of crisp

leaves and toasted nuts: dollops of chicken liver mousse and aubergine caviar, shaves of Parma ham, and a pillow of goat cheese. Carnivores will find the *filet de boeuf* grilled to a perfect medium-rare (as it should be), served simply with roasted potatoes and

an essential *cuillère* of Dijon mustard. For sweets, the Whirl of Delights is a passable sample of four of its classic desserts (chocolate fondue, carrot *ka halwa*, banana gratin, pineapple cake) and a fifth Nepali-French fusion of apple momo laced in *crème anglaise*. Red walls, dotted with conventional black and white prints of the French landscape, and matching utilitarian table settings offer a modern backdrop. And live gypsy jazz on Saturday nights adds a romantic flare. Délices de France is a far cry from the gastronomic splendour of *Babette's Feast*, but hosts a reliable board of French delights at honest prices. Marco Pollo

Walking up towards the Kathmandu Guesthouse in Thamel, stop left at the Ganesh Man Singh building and ascend to the second floor.

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The Khumbu cough



DHANVANTARI
Buddha Basnyat, MD

Many clinicians spend their lives telling patients to take “lamo, lamo sas” (deep breath) as we auscultate the chest. This is wonderful in the beginning when you are fresh out of medical school, but after a while this exhortation becomes dull. Lucky then is the young physician who early on realises that some medical research activity may rescue him from boredom. Ashish Lohani, who is conducting a cough research at the Everest Base Camp, may be that fortunate physician.

While many of his friends have

flocked to the United States, Ashish has steadfastly decided to go the research route and take a chance. Amazingly, cough in the mountains is the single most common medical problem that porters and mountaineers face. Not much is known about the cause of this “Khumbu cough”. It seems the higher you go, the more you are likely to have persistent, disabling cough. Because many at altitude are breathless and breathe through the mouth, thus bypassing the natural humidifying mechanism of the nose, cold air may be triggering the cough by “roughing up” the bronchial mucosa. Or it could also be that asthma like mechanisms are at work at high altitude which cause narrowing of the airways and cough. Another

WHAT’S UP DOC: Ashish Lohani doing a clinical trial of high altitude cough at Everest Base Camp recently.

prime suspect is low oxygen at high altitude. Whatever the cause, as there is no known effective treatment, Lohani is doing a RCT (randomized controlled trial) to see if he can help. RCTs are the gold standard in Western medicine to prove the efficacy of drugs in clinical practice. There are two arms in his study, a potentially useful drug arm and a placebo arm. For over two months, he has been randomly enrolling patients in the highest terrestrial research station (5300m) and conscientiously charting his results to be analysed later. Many climbers including our own Nepali civil servants who were climbing Everest this spring wish Ashish every success in his endeavour even so that future climbers may be helped. Many of these enthusiastic, high profile Nepali climbers had to say goodbye to their summit bid due to hacking, persistent cough that almost caused rib fractures and punctured lungs. In the meantime, at Base Camp, Ashish is saying “Lamo, lamo sas linus” with more enthusiasm than we Kathmandu clinicians. 🇳🇵



WEEKEND WEATHER
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The giant low-pressure trough over eastern Himalaya and north-east India has further strengthened its position this week and has been gathering clouds from the surroundings. Satellite pictures of Thursday morning confirm that moisture-laden clouds have already piled up and are ready to produce heavy rains through the weekend. Expect heavy showers over central and eastern mid-hills before a brief cloud-free break in the weekend.



FRI	SAT	SUN
28-18	29-19	31-19



BIKRAM RAI

WATERHOLE: Kids fill water from a leaking pipe in Kuleshwor, Kathmandu, on Sunday.



BIKRAM RAI

FACE TO FACE: CA members interact with the locals on Sunday in a talk program conducted by Himalayan Television outside the CA building. The channel has been conducting this program daily.



BIKRAM RAI

SARANGI RETAULA: Gandharva musicians from Jhapa, perform at Music on the Move, a program organised by Hri Institute for Southasain Research and Exchange at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, on Saturday.



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Flash back

The editorial in Nepali Times that Friday morning was eerily titled 'Long Live the King'



KUNDA DIXIT

It was a hot and sultry evening, thunderstorms were brewing and the mountains to the west were silhouetted by flashing clouds beyond. There was the deep, dull boom of distant thunder.

At the Nepali Times, we took Fridays easy after the paper came out. That morning's edition featured the unending political bickering in a country paralysed by strikes. Then, as now, it was the NC and UML jostling for advantage with the Maoists on the other side.

Given what was to follow that night, the editorial was eerily titled 'God Save the King' and critiqued the Maoist campaign to ban the national anthem in schools.

In the From the Nepali Press section on p 15 was a translated article by Kishore Nepal from Naya Sadak, titled 'A Suitable Prince'. The Crown Prince was now 31, and needed to get married, Nepal wrote, hinting at disagreement within the royal family about Dipendra's choice of bride, a factor in the tragedy that was soon about to unfold. Royal matters were not discussed so openly in those days, and an article like that was fairly rare.

The first phone call came at 9:30 pm from a friend asking if I had heard that the king had a heart attack



and was in hospital. King Birendra had heart problems, so this was plausible. People in Lazimpat had heard gunshots, and rumours spread that the Maoists had attacked the palace. Cell phones had been introduced just two years previously, and they started going off all over town. Hospital personnel started calling friends and relatives, they in turn called others.

Like Chinese whispers, lot of the information got distorted as it spread. But the broad outlines of the ghastly events began to take shape as the night wore on. The story that emerged was so shocking and unbelievable that many rejected it as gossip and went to sleep. But the phones didn't stop ringing. 'King Birendra dead, Queen Aiswarya dead, Princess Shruti wounded, Prince Nirajan dead, Crown Prince



Dipendra in coma' the SMSs read. At 11 pm, three hours after the shooting, we had to decide whether to put the news up online. We hesitated. What if all the sources we heard from had all got it from the same rumour?

The storm was closing in, and mixed with the thunder was the sound of a helicopter overhead. This was the royal Super Puma that had tried to fly out to Pokhara to fetch Prince Gyanendra turning back because of bad weather. At 1:30 AM we put up the first item of news up on our website relating what we knew till then: that at least six members of the royal family were dead, there were rumours the crown prince had shot everyone and then shot himself.

The nation woke up the next morning, stunned by the news. People gathered at street corners reading



the only two newspapers that carried the news. Some editors played it safe and just ignored the story. The government immediately clamped down on news on the state media, radio and tv were allowed to broadcast only mourning music. The editor of Kantipur, Yubaraj Ghimire, was jailed for publishing an op-ed by Baburam Bhattarai in which he alleged the hand of Indian and American intelligence in the massacre (*See below*).

By morning at Chhauni Hospital seven members of the royal family were dead, King Birendra's brother Dhirendra was struggling for life and Dipendra was in a coma. The helicopter with Gyanendra finally made it and landed at the hospital. Rules of royal succession meant that Dipendra was declared king even though he was brain dead.

The government was in disarray, no one knew who was in charge: the prime minister, the palace, the comatose king or Gyanendra? An official announcement finally came in the afternoon of 2 June that said King Birendra and Queen Aiswarya were dead, it didn't say how they died. It proclaimed Dipendra king, and Gyanendra regent. A senior palace official told CNN that the royal family was killed by the "accidental discharge of an automatic weapon". An information blackout and statements like that meant rumours ran rife, media mishandling lead to wild conspiracy theories.

After Dipendra's funeral, Gyanendra was named king and he addressed the nation on television promising the people a "thorough investigation". Nepal had three kings in four days. The funerals and Gyanendra's enthronement happened as protests raged through the capital despite curfews.

The probe team finally came out with its preliminary findings two weeks later, saying Dipendra was responsible. But the people, lied to and denied correct information, didn't believe the government when it finally told the truth. 🇳🇵

nepalitimes.com/issue/archive
Issue #45, #46, #47

“The New Kot Massacre”

Baburam Bhattarai writing in Kantipur on 6 June 2001. Kantipur's editor, Yubaraj Ghimire was jailed for ten days following the publication of this article on the charge of sedition.

Ever since the Sugauli Treaty of 1846, all the political changes that have taken place in Nepal have been orchestrated by first British and then Indian imperialists. The new 'Kot Massacre' that transpired in Narayanhi is another episode in this series. Why were King Birendra and his family killed at this time? Even during the Indian embargo and the subsequent revolt in 1990, King Birendra had preferred to bow down to the people's wishes than give in to foreign pressures, and lately he had refused to mobilise the army against the Maoists. This was possibly his biggest fault in the eyes of the Indian and American expansionists. In many national issues, we and the king had similar views leading us to have an undeclared working solidarity, a fact that had alarmed imperialist powers.

King Birendra's softer stance towards the Maoists and the growing closeness to China did not endear him to India and America. The old Indian dream of turning Nepal into Sikkim now turned into another grand design whereby



“

I stick by what I said about the massacre ten years ago. Without a well-planned political conspiracy, the whole family of King Birendra could not have been wiped out while Gyanendra's family remained unharmed. The country has now become a democratic republic and we should dare to appoint a powerful enquiry commission to unravel the truth behind the massacre.

Baburam Bhattarai



As an editor, I don't regret giving space to a differing opinion. The arrest was proposed by Ram Chandra Poudel, the PM's office endorsed it and it was later defended by Chakra Bastola in front of the international media in Delhi. Nobody in the government opposed it. Girija Prasad Koirala, then PM had sent word to Kailash Sirohiya and Binod Gyawali, in detention that cases against them would be withdrawn if I was removed from my post but they refused.

Yubaraj Ghimire

”

Nepal would be Bhutanised before it could be made into another Sikkim. RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) formulated a strategy for this design in consultation with the CIA (through FBI whose branch was opened in Delhi). RAW infiltrated into the palace by generating a false fear of ISI and chose the new 'Jigme Singye' for the Bhutanisation of Nepal. It was through this 'Jigme Singye' that another Kot massacre was enacted in the palace. There is no doubt now that RAW which had already found a 'Lendup Dorje' in the form of Girija had used the new alliance between 'Lendup Dorje' and 'Jigme Singye' to enable the Bhutanisation and ultimately the Sikkimisation of Nepal as per its larger strategy.

But this is 2001, not 1846, and a lot of blood and water has flown down Nepal's rivers. King Birendra's and Prithvi Narayan Shah's contribution to the nation would always be remembered by the Nepali people but in no way would they accept the emergence of the new 'Jigme Singye'. The army which was unable to save the King should now work to save the nation and refuse to serve the puppets of imperialism in the palace. The country is in a grave condition; all patriotic forces should join hands at this moment. 🇳🇵

Dipendra kicked his



KETAKI CHESTER

I was standing by the doorway of the billiard room with my sister, Jayanti, when Dipendra walked past dressed in combat fatigues and guns in both hands. Usually the Crown Prince would look around and acknowledge those present, this time I remember his eyes: they were very focused as if he was concentrating hard on something. I whispered to my sister, “Isn’t he too old to be showing off those guns?” Even King Birendra thought his son had come to show him his weapons, but Dipendra let off a burst from the gun in his right hand. The bullets hit his father, wounding him. He said “Ke gareko?” before he slumped to the ground. Dipendra couldn’t hold down the recoil because he had another firearm in his left hand, so the other bullets hit the ceiling.

Kumar Gorakh and Dr Rajiv Shahi were immediately at the fallen king’s side to try to stem the blood pouring out. All of us also rushed to Birendra. That was when Dipendra came back the second time. Prince Dhirendra approached him and told him: “Pugyo Babu, you’ve done enough.” Thinking that his uncle would try to disarm him, Dipendra shot Dhirendra. I think it was the realisation that he had just killed his favourite uncle that brought

Ketaki Chester was a cousin of King Birendra, and was present with her sister at the Naryanhiti Palace on 1 June 2001 when Crown Prince Dipendra killed nine members of his family, including himself. Ten years later, Chester reveals some new information about what happened on that fateful night including how Dipendra kicked his father as he lay dying.

out the blood lust in Dipendra. He spun around and left the room, but when he returned for the third time he started spraying the whole room with bullets even as he entered the door.

By then, I was on the floor, trying to stop the blood pouring out of Dhirendra’s wounds. His arms were on his chest, he was paralysed but conscious. Although himself grievously wounded, I remember him asking me if I was hit. It was then that I saw I was dripping blood. Bits of flesh from my left arm had fallen on Dhirendra’s shirt, and two bullets had shattered my right shoulder. But there was no pain, the body in shock anaesthetizes you.

It all lasted barely five minutes, but the shooting seemed to go on forever. My sister lay dying. Queen Komal was hit in the chest. Sitashma remembered a bullet buzzing her ear. It was a miracle more people were not killed. When the firing started, Prince Paras was at one end of the room, and immediately herded his cousins and relatives behind a sofa. At one point Dipendra had Paras in his sights, but Paras said “Dai malai nahani baksyos...” Dipendra lowered his gun and let his cousin go. Shruti was unconscious, and bled to death in hospital because despite falling blood pressure the doctors did not undress her to find out where she was bleeding from.

After the shooting, Dipendra headed back to his room. His mother, Queen Aiswarya, and his brother, Nirajan, ran after him. Dipendra must have seen them both from the top of the stairs to his room, but in the darkness mistaken Nirajan for an ADC and let off a burst, killing his brother. Someone who was close by heard Queen Aiswarya then scream: “You have killed your father, you have killed your brother, kill me too. Han, han!” He then killed his mother and himself, and it was all over.

What struck me the most, and the memory of it all is still vivid in my mind as I play and replay it, is Dipendra kicking his father after he had shot him. In a way, it was even more shocking than the actual shooting itself. In our culture you never desecrate a dead person like that.

I am convinced now that Dipendra only wanted to kill his father. By law that would have made him the next king, and then he would tell us to keep quiet and that would be the end of it. It would have worked, no one would have dared speak the truth. My generation of family members were nearly all wiped out, only the younger generation remained, and they could have been convinced to remain silent. But after killing his uncle, he ran amok.



I believe Dipendra was just pretending to be drunk. He was walking unsteadily, but it was pretty clear he was putting on an act. I didn’t know him that well, but this was a man inclined to extremes. He was very gifted, very talented, he had learnt a lot in his short life, after all he was groomed to be king since he was a child. He had very good PR with people.

It was pre-mediated and carefully planned. He wanted everyone to

I had no time to grieve

VIVEK KUMAR SHAH

It was completely unimaginable. It was a huge shock, when I first heard what had happened that night, my nerves went numb. I rushed to the military hospital in Chhauni where I saw the grotesquely mutilated bodies of the members of the royal family. I cannot describe it in words. As ADC, I had to overcome my emotions, there was no time to grieve, I had to focus on the task at hand. I called the secretaries, the prime minister whom I briefed on what was going on.

I worked with the investigation team. I told them, I tell you now: Crown Prince Dipendra did it. But the conspiracy theories won’t go away. Who and why was the crown prince provoked to carry out such an act?

The report mentioned the crown



prince went on the rampage under the influence of drugs and drinks, which is not completely right. We never saw him drunk and fall unconscious. It might be that he was stressed before going ahead with his plan. He was in control, just look at his phone calls and the people he talked to. He pretended he was drunk.

It was true he had an ambition to be king. “If I don’t become the king, then nobody does,” he had told me once. I took it as a joke. He was getting extremely frustrated with the wait to be king. Never in my wildest imagination did I think this would happen.

Even today, when I remember that night, I break down. *Vivek Kumar Shah was serving as Military Secretary at the palace during the massacre*

Dipendra’s

Translated excerpt from book, Maile Dekheko Darbar by former Military Secretary to King Birendra Vivek Kumar Shah.

I met Dipendra in the palace when he was three years old. King Birendra and Queen Aiswarya were busy with state affairs most of the time. Dipendra was brought up by nannies and orderlies, and was deprived of parental love. He wasn’t allowed to mingle much with other children, nor was he put under the care of experts to groom him to be crown prince. He did not even get an opportunity to develop a normal personality, and used to beat people to the ground and until they cried. He used to enjoy doing it, and was growing eccentric and stubborn.

I couldn’t help notice what was happening to him. Although mother-son

relations should be warm, Dipendra was not in good terms with the queen as both were headstrong. Neither would concede defeat. I experienced and closely studied his personality, I witnessed and experienced his sadistic activities. We had to escort him to school when he was in kindergarten. He did not want to go to school, but the queen forced him to. She used to shout at him and slap him often when he refused. Sometimes, he wanted to get off the car that was taking him to school.

Dipendra was a lot of bother to his ADCs. He had a destructive streak and used to break glasses and pens in the ADC’s office, and if an ADC refused to obey him he used

father after he shot him



KUNDA DIXIT

be there that night, he invited them personally. It is as if he wanted them all to be witnesses of the death of his father, and in some bizarre way he may have thought this would confer him more authority as king. It was in his nature to crave an audience.

Kathmandu is a place full of rumours, and there are many about Devyani giving him an ultimatum on their proposed

marriage. She is a very well brought up lady, but was not the type that would put that kind of pressure on anyone. He was under a lot of stress, however, and it may have been the combination of tension about his marriage and other things that caused him to snap. And he did it in a way that he took the country down with him.

Prince Gyanendra was away in Pokhara, a helicopter was sent to get him, but couldn't fly out because of

bad weather. The army was sent to fetch him to Kathmandu by road, and the soldiers had been told not to tell him anything. Apparently when the soldiers came for him in Pokhara, he thought there had been an army coup and he was being detained.

I believe Prince Gyanendra would have joined the dinner if Dipendra had insisted, and if he had made it to the palace that night, like everyone else he would probably not have been spared. He and his son Prince Paras were never involved in any of this. I wish the word spread that they are totally blameless. What happened that night was the beginning of the end of the monarchy because of the act of one of its members, although events in the years that followed also contributed.

I can't help thinking that had King Mahendra lived just ten years more, Nepal would have been on a much more solid footing. He was a true nationalist. And King Birendra had such great confidence in the Nepali people, he felt they could do anything if only given the opportunity. He was uncomfortable about wielding absolute power and was happiest playing his constitutional role. He was full of optimism about the future of Nepal, you felt blessed just to be able to talk to him.

To this day, my biggest regret is that we did not jump Dipendra after he fired the first shots that night. I curse myself for not doing that, had we acted sooner so many people would not have died.

But if you ask me who bears the most responsibility and who could have saved the royal family and Nepal monarchy, it is Girija Prasad Koirala. I remember the prime

minister came to Chhauni hospital the next day and he was sitting on the floor next to Queen Mother Ratna and he asked her "Sarkar, what shall I tell the people?" The Queen Mother replied: "This is not something you should hide from the people. It may tarnish our family, we can live with that. But hiding the true facts will hurt the nation." But with the media blackout, and the ridiculous press conference of Speaker Ranabhat, truth was the casualty and conspiracy theories spread.

If the prime minister had followed the Queen Mother's advice, perhaps things would have turned out a lot different for the country. Of course, it didn't help that the palace was telling the international press that the deaths were caused by the "accidental discharge of an automatic weapon". It made us look ridiculous in the eyes of the world. And it was a mistake to make Dipendra king, how can someone who is brain-dead be declared king, there must have been provisions in the laws of succession to prevent this.

I was taken to hospital with the others. I was in pain killers, and in the ICU I dreamt that the entire family was back in a room, talking and smiling, but Dipendra was outside. My right arm never healed completely, I can't raise it more than halfway. But more than the physical wound, I am still haunted by the memory of that terrible night, the death of my sister and the others. It was a hideous thing that happened, and the last ten years have been very, very difficult for me. 🇳🇵

As told to Kunda Dixit.

troubled childhood



to kick and slap them. I had been at the receiving end of such treatment often. He had named me "Dangerous ADC". He was a spoilt brat.

The reason he was sent off to boarding school at Budhanilkantha was that he was difficult to handle at home. Actually, he enjoyed the freedom he had as a crown prince in school. He started drinking and smoking when he was in Grade Seven. We also heard that he led a gang to Siddhartha Bansathali School for a fight. He was interested in body-building, boxing and karate.

The distance between Dipendra and his parents widened after he started going to school. The parents cut his allowance but he would borrow from others. Since childhood, he got pleasure from hurting others, he used to hunt pigeons with his catapult, and he would

torture the wounded bird before it died. If he caught a mouse, he would set its tail on fire and leave it to die.

He had a thoughtful side, too. He loved travelling, wrote poetry, and Nepali literature teachers were hired to hone his talent. In Grade Six, he came up to me and said, "My mother is always ordering me around, can you have a word with her?" I couldn't help him.

As he grew older, he fell for Supriya Shah. The queen came to know about it. She may have asked him about it, which he did not like. The queen was against this relationship because of family ties:

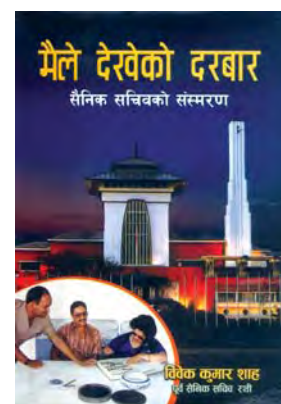
Supriya was grand-daughter of Queen Mother Ratna's own sister. I overheard the queen once saying, "Supriya is not competent to be queen."

Queen Ratna didn't mind the relationship, and King Birendra found himself in the middle between Ratna and Aiswarya. Dipendra met Devyani when he was studying at Eton. He continued his relationship with Supriya while he

courted Devyani. But the royal family had a position that the crown prince should not marry someone having relatives in India, as Devyani did.

He once had a torrid affair with a Japanese girl he met at Eton, and she had come to Nepal often to meet him. On one

of those visits they had a huge fight. Dipendra's ADC Gajendra Bohora escorted her to the airport. On the way, the girl told him: "Your crown prince is mad, he will die a dog's death." 🇳🇵



Living on perks

Saroj Raj Adhikari in Kantipur, 17 May

कान्तिपुर

According to a report, made under the directive of the State Affairs Committee, state resources and privileges are being distributed to government office bearers and their predecessors without following any rules or procedures. The committee had demanded the details in order to streamline the use of the state's resources and prevent misuse. There is no standard guideline as to how these perks are distributed.

The president, as a head of the state enjoys basic privileges of two vehicles and 310 litres of fuel per month along with additional Rs 100,000 miscellaneous expense to host dignitaries in his office and residence. Incumbent ministers and the ex-ministers enjoy huge perks depending on their power and influence. In this regard, Prime Minister Jhala Nath Khanal tops the list. Among the ex- prime ministers, Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal takes home the most benefits. The privileges given to ex-home ministers KP Oli and Bhim Rawal exceeds even those given to ex-prime ministers. Rawal got an expensive Japanese SUV for home ministry few days before he left the office and has refused to return the car. Ex-MP and influential power broker, Amresh Kumar Singh, enjoys a government privileges in the form of a luxury car, 120 litres of fuel/



month and a security personnel.

"The trend of taking perks seems to be less for necessity and more to exert power," says committee chairman Ram Nath Dhakal.

Following are the officially-sanctioned perks:

Prime Minister Jhal Nath Khanal: 3 jeeps, 3 pick-ups and 2 cars, 1000 litres fuel/month, 88 security personnel

Pushpa Kamal Dahal: 1 jeep, 2 cars, 300 litres fuel/month, Rs 80,000/month house rent and electricity bill and 33 security personnel in addition to his party's security

Sher Bahadur Deuba: Two cars, 300 litres of fuel/month and 26 security personnel

KP Oli: 2 cars, 1 pick-up, 450 litres fuel/month and 27 security personnel

Bhim Rawal: 2 vehicles (including a new Japanese luxury car), 200 litres of petrol and 22 security personnels

Fear factor

Sudheer Sharma in Kantipur, 25 May

कान्तिपुर

Nepal's political leaders are famous for doing things at the eleventh hour. Only now have they geared up to discuss on the CA's fate, and like last year it is certain that no solution will surface until the wee hours of 28 May.

The CA's extension will largely be determined by how the debate between the NC and the Maoists goes in the next 72 hours. It will centre on two issues: how to manage the arms and the combatants and who should lead the coalition of the three parties joining the government. The NC has decided that the CA term can be extended only if the Maoists come into an agreement on these issues. With the division of the Madhesi Forum, it is now impossible to garner a two thirds majority for CA extension without the NC's support.

No matter how strong the rhetoric, ultimately a consensus on extension seems inevitable. After all, the parties are quite aware of what will happen if they don't agree. This fear is what will ultimately bring them together. The NC and the Maoists have taken commendable steps by setting up a joint taskforce to seek consensus on Tuesday. But if they continue to be adamant on their respective stances, the CA may terminate on technical grounds alone.

The great thing about Nepali leaders is that in spite of their differences and hostilities, they are always willing to discuss things together and usually come up with a solution at the end. Let's hope, a right decision would be taken on the midnight of 28 May.



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Life interrupted

Ashok Silwal in Rajdhani, 23 May

राजधानी



A banda is usually a protest of last resort. But it has become a part of our daily life by default. It has become a routine to ask every morning, "Is there a banda today?" People are least interested in why and who calls these strikes. The dream of Naya Nepal mocks us in our face. The less crowded streets and clean air give the city a cleaner look but a banda paralyses the nation. Calling a banda has become an effective way for political groups to exert pressure on the government but these groups do not take into account, the multifaceted adverse effect it has on our nation's politics and economy.

There is tendency to glorify banda in the mainstream media. The pictures of empty streets with kids playing on the streets grab the headlines. But it does little beside ruining the nation's reputation internationally and spreading hopelessness towards politics among the people. Vehicles don't have petrol, the taps don't have water, there is no electricity and the generators have run out of diesel. Without even anybody declaring it, the nation is already reeling under an undeclared banda every day. In silence, we walk under the scorching sun or quietly take an afternoon nap at home.

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Point of no return

We need an extension, leaders understand very well that politics does not operate in a vacuum



GUEST COLUMN

Prof. Krishna Khanal

In the last few days, Nepali politics has become tangled and unpredictable. Clarity is the first casualty in the maze that this final run-up to the constitutional deadline has become.

The political parties and their leaders are reactive, setting their agenda on the basis of what they believe are the strategies of opponents within and outside their parties. Overlapping interests and tactics have meant that they have lost sight about what all this is supposed to be about: constitution-writing and concluding the peace process. It is time for them to sit back and look at themselves in perspective, see how far we have come since the 12-point understanding and assess the historical changes this nation has gone through.

Politics in Nepal has changed for the better. Not everyone will accept that, but if you think deeper, it is true. In spite of everything, the political transformation of the past three years cannot be underestimated. A 250-year old Hindu kingdom became a progressive, secular republic, which gives 33 per cent representation to women and recognises rights of the marginalised. That is a tremendous step



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

forward for a country that was steeped in feudalism and until recently was in the throes of a bloody war. The current standoff among the parties is to a great extent about claiming ownership of this change.

When it comes to hard political bargaining, each party is very careful about how much it is willing to concede to its opponents. So there is a 'marriage of convenience' which is exposed when you get to the nitty-gritty. Loktantra, for instance, means different things to different parties. Similarly, there is a debate between the NC and the Maoists regarding the right to private property and land reform. But, to be honest, there isn't much of a gap between the two on a liberalised economy, with the debate only on the modalities of implementation.

The least of all problems between the two parties is an ideological conflict. The parties have progressed from dogmatism, and the tussle is more about power-sharing. There is fear among NC leaders about the growing leftist influence in the country. So, the slogan of the "threat of left-wing dictatorship" propagated by the party is more to consolidate its own political sphere of influence than an actual perceived threat. Similarly, having decided to lay down their guns the Maoists need as much political influence to build a strong public support base.

The strong rhetoric that is flying around just reflects the effort by both sides to enhance their bargaining positions. Remember, the situation was just the reverse last year, and the Maoists were able to pressurise Madhav Nepal

to resign as a condition for extension. But the bottom line is this: everyone wants an extension because these are political actors and they understand very well that politics does not operate in a vacuum.

The government's 46-week work schedule is actually another way to say 'one year'. The first 12 weeks is proposed for completing the peace process, which can be completed sooner if there is agreement among the parties. The debate about the system of governance will be intense and it will take several rounds of meetings before the parties come up with a compromise formula acceptable to all. But if everybody agrees on the UML's proposal of the French model, then the debate can be resolved overnight.

Same is true with the nature of federalism, and the kind of electoral

system. There can easily be a politically acceptable compromise if the parties climb down to reality from their populist posturing. The time frame is neither strictly in line with the proposed schedule, nor is it overstated. Even agreeing on a proposed timeframe is a positive indication.

The political parties must have learned in the last three years that they cannot operate as if this is politics-as-usual. Nepal is still in transition, when the rules are different. It demands compromise, decisions by consensus and sobriety, not populist sloganeering on the streets. We have to return to the spirit of the 12-point agreement and forge that consensus again to complete the task at hand in the extended timeframe. 🇳🇵

Prof. Krishna Khanal is the director at Center for Constitutional Dialogue.

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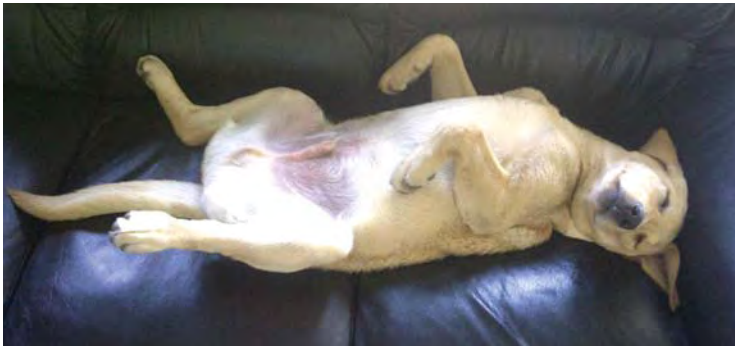
Character makes a man,
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Every son of a bitch has his day

It was one of those great reversals of fortune to hear Om Minister Mahara Kamred issue an appeal to Chhetris, Bahuns and Co Pvt Ltd not to go through with their three-day bund because, as he put it, "It will have a negative impact on the economy and inconvenience the people." Which must be why his party announced an indefinite strike that lasted nearly a week last year about this time. Muntri Mahara, of course, doesn't have a clue that bunds are in fact good for the economy, they are great for GDP growth, and we should have more of them. Take the three days of shutdowns last week, and look at what we achieved:

1. Nepal saved 102 million litres of petrol and diesel in the 15 days of shutdowns in various parts of the country this month, thus preventing an increase in our BOP deficit with India to the tune of Rs 1 arab.
2. At the average rate of 15 fatalities a day on our highways, the shutdowns saved the lives of 45 Nepalis.
3. 50 goats, 67 ducks and 650 chicken that would have been



victims of road kill on our highways lived to see another day so they could be sacrificed at the temple.

4. More than 7,000 marriage processions with lavish jantis, baja gaja, sumptuous banquets and other unnecessary wedding expenses were not incurred because of successive highway closures, boosting family cash savings nationwide by an estimated 100 karods.
5. Nepalis all over the country saved up to Rs 3 arabs in three days because they couldn't get to hospital and so were spared having to pay exorbitant medical bills.
6. The kids stayed home and got time to catch up with their home

works like tending buffalos, washing dishes and helping at the neighbourhood rice mill, thus contributing their slave labour to the national economy.

7. Nepal's annual GDP growth rate went up by an average of 0.5% because of the dramatic increase in the sales of gin, vodka, whiskey, rum, beer and moonshine during the bund period.
8. Tens of thousands of jobless youth were provided three days of full-time employment setting up highway barricades, setting fire to buses and carrying out target practice on fast-moving motorcyclists. This enhanced the purchasing power of the population,

and helped the economy.

9. A new national past-time was created in Butwal on Tuesday's bund: the attempt of the live cremation of a teacher who dared defy a strike call. Barbecuing fellow-Nepalis is a bold new step to showcase our martial spirit and upholding our proud heritage of bravery in battle.
10. Tourism entrepreneurs have short-sightedly called for a ban on bunds. That would be a mistake. We should look at marketing hartals to potential visitors by having niftily designed signage on the sides of London double-deckers promoting deserted streets, pollution-free cities and free treks from the airport to hotel.

As the country reached its constitutional climax, tempers frayed and the defenestrator MP, Mr Paswan, did a Tarzan-cum-King Kong impersonation by trying to wrestle the chairman of the constitutional committee, Nilambar Uncle, to the ground. Paswan has certain conditions for constitution extension: that throughout the extension period CA members should be allowed to throw furniture out of

windows, poke microphones up the noses of fellow-legislators in the State Restructuring Committee, colour red passports fluorescent pink so they can be sold in dark alleyways behind the BICC, slap a super-injunction on media reports about phone calls pertaining to 50 karods for buying and selling CA members. Only if these conditions are met will he allow the CA extension.

So Armageddon did not happen on May 21. But wait, did they get the calculation wrong by a week and it will still happen on May 28? Which brings us to the question when does the deadline actually expire on May 28? Western embassies in Kathmandu seem to think it is midnight. Actually in Nepal the new day begins at 6AM, which means the party bosses have six more hours to bang their heads together and come up with an agreement on extra time.





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