As the country reaches another constitutional crossroads, it is being paralysed by a buildup of bandas. 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, 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 Gagan Thapa 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
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 godsend. They were emboldened to telescope their revolution and within five months attacked army bases. The war intensified dramatically, three 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 agreement with the guerrillas. Even then, most Nepalis, despite the erosion of respect for the monarchy that is not a small mistake. They should have removed the an absolute king in Nepal were forced to respond to the 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 once the country's pride was now a source of controversy and debate. 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, 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 like 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?

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 Nepalis are raped or sold in brothels? How can any one live with 15 hours of power outages 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. It's 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 bashing them, impunity will grow in Nepal. They should be made to forti fy 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, Shakhtikhor 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 Pushpajuli Nath put some sense to these so-called civil society and media activists. Completely disappointed with Kunda Dixit's editorial.

Sameer

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 is the euro-funded hot heads.

Janardan

What an inspirational story (‘Ani’s school’, #554), thanks to Tsering Dolker Gurung and Nepal 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 Anita 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).

Balak

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 and are diverse? The people are much wiser than dotard-farming activists and their masters.

Dh

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

What do you think about the SC’s decision regarding the extension of CA?

Eric

Weekly Internet Poll # 555

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

Tul interal Poll # 555. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Times

nepalitimes.com

Published by: Himalmedia Pvt Ltd

Chief Operatin#er: Sunim Tamang

Printed at: Jagadamba Press

Subscription:

Printed at: Jagadamba Press

Tel: 01-5250017-19

Editorial:

Arjun Karki, Surendra Sharma

Edited with just a ceremonial role. He had a visceral hatred for 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, 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 like 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?

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 Nepalis are raped or sold in brothels? How can any one live with 15 hours of power outages 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. It's 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 bashing them, impunity will grow in Nepal. They should be made to forti fy 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, Shakhtikhor 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 Pushpajuli Nath put some sense to these so-called civil society and media activists. Completely disappointed with Kunda Dixit's editorial.

Sameer

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 is the euro-funded hot heads.

Janardan

What an inspirational story (‘Ani’s school’, #554), thanks to Tsering Dolker Gurung and Nepal 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 Anita 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).

Balak

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 and are diverse? The people are much wiser than dotard-farming activists and their masters.

Dh

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

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

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 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 muddied 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.
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 Kalkot, 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
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, 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 the 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 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 hyenas—they thrive on combinatorial 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 barista 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.

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 the 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 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 hyenas—they thrive on combinatorial 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 barista 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.

Achieving professional success in Nepal needs patience and humility.
Feeling crabby?
It’s bad enough being in a bucket without a bunch of crabs pulling you down

Nepalis are the bravest of the brave and hospitable beyond the call of duty, if we are to believe our own mythmaking. By the same token, they’re akin to a cluster of crabs in a bucket; we do enjoy the odd game of khatta zauna, a local variation on the globally accredited ‘tall poppy syndrome’.

Going by the Facebook protests in the capital lately, the so-called sukila-mukila of yesteryear are live and kicking. Inevitably, the initiative to use social networks to push for a constitution and outlaw the plague of bandas has spawned a couple of dismissive op-eds. Protestors have been damned for their alleged loyalty to brands (rather than the ‘people’) and their moralistic outrage (as opposed to practical politics).

To state the obvious: everyone has the right to protest, as long as the protest does not tread on the rights of anyone else. Thus bandas, particularly of the illogical variety that have sprung up in this last week, are a no-no. Rallies that do not obstruct traffic – such as those in Khula Manch – and which seek to counter those who obstruct our freedom to move around and conduct our business, are definitely kosher. We’ve heard some perverse arguments in the meantime. When the indefinite Maoist banda of last May began to fall apart, the former revolutionaries complained that reactionaries were provoking them and impinging upon their right to protest. Coming from those who seized the right to unleash violence in response to literal or structural state violence, this was hardly surprising. From left-of-centre commentators embedded into sukila-mukila society, it borders on the absurd.

Those who’ve turned up to the Facebook events were by no means a homogenous clique of prosperity. But let us assume that such a class manifests itself beyond the pages of ECS and TGIF to frivolously protest on the streets when the fancy takes it. Critical commentators should in fact be glad that the indolent elite are demonstrating some interest in politics. So what’s their problem?

At the core of the antagonism lies mistrust, and a certain contempt, of the sukila-mukila. But more important from the perspective of the armchair revolutionary is to publicly distance oneself from this class as in reality, they are as favourably bound to the system as the sukila-mukila.

One would think a more positive response towards the Facebookers – in intent no different from the umpteen protesters in front of the Constituent Assembly – would contribute to the creation of a better, fairer system. But perhaps the problem, for the critics, lies in the supposedly naïve and moralistic tone of all these protests that demand a constitution NOW. After all, politics is politics, they say, and without the tedious negotiations among the representatives of the people, we’d only have a half-assed sketch of a constitution, respected by none. Granted: no one is suggesting we set up a Government of It’s bad enough being in a bucket without a bunch of crabs pulling you down
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 de-motivation,” 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.”

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

Eyes Empowered Part II, NIDACS 2nd Annual Deaf Art Exhibition, Summit Hotel, 3 - 10 June
Gardens of 28 May, 10am to 5pm, book sale organised by Alliance Francaise, a used French Book Sale.

28 May, 3pm to 8pm, Conference exhibition by Jeff Botz.

The Government Inspector.

Spring Resort, Kurintar, Rs 3500

Discussion on Karnali Blues, with author Buddhi Sagar organised by Himalayan readers’ book club.

Champions league final.

Tripureshwor, Outdoors Grind, Sherpa Mall, Durbar Marg.

28 May, 9pm to 4am, Cafereena, Outdoors.

28 to 29 May, party organized by Party Nepal.

1 am, Patan Museum, Lalitpur.

AFK Music Contest, an open music contest to young musicians featuring artists Dinesh and the Sound Minds, 27 May.

Factory, Trameil, Prism, 3 June, Bhum Reeto and Lounge, Lazimpat.

International Music Week.

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

DINING

Power Lunch, Corporate Business Lunches at Olive Garden, Radisson Hotel.

Every Friday from 12.30 pm to 3 pm, Rs 600 nett for Veg and Rs 650 nett for Non-Veg, Lazimpat.

Attic Bar, ambience, good food and drinks and great music. Tej Bhawan, Uttara Choka 4442613

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

LIFE TIMES

27 MAY - 2 JUNE 2011 

YES TO PENSION NO TO TENSION

- Pay monthly premium and receive monthly pension for your whole life
- Numer of APF: 500,000 /- (Insurance Amount)

Note:
- Monthly premium
- Based on future rate assumption of 5% and subject to change if declined bonus rate varies.

PrimeLife

Pension PLAN

Hikal, Kathmandu, 1008-01-44853 (Toll free)

Email: info@primefalaya.com, Web: www.primefalaya.com

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 yardhausma and molecular cocktails along with the famous Starbucks. Woodland Complex, Durbar Marg

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

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 politicos 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 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 caillèbre of Dijon mustard. For sweets, the Whirl of Delights is a passable sample of four of its classic desserts (chocolate fondué, 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 Polo

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

M any clinicians spend their lives telling patients to take “lamo, lamo sa” (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 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 helping 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 endeavours 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 sa! linus” with more enthusiasm than we Kathmandu physicians...
Flashback

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 overtook the hills 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 opposite 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 King. PM Baburam Bhattarai writing in Kantipur on 6 June 2001. Kantipur's editor, 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.

The country was in a state of jostling for advantage with the Maoists on the one hand and the NC and UML on the other. The country didn't have a strong leader to guide it.

The American policy of counter-insurgency and the people's wish to march towards a communist state was a fact that had alarmed imperialist Indian and American expansionists. In many places, the people had gone on strike and the army had been called to put down the people's wishes.

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, a 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 Aishwarya 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 in our site or hold back.

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 a 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, gpshnpmfs reading 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.

By morning at Chhauni Hospital seven members of the royal family were dead, King Gyanendra’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. A political announcement finally came in the afternoon of 2 June that said King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya 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 crowned 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 the country was in a state of starvation.

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.

The New Kot Massacre

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, generating a false fear of ISI and chose the new ‘Jigme Singye’ for the Bhutanisation of Nepal. It was through this ‘Jigme Singye’ that the new ‘Kot Massacre’ was enacted in the palace. There is no doubt now that RAW which had already found a ‘Lendu Dorje in the form of Dipendra’ had used the new alliance between ‘Lendu Dorje’ and ‘Jigme Singye’ to enable the Bhutanisation and ultimately the Sikhisation of Nepal as per its perverted 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 who in no way would they accept the emergence of the new ‘Jigme Singye’. The army which was unable to save the King and 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 forces should join hands at this moment.

Baburam Bhattarai writing in Kantipur on 6 June 2001. Kuntaur’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 British and then Indian imperialists. The new ‘Kot Massacre’ that transpired in Narayanhiti is another episode in this series. Why were Dipendra and his family killed at this time? Even during the Indian embargo and the subsequent revolt in 1960, King Birendra had preferred to bow down to the people’s wishes than give in to foreign pressures, and lately he had refused to make even small overtures to Maoists. He was possibly his biggest fault in the eyes of the Indian and American expansionists.

In many nations a brewing and the king had similar views leading us to have an unclutered working solidarity, a fact that had alarmed imperialist powers.

King Birendra’s softer stance towards the Maoists and the growing doiness 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 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 his right shoulder. It was a miracle more people were not killed. When the firing started, Prince Paras was at one end of the room, and immediately heeded 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. It might be that had he continued, Dipendra 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. I couldn’t help noticing that fateful night including how Dipendra kicked his father as he lay dying. After the shooting, Dipendra headed back to his room. His mother, Queen Aiswarya, and his brother, Nirajan, ran after him. Dipendra must have been aware of this. 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 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 believe he was drunk and was not in control. I think Dipendra was drunk, but he was in control. In his personality, I don’t think I could 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. As I looked 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. He never desecrate a dead person like that. It would have made him the next king. That would have been a disaster. 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.
father after he shot him

Kathmandu is a place full of rumors, and there are many about Deyvari 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 Chhaumi 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 law 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 image 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

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 Deyvari when he was studying at Eton. He continued his relationship with Supriya while he courted Deyvari. But the royal family had a position that the crown prince should not marry someone having relatives in India, as Deyvari did.

He once had a terrible 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 aSDC Gajendra Bohora escorted the girl to the airport. On the way, the girl told him: “Your crown prince is mad, he will die a dog’s death.”

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.

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, but he did not like. The queen was against this relationship because of family ties:

be there that night, he invited them all to be witnesses of the death of his father, and in some bizarre way he may have thought this would confer his nature to crave an audience.

His marriage to Devyani was against this relationship he did not like. The queen asked him about it, which she may have known about it. She may have thought this would confer more authority as king. It was in his nature to crave an audience.

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 Chhaumi 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 law 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 image 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.
Living on perks
Sanj Raj Adhikari in Kantipur, 17 May

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 compensation which he has not been able to utilise.

The privileges given to ex-ministers include: KP Oli: Two cars, 300 litres fuel/month and 26 security personnel; KP Oli: 2 cars, 1 pick-up, 450 litres fuel/month and 26 security personnel; Sher Bahadur Deuba: Two cars, 300 litres fuel/month and 26 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.

Fear factor
Sudheer Sharma in Kantipur, 25 May

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 bearers 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 the CA gets terminated on technical grounds alone. This 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.

Life interrupted
Ashok Silwal in Rajdhani, 23 May

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 bandsas in the mainstream media. The public has become used to the idea of empty streets with kids playing on the streets grab the headlines. But it does little beside increasing sense of hopelessness towards politics and 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.
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 they 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 the rights of the marginalised. That is a tremendous step 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.

Point of no return
We need an extension, leaders understand very well that politics does not operate in a vacuum.
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 juntis, 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. 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.
6. More than 7,000 marriage processions with lavish juntis, 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.
7. 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.
8. 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.