Contours of a new Nepal

A constitution is not supposed to be something that is hardly worth the paper it is written on. It is a dynamic document that should evolve, and can be changed to suit the times. We have to start thinking about the post-27 May scenario by devising a national unity government to protect Nepal’s national unity. Then, approve a new federal republican constitution that guarantees in its preamble fundamental values like democracy and pluralism, ensures social justice and gives every citizen the right to food, shelter, health care and security. We can shelve the deeply divisive issues for later when there is more stability, and our politicians show more maturity.

The wrong signal
Kul Chandra Gautam on the questionable wisdom of Ban Ki moon’s proposed visit to Lumbini

BHUMIKA
“I was born a male, but I never felt I belonged to that body.”

Editorial page 2

page 3

page 13
It has often been said that the reason for the current political standstill is the trust deficit among the narrow-minded and short-sighted parties. The main obstacle to the peace and constitution project is the Maoist party itself. To be more specific, they are the so-called Baidya faction that wants a “people’s revolt”, and the even more hardline Ram Bahadur Thapa clique that on Wednesday threatened to take Nepal down the path of a multi-ethnic civil war. Who's the party just split and get it over with?

This week the ultra-left wing of Nepal’s extreme leftists once more put a spanner in the works by announcing a series of escalating protests till May. Protest against whom? For what? Mohan Baidya lashed out at Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal for double crossing him. Essentially, Dahal had assured Baidya he would help bring down what both saw as an “anti-nationalist” Bahadur Bhattarai government and replace it with one that would push a “revolutionary people’s constitution”. But when Dahal said this week that the constitution would be drafted in time and hinted that Bhattarai should remain till then, Baidya blew a fuse. It’s getting difficult to tell who is stabbing whom in the back with the Maoist party anymore. Dahal and Bhattarai keep blaming the UML and NC as being the reason for the delays in the constitution. They can’t fool all the people all the time that the main obstruction is and have always been the hardliners that they have flirted with time and again to improve their short-term bargaining positions. As for Dahal, this is a man with a single-minded and vaulting ambition to be an executive president, and is willing to do anything to give himself the chance to threaten anyone, to get his way. Which is why he has suddenly gone soft on ethnic federalism, given in on the rank of Maoists to be induced into the new directorate, and abandoned just about everything his party fought a ruinous war for.

Most Nepalis don’t buy this nonsense anymore. They’ve heard it all before, and know that the Maoists will blow hot or cold depending on internal party dynamics. The integration of Maoists into the Nepali Army should have been finished by December, and it kept being pushed back because the Maoists kept moving the goalposts. Every time there was an agreement in the Special Committee on the terms of integration, compensation packages, or the composition of the directorate, the Maoists would pull back from already agreed terms. What do they take the rest of the country to be useful idiots for?

With two months to go for the unextendable constitution deadline, the real issue is that there is no time left to resolve the stumbling blocks in the new constitution on federalism and government. It is unlikely that they can be miraculously resolved in the next few weeks, especially since there has been so much politics played around ethnic federalism and presidential system.

Our humble suggestion would be to start thinking about post-27 May scenarios by reading a national unity government to protect Nepal’s national unity from the centrifugal forces threatening it. Then, we can approve a new federal republican constitution that guarantees in its preamble fundamental values like democracy and pluralism, ensures social justice and gives every citizen the right to food, shelter, health care and security. We can shallow the deeply divisive issues for later when there is more stability and Nepal’s politicians exhibit more maturity.

After all, there is no point passing a constitution that is hardly worth the paper it’s written on, a dynamic document that should be evolved, and can be changed to suit the times.

WHOSE MADHES?
I contributed an article with Rubeeba Mahato on “Whose Madhes?” (R956). Being from the Madhes myself, I don’t see any sign of a conflict between the Madhesi and Pahadi peoples. Selfish politicians who have been earning large sums of money in the name of poor Madhesi people, and intellectuals in the national daily are carrying this propaganda and misleading Nepalis.

Dibya

- Thank you Rubeeba Mahato for another superb piece. I visit the Nepal Times website just to read your articles. Your reporting is original, you don’t have the bias of foreign writers or the lack of insight of local reporters. Keep up the excellent work.

Pranab

- Thank you Nepal Times and Rubeeba Mahato for an insightful report. I am a Madhesi myself and during my stay in Janakpur, especially in summer time, I found it fascinating how the Pahadi and Madhesi people who share their culture and created a vibrant community. You do not have to tell them that diversity is good, they would tell you that diversity is a strength of Nepal.

Sukdev Shah

- What the Madhes wants is also what rest of Nepal wants: good delivery of services and development. Similarly, the disenchantment with party leaders is not limited to the Tarai, it is pervasive throughout the country. I think the root of our problems lies in our inability to choose the right leaders.

K K Sharma

- You can easily replace ‘Madhes’ and ‘Madheshi’ in Rubeeba Mahato’s column with ‘Nepal’ and ‘Nepali’ and it will portray a true picture of the entire nation. What Nepal (and the Madhesi) really need are honest, smart and capable leaders who will introduce new models of governance in the country. Until then corrupt politicians - from different regions, castes, parties – will continue enjoying good lives while ordinary Nepalis will keep on suffering.

A Nepal

REVISIONISTS AND REFORMISTS
Nepal Times refused to call the Maoists “terrorists” even when they were killing innocent people, and instead justified it as a “liberation movement” (“Wanted: revisionist and reformists,” editorial, R956). Then in the 2008 election the paper said the Maoists were the only party that is for change. As the Maoists look towards the current government to be sent to the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

Fan

- The Maoists have fooled everyone in Nepal and in the international circles and hoisted billions in the process. But very soon the Dahal and Bhattarai factions will split and it will be the best day for Nepal. There are also other options: we can put them behind bars and make them share their fate.

Poudyal

- It’s clear that the west is using Nepal as a battleground to embarrass China, and since Nepal is so politically weak it cannot stand up to them. Nepal cannot allow itself to be used for anti-China activities. It’s not our fight and the Americans should take their Simaphosa elsewhere.

Anil B

UN and party to Universal Declaration of Human Rights, those who should honour a principle to respect and reject minimum standards of human rights. Also sitting on the fence will neither help the fugitives nor will it improve Nepal’s reputation in the international arena. It’s time the government realised the gravity of Tibetan refugee problem and made its position clear.

Laekam Lamichhane

- With the kind of political leadership we have in Nepal it will take at least a generation to show maturity and stop acting like a border sentient for our northern neighbour.

Bishwa Nepal

- This week the ultra-left wing of Nepal’s extreme leftists once more put a spanner in the works by announcing a series of escalating protests till May. Protest against whom? For what? Mohan Baidya lashed out at Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal for double crossing him. Essentially, Dahal had assured Baidya he would help bring down what both saw as an “anti-nationalist” Bahadur Bhattarai government and replace it with one that would push a “revolutionary people’s constitution”. But when Dahal said this week that the constitution would be drafted in time and hinted that Bhattarai should remain till then, Baidya blew a fuse. It’s getting difficult to tell who is stabbing whom in the back with the Maoist party anymore. Dahal and Bhattarai keep blaming the UML and NC as being the reason for the delays in the constitution. They can’t fool all the people all the time that the main obstruction is and have always been the hardliners that they have flirted with time and again to improve their short-term bargaining positions. As for Dahal, this is a man with a single-minded and vaulting ambition to be an executive president, and is willing to do anything to give himself the chance to threaten anyone, to get his way. Which is why he has suddenly gone soft on ethnic federalism, given in on the rank of Maoists to be induced into the new directorate, and abandoned just about everything his party fought a ruinous war for.

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Wrong visit at the wrong time
The questionable wisdom of Ban Ki-moon’s proposed visit to Lumbini

T

e the proposed visit by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to Lumbini on April 2012 should have signified a welcome new commitment for the development of the birthplace of Lord Gautam Buddha which is a UNESCO world heritage site.

However, it would be untimely and inauspicious for the Secretary-General to visit Lumbini under present circumstances. Nepal is at a critical juncture, struggling to overcome the legacy of a decade-long civil war that killed 15,000. Genuine peace has not yet dawned, the drafting of the new constitution has been delayed by two years, and there is rampant lawlessness and impunity.

The war saw horrendous human rights violations, some amounting to crimes against humanity, but not a single individual has been prosecuted. Many known perpetrators occupy high positions in government. Instead of establishing a credible Truth and Reconciliation Commission consistent with international norms, the ruling Maoists are negotiating the terms of a blanket general amnesty with other Maoists are negotiating the terms of amnesty for heinous criminal acts, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

It continues to be the party’s official policy to “capture state power” by any means, either through ballots or bullets, backed up by a “people’s revolt” from the streets.

The main rationale for the UN’s involvement in Lumbini is to spread the culture of peace, not to condone the glorification of violence. It would be moronic for the Secretary-General of the UN to co-chair a meeting with an unrepentant leader with blood on his hands at the holy birthplace of the Buddha.

If Ban Ki-moon is to co-chair a high profile meeting with Dahal, he must first insist that Dahal’s party officially renounce the use of violence in politics in the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations. The Secretary-General co-chairing such a conference at a holy site would be a sacrilege insulting not just peace-loving Nepalis but millions of Buddhists around the world.

Ban Ki-moon must not ignore recent attempts by a rather mysterious Hong Kong-based private foundation called the Asia-Pacific Cooperation and Exchange Foundation (APECF), of which Dahal is Co-chairman, to sneakily involve the UN Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) rather than UNESCO for the development of Lumbini. When this highly unusual deal involving the Beijing of UNIDO was exposed last year, UNIDO headquarters in Vienna embarrassingly disowned its country office’s decision and reimposed its Country Director.

It would be most unwise for Ban Ki-moon to lend his name and the prestige of the United Nations to whitewash the image of a political leader who continues to believe that political power flows out of the barrel of a gun. The Secretary-General could help expedite Nepal’s peace process and regain the tarnished image of the UN in Nepal by insisting on three preconditions for his planned visit:

a) that Dahal and his party abjure the politics of violence;

b) announce that the UN will not cooperate with the proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission if it does not fully comply with the norms enshrined in relevant UN Conventions to which Nepal is a State Party, and reject attempts to grant blanket general amnesty for heinous criminal acts, war crimes and crimes against humanity;

c) insist that the long-delayed integration and rehabilitation of Maoist combatants is completed in the next few weeks to close all remaining cantonments prior to the April visit.

Ban Ki-moon must convey such messages clearly and forthrightly, not in the ambiguous diplomatic language calling for “flexibility and compromise by all parties.” If these pre-conditions are not fully met, he should either cancel his visit or come prepared to deliver such a message bluntly and boldly.

Part of the reason for Ban Ki-moon’s strong interest in the development of Lumbini has to do with his devout Buddhist mother’s wishes. We Nepalis deeply respect her wishes, and Mr Ban is welcome to visit Lumbini any time for a pilgrimage, but without hobnobbing with Maoist leaders who refuse to fully abide by Buddha’s teachings of peace and non-violence.

Kul Chandra Gautam is a former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations.
Since the end of the Maoist insurgency, an average of three commercial banks has opened every year, with 32 commercial banks operating in the country today. The industry, which once showed immense growth even through the sluggish economy is now challenged by high liquidity, decreasing profits and increasing bad debts.

Excessive investment in the real estate sector is deemed encouraging either. In the first six months of the current fiscal year, banks’ profits declined by 29 per cent, even as bad debts doubled. In the last quarter, interest income grew by only 13 per cent, while interest expense soared by 28 per cent. The provision for bad and doubtful debts has also doubled. The interest spread is at 3.16 per cent. “The liquidity crisis has eased, but banks have to bear the high costs of funds, which is in turn affecting profits,” explains Rajan Singh Bhandari, Vice Chairman of Nepal Bankers Association and CEO of Citizen’s Bank. The anti-money laundering acts, which Nepal is supposed to ratify within two months, also pose a threat to the banking industry. If Nepal fails to endorse the bills before the deadline, Financial Action Task Force, the international anti-money laundering body, will blacklist the country. This means that the letters of credit

**In search of new avenues**

The illusion of a loss-proof banking sector is slowly breaking

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**“I am worried about the peace process”**

German Parliamentary State Secretary for Development Cooperation Gudrun Kopp spoke to *Nepali Times* at the end of her three-day visit to Nepal this week.

Nepali Times: Did you get any indication in your meeting with senior Nepali ministers that they really understand or have a commitment towards transitional justice? Gudrun Kopp: Yes, I did. When I first prepared my trip to Nepal, the priority was different. We intended to look at renewable energy, health, decentralisation empowering local government in the villages to prepare for the bilateral negotiations on future cooperation between Nepal and Germany in May. But when I read about the state of the peace process, I was really worried. I talked to my experts in the ministry about the proposal to grant general amnesty. Of course, we can’t be telling another government what they should and shouldn’t be doing. But we bear our share of responsibility when it comes to the question for whom and what we are going to spend our taxpayers’ money for. We underline towards the government, the importance of good governance, respect for human rights and justice. The government of Nepal asked for more private investments and therefore I urged the prime minister to first build a conducive economic framework to attract foreign investment. The rule of law is absolutely essential for further economic development.

Is progress on truth and reconciliation and disappearances going to be linked to future aid? As a friend of Nepal I wish to make it quite clear that progress on the two mentioned commissions and the entire inclusive peace process will be crucial for our forthcoming government negotiations. Do you think the message went home? Absolutely.

Are you optimistic that they will act on it? Personally I had the impression that the prime minister is really willing to act accordingly. I don’t know whether he will be able to bring all parties concerned around the table to find a compromise including representatives of the victims and actually dealing with the cases. I know it is difficult, but it will be even more difficult not to do so.

Is the relatively more nuanced way Germany deals with these issues a result of Germany’s own history? Definitely! We as Germans made mistakes in the past and had to suffer from the country’s division for more than four decades, families were separated and society broke up. Reunification and sorting out our past – including severe offences - were tough. We know how harmful it is to be a divided nation and therefore would like to share our experiences and lessons learned with others. Denying the past can never help build a bright future. Sweeping away past injustices will doubtlessly lead to future conflict. You included Purnimaya Lama and Suman Adhikari in your press conference in Kathmandu. What struck you the most about what they had been through?

Both were calling out for justice – not revenge! We could feel their suffering. How a woman, who has a weaker standing than a man in this society, could keep her strength, perseverence and still have the will to make others feel the injustice she has been suffering was very moving. It is absolutely admirable how powerful she is in a country where a woman’s voice is often so feeble. Suman is not angry with the government, he is not seeking revenge, and he is not “carrying a weapon”. Both just want justice. Maybe this reaction is typical for Nepali culture, where deep inside people are peaceful.

Given Nepal’s progress in health and education, do you anticipate Germany’s aid policy to have a different emphasis? It will have to be more inclusive. We will focus on women and children in focus. For example I will be wise to train midwives in villages since many young pregnant women don’t go to hospitals and therefore training and sending midwives to villages is important and effective. People with disabilities who are still being neglected need special attention, too.

Are there any concrete thoughts what might be on the agenda in the May assessment of aid policy? We will be moving away from further big national energy projects like the Marsyangdi project which cost over 150 million euros. Instead, we will put an emphasis on smaller decentralised projects with biogas and solar that can function independently.
Banking on banks

The increase in liquidity has to be followed by an increase in investments

This time, last year, banks and financial institutions in Nepal were reeling under a severe liquidity crunch. Interest rates went up, lending went down, and investments suffered.

The good news is that the crisis has been resolved and banks can boast of liquidity surplus now. According to the latest half yearly review of the current fiscal year conducted by Nepal Rastra Bank, liquid assets of banks have increased by 24 per cent in contrast to a decrease of 15.3 per cent in the same period of the previous year.

Relaxation on income declaration requirements, low credit flow, higher interest rates on deposits and elevated level of remittance inflows have contributed to the current improved liquidity position.

However, the increase in liquidity has not had the obvious effect of decreasing the credit crunch. Credit flow of banks and financial institutions has been lower than their deposit mobilisation. Credit flow has grown only by Rs 36.54 billion, while deposit mobilisation has grown by Rs 73.77 billion. Banks and financial institutions have been criticised for hoarding money, not moving towards new areas of market or expanding the traditional lenders.

Last week, at Himalmedia Roundtable on Banking, bankers admitted to continuation of credit crunch, but attributed it to the lack of productive investment options. Earlier, the banking sector faced uncertainty when it doled out easy loans to real estate and consumer sector borrowers without assessing their capacity to honour interest and principal payments in time. “Banks have learnt their lesson and will give ad hoc handouts like they had previously and invite trouble,” said the CEO of a leading commercial bank.

The bankers also said that there isn’t demand for credit due to the risky investment environment in the country, with investors being plagued by power shortages and labour problems. At a time when even big players are struggling, not many new entrepreneurs have the courage to take the risk. The lower suppression of credit demand over the last few months, coupled with regulations imposed by the central bank regarding capital adequacy and liquidity have reduced the capacity of the banks to lend aggressively.

But banks are in the business of collecting deposits and issuing credit. The mismatch between the two will obviously affect the balance. Returns from earlier credit will not be able to hold up the cost of new deposits much longer. This is already being reflected in the decrease in profits of the financial institutions, with more than half of the banks reporting decreases in profit in double digits in the last quarter.

Banks have also seen a surge in their expenses, with over 15 per cent increase in operating costs.

A proportional increase in deposit base and diversification of investment portfolios is a must if we want a healthy financial system. The banking industry needs to be proactive now, and not just respond to demand or wait on the traditional big industry needs to be proactive now, and not just respond to demand or wait on the traditional big creditors.

The banking sector has now reached a level of profitability that it says has more space, comfort and a revamped in-flight entertainment system. The seats will be key features of the airliner that will be inducted into the fleet this summer. The new seats will feature touch screen Android technology control units that will debut on Qatar Airways’ 787s.

Hot wheels

Lauren Intercontinental, the authorised distributor of Hyundai four-wheelers in Nepal, has introduced new models of Hyundai Eon. The four models of Eon namely Eon Dlite, Dlite Plus, Era Plus and Eon Sports were unveiled by the company.

Refreshing offer

Bottlers Nepal has reduced the retail prices of Coca-Cola, Fanta and Sprite in Kathmandu Valley. The price cut was announced on Eon. The four models of Eon namely Eon Dlite, Dlite Plus, Era Plus and Eon Sports were unveiled by the company.

Sliced life

Slice has launched promotional schemes for Slice drinkers to meet famous Bollywood actress Katrina Kaif. Consumers will receive a scratch card with every purchase of a bottle of Slice from 6 March to 6 April, consumers will receive a scratch card with 10 digit mobile number that will help them become a part of the party with Katrina Kaif. Three lucky winners from Nepal will get the chance to meet the beautiful actress.
This spring go to Khopra and Mohare which have all the benefits of the main trekking routes, but none of the crowds and received the 2007 Ramon Magsaysay Award for it, knows a good thing when he sees it. He is now tapping into the tourism potential of these amazing mountains to fund his work in education and health. For this he is offering all the benefits of the main routes and none of the crowds.

Much of the work was completed with local funds and the UN-Micro Enterprise Development Program. The group prefers performing tasks within the community and has income generating ventures such as a lokta paper mill in Nangi Village and a yak-cow crossbreed project at Mohare Danda, as well as a 150-strong yak farm at Khopra. Prospective income is reserved for school and health clinic funding.

These routes are for the unique tourist seeking an experience that could once be had on popular routes in an industry that is becoming over-regulated. Khopra Danda and Mohare Danda provide alternatives to well-established areas and will be a pleasure for returning visitors and all Nepal lovers.

www.himanchal.org

**Repeat the text**

**Away from it all**

It’s sunrise on Rishal Dara, on Lakure Bhanjyang on the eastern rim of Kathmandu Valley. We are a thousand feet higher than Kathmandu, an hour-and-half drive from the city and yet we could be a world away.

The tranquility, the crisp morning and the abundant oxygen make a heady combination. Last night’s thunder shower has cleared the horizon and we can see the bracing green expanse of forests and beyond it, the northern ranges.

We are at the Summit Lodge, as guests of my friend Phunstok Ongdi, absorbing the pleasures of a rural throwback to gentler times. Since driving up here last evening, the stress of that choked up Gotham we call Kathmandu has all but vanished.

Recently, I have begun to value the innate advantages of
And Love

living in suburba, USA. It’s reduced my immunity to the ravages brought on by all the unsettling paradoxes so pervasive in Kathmandu. The crude, jagged ever-changing skyline, concrete totem poles of a new lifestyle, sit on tackily decorated store fronts, contrasting with the stench and squalour of river side slums. Add the choking atrophy of traffic, the overpowering pollution, the noise and dust, and the shrinking value chain of social courtesies, all plotting to mercilessly grind down your defenses. Eco-compassion is at a premium in the mass-metrometamorphosis of Kathmandu.

All this I can do without, and hence the decision to visit Kathmandu frequently but never stay too long. I’ve often wise-cracked that I consider myself a “non-returning Nepali”. So, it is with deep gratitude that I have accepted this invitation to get away from it all, even for a brief weekend. And what a discovery the Summit Lodge is.

We drive through the congested chaos of the Ring Road, where until recently were pristine green terraces. We make the zigzag climb up the hills past straw-roofed orange huts that still dot the hill sides and farmers tilling their fields welcome us with smiles. The farther you go from Kathmandu, the further back in time you travel to the previous tranquility of the Valley.

The drive ends close to the ridgeline and a short walk past an Ashram leads to the resort. The lodges are perched on a steep ridge, spread in a semi circle around a main double storey house. A neat little wooden balcony invites you, the architectural ingenuity of it all, the tastefulness and simplicity is soothing.

Inside, there are cosy old wood floors and ceiling beams with recycled wood; the roof is thatch. The rooms are spotlessly clean, with warm brick tones, small and functional, and lending a sense of reflective quiet. The only nod to modernity is the bathroom with handheld shower and solar-heated water. Each room opens up to a spectacular vista of the Valley below and the mountains beyond.

I am glad we brought light fleece jackets to ward off the sudden twilight nip. The amber glow of the airport dominates the night city, with dark patches where neighbourhoods are suffering power cuts. There is a fleeting sense of having stolen something sublime from the scenery, because we are not part of that maddening rush down there.

The sincerity and hospitality of the staff are evidenced in their ready smiles. This is not the bland and modern demeanour of posh franchised hotels but a genuine sense of wanting to make the visitor comfortable and relaxed. Again, there is a sensation of regaining something long lost.

At 10, we all head off to our rooms. Sleep comes easily under the stars, as I look forward to my hike next morning.

Tashi Sherpa lives in Seattle, comes to Nepal frequently on business and is a sucker for sixties rock.

Summit Village Lodge www.summitvillagelodge.com

ONCE IS NOT ENOUGH: The vista of Machapuchre, Gangapurna and Hiunchuli from Mohare one recent afternoon (left) and the view of Dhautagiri from Khopra (above) with terrace farms being readied for sowing corn.
performances by cultural groups from thirteen countries in Kathmandu, Dang, Pokhara and Butwal. Till 18 March

Buchanan Hamilton Exhibition, celebration of 200 years of biodiversity research in Nepal. 24 March to 1 April, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal. Revisited

Spring Camp, 10 days Spring Camp for children to empower themselves through music, art, dance and outdoor activities. 2 April-6 April and 9 April to 13 April. For more information call 5013854

ANUSARA YOGA WORKSHOP. learn and practice yoga with the internationally renowned teacher Jonas Westring. 23 March, 5 pm to 7:30 pm, 1905 Restaurant, Kantipath. info@pranamaya-yoga.com

KUTUMBA PLAYING FOR HERITAGE II, Kutura is to be travelling across Nepal to generate awareness on preservation and protection of local heritage. MV 15 April.

THE OLIVE GARDEN is offering a revamped dinner menu from March 14 onwards with various trout dishes. Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat

MANNY’S EATERY AND BAR introduces special lunch packages. Jawalakhel, Shaligram Complex, 5536919

Enjoy Sunday brunch at Fox Restaurant from 12:00 noon to 3:30 pm, Hyatt Regency, 4461234

PYONGYANG OKRYU-GWAN, for the rare taste of North Korean cuisine and hospitality, Durbar Marg

Him Thai Restaurant and Bar, for authentic Thai cuisines in town. Lazimpal, 4418633

Café Du Temple, famous for its delicious food, warm ambience and the beautiful roof top view. Patan Durbar Square, 5527127. Boudha, 2143256

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SAI’S PIZZA, almost round, almost cheap, always delicious, the cheesiest pizzas in town. Lazimpat, behind Jazz Upstairs.

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COMFORT ZONE. expansive restobar with a decent range of cocktails and barbeque meals. Thamel

Home delivery

A fter a long tiring day, you come home starving, only to find that you are home alone and your fridge is empty. You are too tired to cook, and might have to settle for a noodle dinner. But wait, with foodmandu.com, you can enjoy food from your favourite restaurants, without stepping out of your house.

Foodmandu.com is an online portal that allows you to order food from restaurants all over Kathmandu, which will be delivered right at your doorstep. The site lists over 70 restaurants, and you can browse through their menus and pick your favorites. Foodmandu has roped in the most popular food joints in Kathmandu, including the likes of Roadhouse, Bawarchi and Delicias de France. A couple of clicks and a Foodmandu delivery boy will come cruising with your steaming order. Foodmandu also takes orders over the phone.

“Most restaurants here don’t have home delivery services, we are simply allowing them to outsource,” says Mannmohan Adhikari. The idea struck him when, at his previous job, he had limited lunch options and wished restaurants would deliver his order at his office.

As an IT enthusiast, Adhikari saw an opportunity and began foodmandu.com. The price listed is the same as the restaurant’s menu and minimal delivery charges are levied for long distances. Foodmandu delivers within Ring Road and few kilometers beyond. Sixteen months since it began, the service is in high demand, keeping their 10 delivery boys busy throughout the day. The volume of orders used to be equal online and over the phone when the service began, but traffic is now heavier online. “It is easier when people use our site to order-they can browse menus, give clearer instructions and we can maintain their database for the future,” says Adhikari. Although Foodmandu now operates on cash basis, the site plans to incorporate online payment services. Visit www.foodmandu.com or call 4241732

Paavan Mathema
Caférena, the extensive menu has something for everyone. Try their famous chips chhilly, Sherpaa Mall, Durbar Marg.

ALFRESCO, for homemade pastas and other lip-smacking delights. Sahra Crowne Plaza, 4273999.

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

WOODLAND COMPLEX, Durbar Marg

SOMEPLACE ELSE

CAFE HESSION, for those with a sweet tooth, the cafe offers a delicious range of cupcakes and doughnuts. Jhamshikhel.

LIOLY GRINDO, fail-safe Mexican restaurant. The lemonade with refills is what won us over, but the food is mighty fine. Jawalakhel.

1905 Restaurant, feast on roasted delights within this converted aristocratic residence. Walked ambience and green surroundings make it an oasis within the city, Kantipath, 4215058.

CAKE LABOY, for an extensive range of North Indian delicacies, try their unbeatable Kashmiri Gosht. Thapathali.

BHOJAN GRIHA, traditional Nepali restaurant that serves up great local food with folk music and dance. Dillibajar.

Dhāba, for an excellent range of North Indian delicacies, try their unbeatable Kashmiri Gosht. Thapathali.

GETAWAYS

7th ANNUAL SUNDANCE MUSIC FESTIVAL, join the musical extravaganza with bands like Joint Family, Soul Train Featuring Rainer Pusch (Germany), The Acoustics (Shari Music), Himalayan Connection, and DJ Phuchhey. 24 March to 25 March. The Last Resort. Call 4410753/4700525 for bookings.

The Pranamaya Yoga retreat, enjoy yoga, nature and healthy food as you recharge and restore your energy levels. 16 to 18 March, Namr Buddha, Kavre.

For more information call 9851002820.

Spring Break @ RSR, welcome spring in style away from the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu and party alongside the mighty Trishul river. 16 March, 7 pm, River Side Spring Resort, Katmandu. Call 5654029 for more information.

Chitwan Safari Tour, exciting wildlife safari in the Chitwan National Park at Rs 49990. Call Ace travels at 4411830.

Laaxi Care, a registered NGO and a social initiative of employees of Laxmi Bank, is organising the 4th Annual Laaxi Care Annual Mountain Bike Rally on 22 March as a part of its ‘Go Green’ campaign. The rally will begin from Patan Durbar Square and conclude at St. Xavier’s Godavari School, covering 12 kilometers. The funds raised from the event will be utilised to install 14 Solar Street Lights at Bagmati Bridge, Thapathali. Laaxi Care will be looking after the maintenance of the lights for the next five years after which they will be handed over to the local community. Last year funds raised from the bike rally helped install solar powered lights at Patan Durbar Square. The participants and guests will also get to enjoy musical performances by YoGeesha Amalysa, Jams Pradhan, Lyrics Indy and a host of other talented artists.

Date: 22 March, Thursday (Ghode Jatra)
Route: Patan Durbar Square to St. Xavier’s Godavari School
Beginning at 7 am
Transportation to Lahanikhel Bus Park from Godavari available after 11:30 am
Deadline for registration: 20 March
For details, call 9841298400

 calling for a toast.

The Bratwurst (pork or chicken) (Rs 260) at Flavour is one of the best-cooked weiners in town, but it is sadly complemented by a measly portion of grilled veggies. A side of mash, slaw or—dare I crave—sauerkraut would be more adequate. Other dishes sampled like the Shrimp Curry (Rs 285) and the Hamburger (Rs 160) were just decent.

The coconut curry carries a kick, and the shrimps are perfectly cooked. But once again, better pairings could be made, like a simple side salad or a fan of sliced tomatoes to cut the heat.

Like the sub, the burger’s bun could be toasted. Otherwise, the sandwich is comparable to that of a typical, hunky-dory food stand.

Drinks at Flavour are relatively cheap for dine-in. Domestic beers for Rs 275 and Carlsberg for Rs 300 make it, for now, an affordable watering hole. For sweets, look elsewhere.

Marco Pollo

Cycling for light

The lemonade with refills is what won us over, but the food is mighty fine. Jawalakhel.

Bigger ain’t better. Flavour in Pulchok, not to be confused with an unrelated plural in Boudhanath, is a tiny joint with promise. Wide windows, fulvous paint and beige decor draw an elegant, modern and clean space. No frills, no cutbacks. Unlike their menu is evenly set and priced. And although it jumps from bar snacks to Thai to Indian to continental, the choices are not overwhelming. Improvements, however, can be made. Among the appetizers the Saturn Potato (Rs 170), sauteed baby potatoes wrapped with bacon, is tender and well-prepared, but lacks a necessary touch of sweet mustard or blue cheese.

Highlights for mains include the Chicken Sub (Rs 165) and the Bratwurst (Rs 260).

The Chicken Sub (vegetarian and chicken alternatives available), served with fries, is a six-inch sandwich dressed with mustard and honey mustard sauce. The punch of flavours renders a surprisingly appetising treat. Ask for a toasted sub.

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Marco Pollo
Top Gun remembered

Guinness addict

F or any one growing up in the late 1980s, the Top Gun phenomenon, the fighter planes,旅游业, bomber jackets, aviator, steampunk locker room scenes, and of course, the classic genre defining 80's music will probably induce a wave of the fondest kind of nostalgia. To its detractors, Top Gun is the worst kind of sentimentalising action movie, one with no particular lofty sentimentising action movie, one with no particular lofty

Guinness world records have become an obsession in Nepal, and here is another world record we could break: 57-year-old Keith Furman holds the world record for the number of inclinations in the Guinness world record book. He has a total of 131 records to his name. Many are just stunning feats in being able to bear pain and great heights of perseverance. In London he walked nearly 10 metres in the world's heaviest shoes which weighed 146.5 kg.

One of his most memorable records is for non-results. He did 8,341 somersaults over 20 km which took him 10.5 hours. He had cramps, vertigo, and vomiting throughout most of the distance, but he kept going. Endurance clearly is his forte. He has clapped for 50 hours non-stop, each clap had to be audible at a hundred feet. Contrary to what you may think, you can’t just go out and do something arduous and call it up the Guinness people. To own a record you have to break one that exists, undertake one that Guinness has created, or propose one to Guinness and seek their approval. Guess what, most proposals are rejected.

Furman also attempted to climb a mountain near Machu Picchu in South America on stilts. Perhaps we can entice him to come here and try out his stilts on Mt Everest. Or perhaps climb an 8,000m peak walking backwards if he fails the stilts.

In all likelihood just like world-famous mountain climbers who have been tested for physical strength and ability and found to have nothing physiologically exceptional, Furman (1.8m in height) too probably does not have any measurable fitness quantity that sets him apart. So what’s helping him break records even at the ripe age of 57?

For sure his threshold for pain is very high. And he is extraordinarily motivated, clearly these two qualities make a great combination for breaking Guinnesspeck (as it is called) records. But Furman also uses something else: the teachings of an Indian Guru, Sri Chinmoy, who changed Furman’s first name Keith to Sri Chinmoy, who changed Furman’s first name Keith to Ashrita (protected by God). Sri Chinmoy, who settled in the US, believed that extreme physical pursuit offers the means of transcending the self. Furman took this message to heart, literally. When he is totally exhausted, he says he meditates on a flame within his heart. Clearly many things in medical science are inexplicable, perhaps ineffable.
A step back to step forward

There is plenty to be cynical about, but we are inching ahead on peace and constitution

As we approach another constitutional timeframe, the best we can hope for is that the political parties stay engaged. They may have predictably failed to stick to their commitment to formally kick-start integration this week, but behind the scenes the situation doesn’t look that dire.

The satellite cantonments and make-shift camps are being vacated. Those who have opted to move on have left, and those who remain are packing their bags. The political climate in Kathmandu may look gloomy, but frayied nerves have been soothed and both the Maoists and the opposition parties at least agree on one thing: there will be no more extension, because constitution is possible by May 27.

In private conversations, opposition leaders and members of the coalition have been seen laughing and cracking jokes, which is annoying to a bemused public, but it means that there is still civility and the leaders appear to sense that a compromise on the constitution is possible. The cynics, of course, are used to lumping politicians together as good-for-nothing louts and wisecracking about lazy CA members. Sure there have been delays, but this is what you get when an elected body is both a functioning parliament and a constitution-writing body.

The Prime Minister bluntly, and unwisely, warned recently that those living there are anxious to leave. The leadership can begin by asking their unruly comrades to stop shooting their mouths off and embroiling their party in constant hate-mongering, and cracking jokes, which have been seen laughing. The leadership must end the mutual fears. The Maoist leadership offered nothing besides criticism, even the NC’s fiery critic Rijal thinks the Maoists are once more on a warpath. While the UML leaders offered nothing besides criticism, even the NC’s fiery Ram Sharan Mahat indicated the possibility of consensus through further debate.

Constitution drafting has its ups and downs, and it had another down at Tuesday’s meeting of the Special Committee which ended indecisively. But sensing the Prime Minister’s request to keep their spirits up. NC leader Minendra Rijal told me: “We disagree with the Prime Minister’s request to discuss it further.” Ah, so all is not lost.

Rijal thinks the Maoists have sufficient incentive to cooperate, and his party’s effort will be to engage with them until they finally do. Rijal may be right in his assessment of the mood in the Maoist camp. The cantonments have become a political liability for the party and there is no doubt even the leaders are anxious to leave. The leadership seems ready to take a step back but are nervous they may find themselves against the wall. To complicate things, the hardliners are once more on a warpath. While the UML leaders offered nothing besides criticism, even the NC’s fiery Ram Sharan Mahat indicated the possibility of consensus through further debate.

Mohan Baidya admitted in an interview last week that there is no alternative to peace and constitution, but has since taken another one of his numerous U-turns and threatened the nation (yet again) with another revolt. This gives the NC and UML a valid reason to question Maoist intentions. But on the constitution making front, their unwillingness to give up the Westminster system also stems from anxiety over having to leave a turf which they have learned to maneuver over the decades, and step into the unknown.

To cut a long story short, there is no real point of contention except for the lack of trust and self-confidence among the bargaining parties. It isn’t about the ranks of combatants, names of the federal state, or which system is better anymore. The opposition just isn’t convinced that the Maoists will behave as a mainstream party even in the changed context, and suspect Pushpa Kamal Dahal is out to write a constitution that will install him as an executive president for life. Likewise, the Maoists are annoyed that the opposition is out to demonise them and reluctant to accept them as a mainstream party.

The fears on both sides are well grounded, but boggling one another will not help. The time for blame games and finger-pointing has long gone. Conflict mediation always tries to bridge the trust deficit and remove mutual fears. The Maoist leadership can begin by asking the leaders to stop shooting their mouths off and embroiling their party in constant hate-mongering, and keep the Maoists engaged.
The past two weeks have seen an escalation in the level of violence here in Afghanistan, including an attack on the UN compound in Kunduz that was successfully repelled by Afghan forces in tandem with Gurkhas. The men in this photo (right) taken on the rooftop of our office in Kabul recently are the Nepali Gurkhas who keep me safe, and who allow me to get my work done every day here in Afghanistan. They guard our UN compound around the clock, always heavily armed and prepared for any potential attack.

New reports from Afghanistan rarely mention the role played by Gurkhas, focusing instead on members of the 50-nation International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). But for most UN agencies and many embassies and consulates across the country Gurkhas are relied on and admired.

Nepali soldiers are credited with saving the lives of employees at the British Council in Kabul when it endured a fierce assault by the Taliban in August 2011 that lasted more than nine hours and resulted in at least 12 fatalities, including eight Afghan policemen and a member of New Zealand’s elite SAS forces.

While the Gurkhas held off insurgents who were armed with AK-47’s and rocket propelled grenades, British Council employees were able to make their way to safety in an underground bunker. One insurgent exploded his suicide vest while pressing up against the bunker door, which withstood the blast.

On 1 April 2011, four Nepali soldiers and three international staff members of the United Nations were killed in an attack by an angry mob of more than 1,500 people on the UN compound in Mazar-i-Sharif that was sparked by reports of the burning of the Holy Quran in the United States, orchestrated by the American pastor Terry Jones. It was the deadliest attack ever experienced by the UN in Afghanistan. The Nepali Gurkhas who lost their lives were Dil Prasad Gurung, Chhabilal Purja Pun, Min Bahadur Thapa, and Narayan Bahadur Thapa Magar. One of the men killed that day was Buddhist, and so I arranged for a khata that a child in Kathmandu had given me for my own protection when I departed for Kabul several months earlier to be wrapped around his body just before it was returned to his family in Pokhara.

Afghanistan is enduring its coldest winter in more than a decade, and so one of my responsibilities is to deliver hot coffee in my metal thermos to our Gurkhas at their firing stations late at night. They send every dollar they earn back to their families in Nepal to pay for their children’s school fees and uniforms, or to improve their homes. I have never heard one word of complaint from any of them about their spartan living conditions in the compound, their long hours of work, or their extended periods away from friends and family. One of the best things about my job in Afghanistan is working alongside such courageous and dedicated people.

From our rooftop the snowcapped mountains stretching along the northern horizon appear tantalisingly close when caught in the day’s last light, prompting our Gurkha commander to speculate that if it were possible for the two of us to trek along their base we would eventually reach his village in Kaski district.

But hearing the constant chatter coming across his walkie-talkie and with the very building under our feet shaking from the reverberation of a pair of ISAF Apache helicopters flying low overhead his beloved homeland to me seems as if it’s a million miles away.

Peter Dalglish is a Canadian lawyer who serves as the Senior Adviser for UN-Habitat in Afghanistan.
TRISHNA RANA

When Sunil Pant started the Blue Diamond Society in 2001, Nepal’s gay and transgender community was entirely underground. There was no legal protection, and police brutality against “unnatural” sexual behaviour was the norm.

The turning point came in 2007 when the Supreme Court granted basic rights to all sexual minorities. Pant, then Nepal’s oldest school, Durbar High School, admitted a transgender student. And pride parade has become the highlight event during the annual Gai Jatra festival (pictured above). While the most developed and “progressive” countries are still divided over gay marriages, Nepal is on its way to becoming the first country in Asia to legalise same-sex union.

Progress and achievements of the community have been unprecedented: “India started its gay rights movement in the early 1990s and it took more than 20 years to report Section 377 of the Penal Code and discrimination against homosexuality,” he says, “in comparison we have managed to introduce equal rights for sexual minorities in 11 short years. There has been a big drop in discrimination and abuse.”

Roshan Mahato, coordinator of the Federation of Sexual and Gender Minorities, played an active role in improving the curriculum in universities to make instructors and administrators more sensitive to the needs of sexual minorities. Today courses in sociology and anthropology in government universities are incorporating gay and lesbian studies.

However, Nepal’s archaic bureaucracy and the lack of political will are still obstacles to further progress in the rights of the LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) community. Soon after the SC passed the verdict to allow citizenship for transgenders as well, the Home Ministry, under Moust Krishna Bahadur Mahara, issued a circular that ended this practice. Today, when third gender people request citizenship, they are first met with stares for their “unusual appearance” and then the habitual “we don’t have permission from above.”

“Until one of the leaders has a transgendered family member, or until the community becomes a large vote bank for the parties, the citizenship issue is likely to drag on,” Pant admitted. It’s the same story for same-sex marriages. Bikbe Poudyal, a human rights lawyer, says: “Our leaders’ hardened ideologies and stereotypical views about gender and sexuality will be difficult to change. If our parliament couldn’t grant equal rights to transgenders, why would we expect them to change their mind about allowing same-sex marriages?”

Urban youth seem to be more accepting, while homosexuality still baffles many. “I feel Nepali people think this has changed a lot now and there is greater acceptance. Having said that, I feel Nepali people are much more willing to accept transgendered and transsexuals, because our presence is more visible, whereas homosexuality still baffles them.”

Since 2010, I am an active member of the Nepali Congress party. Like most Nepalis, I used to think politics was a dirty game. But after working with the community for the past seven years, I have understood how important visibility in the media and in national level politics is. The only way sexual minorities will make real progress if we can politicise our issues and make it a part of the national agenda.

Yet, now there are only two of us involved in politics, Sunil Babu Pant and myself. Unless more people participate we won’t be able to make an impact. I am happy that the entertainment industry is finally growing up and learning to respect us. Earlier Nepali movies used to make fun of transgendered and gay people and used them for comic relief. But recent movies, like Highway where I act as a transgendered character, portray real problems. My biggest suggestion to families with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, intersexual, queer children is give them all your love and treat them like regular kids. The moment they have the support of their families, it becomes much easier to deal with the discrimination from society and the nation.

Bhumi Shrestha is a transgendered activist and Human Rights Officer at Blue Diamond Society. She joined politics in 2007 as a member of the Nepali Congress.

A proud woman

BHUMIKA SHRESTHA

I was born a male, but I never felt I belonged to that body. I was very lucky because I was supported from a young age and they have come to accept me as I am. But school was another story, the boys would constantly tease me and teachers would single me out in class and embarrass me. I was expelled from school because I was a “bad influence” on other students. The administration told me to change my behaviour and act like a man or leave school. I was aware of this and this went on for two years.

The moment people realised I was “different” they started taunting me and calling me names like “chakka” and “hija”. I remember when I started working with the Blue Diamond Society whenever we invited people for meetings they refused to attend because they thought we would be promoting sexual disease and would turn into homosexuals or third gender. I think this has changed a lot now and there is greater acceptance. Having said that, I feel Nepali people are much more willing to accept transgendered and transsexuals, because our presence is more visible, whereas homosexuality still baffles them.

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Yeti Airlines operates Jetstream 41 (J-41) the latest in line of turbo prop planes made by British Aerospace (BAE). With a 200-seats built to date, the BAE’s J-41 is in active service as a regional liner because more than 52 airlines across the world. The best in this class, the BAE’s J-41 is also a top-notch aircraft for private corporate travelers. What’s more, Yeti Airlines’ J-41 aircraft are always robotic clock by a certified crew in its own CAAM approved hangar.

At Yeti Airlines, you always come first.

Between taboo and tolerance

Sexual minorities have made a space for themselves, but complete integration and acceptance is still hard to find while others escape to bigger cities or to India.

“Given our religious society, even if same-sex marriage is adopted in the near future, it will take time for Nepalis to accept them as natural and equal to heterosexuals,” says Poudyal. Sex, class and regional divisions within the LGBTI community threaten to blurt the movement. Mahato says people who have migrated from villages to the anonymity of the cities are most open about their sexual and gender identity. “Members of the upper class are the most hesitant to come out of the closet, since they feel they have a lot to lose,” he explains, “rich people also can afford the privacy of hotels or to settle abroad. So the middle and lower class have to carry the movement forward.”

The LGBTI movement in Nepal has a visible hierarchy with a strong focus on third gender issues due to which gay and lesbians are frequently grouped together in the same category. Also since majority of international funding is funnelled towards HIV awareness and prevention for gay men, lesbians find themselves at the bottom of the ladder.
Despite advocating for federal states in Nepal, I strongly feel that the country should not be divided based on ethnicities. Doing so would only invite further conflicts among people from different ethnic groups. For the past few years the issues of indigenous people have hogged the limelight. However, we must reexamine the very definition of indigenous because the category was created by people in power and does not represent the genuine desires of ordinary Nepalis. Therefore, state restructuring should be done in such a manner that will bring together resources from different regions and promote development of all groups.

Advocates of ethnic states, on the other hand, are not only uninformed, but they have also failed to take into account negative outcomes. For example treating the Tarai and Hills as completely different entities will only pave way for violence and discord among people who have lived in harmony for so long. The good news is that Nepalis themselves are aware of what communal disharmony can lead to. This might be one reason why our country has had little ethnic strife despite our diversity.

There are talks of a new wave in UML. What are you planning? When it comes to the peace process and national politics, CPN-UML moves with a progressive democratic perspective. We will take a balanced approach to identify and solve the problems in our society. Initially we were divided in our understanding of the Maoist’s motives. But their unchanged stance has brought us together and we are now a united party. Some people say UML’s leadership is complicated, while others call it “a party of Pahadi pundits”, what do you have to say about this?

Bhattarai’s new enemies

The European Union is furious with Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai, because he is showing signs of rejecting the proposal for ethnic federalism. Norway, Switzerland, Denmark and Finland who were openly supporting Bhattarai recently are now dissatisfied with him. Apparently, the only people who are pleased with Baburam’s change of heart are former American ambassador to Nepal, Scott H DeLisi, Indian ambassador Jayant Prasad and his own chairman, Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

The Europeans have so far successfully incorporated secularism in the interim constitution. They are now spending Rs 3.5 billion annually in the name of federalism and ethnic inclusion and actively pushing the ethnic agenda in Nepal. However, the EU’s opposition can prove costly to Bhattarai’s government.

The party was not formed for the sake of few thousand votes or for a few seats in the CA. Rather our aim is to work towards a prosperous Nepal, while being sensitive towards the sentiments of people from all castes, ethnicities, regions, religions, genders and professions. We are against dictatorship and fully support democracy. There is no chauvinism in that.

But your own ethnic CA members disagree and have defied the party whip. In our party, just like in the country, the lines between democracy and anarchy have been thinned. If one does not agree with an issue, there is a tendency to break laws and express dissatisfaction. We have to be careful of this behaviour.

In your recent speech in Dolakha you said “new citizens cannot break the Tarai”. What did you mean? I am also a Madhesi, and have been living here for generations. It is not appropriate for recent settlers to challenge the Madhesi identity of old inhabitants. Many old settlers are categorised as “others”, the parameters of this category need to be explained. Nepal should not be divided. Regardless of our caste, religion or language, we are a single country and the idea of driving a certain group out from a region will not work here.

We have to create a modern democratic society that respects the constitution, law and equality.

Abin Shrestha in Kantipur, 14 March

Footballer: Parties

Goal post: Peace and constitution

Even I want to become the PM. I am sure I can do better if given a chance.

Randi Thapa

Bikram Rai
Illegal caucus

Rajdhani, 15 March

Since the caucus of women parliamentarians in the Constituent Assembly is not registered with any government office, its legitimacy has been called into question. However, this has not stopped the CA secretariat from providing generous facilities to the caucus such as an office space and six government staff.

"It is irresponsible to give legal status to an agency that has not been registered anywhere or mentioned in the law. We are not sure on what grounds these facilities were offered to the caucus, but such use of the secretariat’s resources is an outright abuse of power," said an official from the secretariat. He added that even though the CA is a sovereign entity, if there are irregularities going on within the parliament the anti-graft body CIAA can investigate.

The caucus has spent more than Rs 10 million from the state coffer till date and there is no record of the money that has poured in from foreign donors in the name of constitution building and women empowerment. However, female lawmakers like ex-caucus member, Uma Regmi claim that male CA members are preventing the group from gaining legal status.

Chairman of Nepal Workers and Peasants Party, Narayan Man Bijukche says that allowing the women’s caucus inside the parliament infringes upon the sovereignty of the CA and takes women away from the purview of their parent party. Questioning the objectivity of the caucus, Bijukche’s party has already called back its CA member, Lila Nyaichai.
The top leadership of the parties have all given up on having a full-fledged constitution by May. At least they agree on something. Is this why everyone is so relaxed during the meetings of senior leaders? The loud banter and raucous laughter can be heard right down the hall. One particular tripartite meeting last week of top notch leaders of the three main parties was even more boisterous than usual. The Mule’s mole, who was a fly on the wall, said the leaders put the decision on state restructuring in the back burner and the subject drifted to the more serious issue of the sex change operation carried out by the scion of Nepal’s top comedian, and what this would mean for Nepal’s territorial integrity. The conversation was freely sprinkled with Nepali colloquial terms for genitalia and punctuated by full-bellied laughter and detailed speculation on what happens when a man becomes a woman. The long and short of it is that we now know how little Nepal’s political leadership grasp human biology. Advice to politicians: before you ask for autonomy, study the anatomy.

Has Nepal’s donors also given up on the constitution? Why else would they send members of the Special Committee off to Zurich for two weeks right in the middle of crucial negotiations on demobilisation? The theory is that when taken out of their domestic context members may be better able to forge a consensus. But experience with past junkets to South Africa, Denmark and Norway have shown that it doesn’t always work. They get on like a house on fire, but as soon as they land back at Tribhuvan they are at each other’s throats again. All major decisions are centralised in the top three honchos, so flying the second rung leaders halfway around the world increases their carbon footprints, but doesn’t get the constitution written on time.

After awarding West Seti to 3 Georges, Inc, the Baddies seem to have realised what it feels like to have the shoe in the other foot. The Maoist energy minister said this week: “Protests against West Seti will be detrimental to future investment in hydropower.” Ha ha ha. Look who’s talking. Our PhD prime minister loves to talk in equations, which is why he announced the discovery of a new theory of quantum mechanics at the Power Summit this week: Hydro Power + Democracy = New Nepal. So, remind me again, why did we have to fight a war to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat during which hydro projects were bombed?

Going by the full page ads in the papers offering Super Bumper Offers for office space in a new downtown mall, one would think Nepal’s economy is registering double digit growth. But sales of apartments must be slow if they have to bribe people with Range Rovers to buy a flat:

- Buy a subscription to this paper and win a shirt
- Buy trousers and get undies free
- Buy an apartment and win a SUV
- Buy a SUV and win an apartment
- Buy one hatchback and get a free gold bangle
- Buy a gold bangle and win a Santro

Our ministers are all ministering to themselves. Irrigation Minister Mahendra threatened Secretary Brinda Hada with physical harm when she refused to include “pre paid” Yadav appointees to juicy posts. Minister of Labour Pains, Sunita Giri has replaced the chief of the Dept of Foreigner Employment for the fourth time in a year with a man from his ministry. State Minister for Denatization Lax Man went on a transborder shopping spree in Jogbani and tried to sneak in a pressure cooker and saris for wifey but was caught red-faced by locals who turned out to be lackeys of none other than our very own Upadhy Yadav. Gotcha!