THUNDERBOLT: The first major storm of the season lights up the sky behind the Taleju temple in Kathmandu as the Seto Machendranath chariot festival got underway this week.

For the first time in a long while there is a sense that the political parties are finally focusing their minds on the urgency of peace and constitution. Barring last minute hitches, the cantonments and weapons containers will be handed over to the army by 12 April, there is now a real chance the remaining issues on the constitution can be sorted out. But after coming all this way, and in a hurry to meet the 27 May deadline, we shouldn’t adopt an authoritarian constitution.

Bem-vindo!

Brazil wants to increase investment in Nepal’s hydropower, but the new Brazilian ambassador to Nepal says delays on Lower Arun could put that in jeopardy.

Stormy season

Bem-vindo!

Brazil wants to increase investment in Nepal’s hydropower, but the new Brazilian ambassador to Nepal says delays on Lower Arun could put that in jeopardy.
there is a feeling of déjà vu as we approach the 27 May midterm deadline for the Constituent Assembly. Why? It seems like it has all happened before, and it has. Four times in the past two years, in fact.

Like last time six months ago, and the time before that, the top leaders are again blowing hot and cold over the prospects of integration, and finishing the new constitution in time. Torn between the need to assure a completely skeptical and disillusioned public, and talking tough to improve their bargaining position in negotiations, leaders’ statements still swing between wild optimism and reckless pessimism. Some tell their cadre in Kathmandu there is no way the constitution will be written in time, and the same afternoon publicly announce in Biratnagar that the CA term will not be extended.

Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai excuses confidence these days about meeting the 27 May deadline, but the crony he hand-picked to be the Army Chief General Chairmain Pushpa Kamal Dahal finally saw he couldn’t play it both ways, and be a spoiler anymore. With the constituent and vigilante containers being handed over to the army before the new year, there is now a real chance that the remaining issues on the constitution can be sorted out. This time, it may have to be the NC, and UML who will have to give in on state structure and form of government while safeguarding pluralism, press freedom and an independent judiciary. After coming all this way, and in a hurry to meet the May deadline, we shouldn’t adopt an authoritarian constitution.

FEDERALISM BY ANY OTHER NAME

There is a feeling of déjà vu as we approach the 27 May midterm deadline for the Constituent Assembly. Why? It seems like it has all happened before, and it has. Four times in the past two years, in fact.

Like last time six months ago, and the time before that, the top leaders are again blowing hot and cold over the prospects of integration, and finishing the new constitution in time. Torn between the need to assure a completely skeptical and disillusioned public, and talking tough to improve their bargaining position in negotiations, leaders’ statements still swing between wild optimism and reckless pessimism. Some tell their cadre in Kathmandu there is no way the constitution will be written in time, and the same afternoon publicly announce in Biratnagar that the CA term will not be extended.

Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai excuses confidence these days about meeting the 27 May deadline, but the crony he hand-picked to be the Army Chief General Chairmain Pushpa Kamal Dahal finally saw he couldn’t play it both ways, and be a spoiler anymore. With the constituent and vigilante containers being handed over to the army before the new year, there is now a real chance that the remaining issues on the constitution can be sorted out. This time, it may have to be the NC, and UML who will have to give in on state structure and form of government while safeguarding pluralism, press freedom and an independent judiciary. After coming all this way, and in a hurry to meet the May deadline, we shouldn’t adopt an authoritarian constitution.

hardcore sound like.

Despite this, for the first time in a long time there is a sense that the political parties are finally focusing on the urgency of peace and constitution. PM Bhattarai has played a catalytic behind-the-scenes role in this. He got his party to give in on the insistence from the NC, and UML on peace-firstconstitution-later by showing flexibility on integration. The breakthrough was possible because Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal finally saw he couldn’t play it both ways, and be a spoiler anymore. With the constituent and vigilante containers being handed over to the army before the new year, there is now a real chance that the remaining issues on the constitution can be sorted out. This time, it may have to be the NC, and UML who will have to give in on state structure and form of government while safeguarding pluralism, press freedom and an independent judiciary. After coming all this way, and in a hurry to meet the May deadline, we shouldn’t adopt an authoritarian constitution.

hardcore sound like.

Despite this, for the first time in a long time there is a sense that the political parties are finally focusing on the urgency of peace and constitution. PM Bhattarai has played a catalytic behind-the-scenes role in this. He got his party to give in on the insistence from the NC, and UML on peace-firstconstitution-later by showing flexibility on integration. The breakthrough was possible because Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal finally saw he couldn’t play it both ways, and be a spoiler anymore. With the constituent and vigilante containers being handed over to the army before the new year, there is now a real chance that the remaining issues on the constitution can be sorted out. This time, it may have to be the NC, and UML who will have to give in on state structure and form of government while safeguarding pluralism, press freedom and an independent judiciary. After coming all this way, and in a hurry to meet the May deadline, we shouldn’t adopt an authoritarian constitution.
Truth without justice

It would be better to have no Truth Commission at all than a toothless commission.

The war may have ended five years ago, but the country is not at peace. It will not be at peace until the surviving families and victims of the conflict are not told the truth, and do not get justice. Unless these grievances are addressed, revenge will fester, and there is a danger of another, more virulent conflict.

By trying to brush the dirt under the carpet, by attempting to push through a general amnesty, by protecting those accused of war crimes, the state is rubbing salt on the wounds of the families of wartime victims. A colleague recently told me the hallmark of Nepali political culture is a penchant for ‘big picture’ solutions, ignoring the ‘little picture’, solutions, ignoring the ‘little people’. Our political leaders have failed to listen to the victims, and their need for truth and justice.

They see the ‘logical’ end of the peace process as being confined to the integration of combatants and drafting of a new constitution. Over the past six years they have fought tooth-and-nail for power and abused it, signed countless agreements, and been obsessed with their own power-sharing concerns and not those of the people who suffered during the war that they waged.

A recent package deal between the main political parties has removed the amnesty clause on serious crimes from the draft bill, but they have agreed to appoint commissioners on the basis of political consensus. This is a dangerous game. The commissions will then be committees of the parties rather than mechanisms will not only be called into question, but will be rejected by the victim community.

Forgotten futures, #586

Ram Kumar Bhandari, whose father was disappeared by state security forces in 2001 in Lamjung, is a human rights activist and chair of the National Network of Families of the Disappeared (NEFAD).

The selection of commissioners is the key to their independence at a time when human rights activists are still receiving death threats, the guilty have political protection. Who will protect the hundreds of voiceless victims when they want to speak out? The proposed bills are silent about witnesses, protection, and victims’ welfare. With the departure of OHCHR, the weaker role of the NHRC and a personalised human rights lobby, the internationals need to monitor this process carefully. The peace process is not just about integration. The Nepal Peace Trust Fund (NPTF) should be made transparent, justice-oriented and foster sustainable peace.

The euphoria of peace in 2006 has been replaced by widespread disillusionment and cynicism about politicians. Impunity is rife, accountability is feeble, and there is declining political trust. The social injustice that lay at the root of the conflict is all but forgotten, and so is the war’s legacy of violence.

Surviving families and victims are fed up with the politics of compromise that sidelines their concerns, and the false commitments that arise from the establishment. Us victims will not follow secret accommodations made in Kathmandu that ignore grassroots realities. Known perpetrators openly walk the streets, pose for TV cameras in the company of party leaders, completely discarding the peace process. The instigating party that unleashed the bloodyshed sits in power, and does its best to ensure general amnesty with the acquiescence of its erstwhile enemies. It is hard to imagine that the kidnappings, disappearances, extrajudicial killings, rape and torture will be investigated in Nepal and the victims will ever get justice.

When victim groups who suffered from excesses by both sides visit the top brass of political parties, there are platitudes and assurances, but nothing ever happens. The president seems sincere, but can’t play a proactive role. Under intense international pressure, the two commissions are now ready to boycott this process if government adopts general amnesty provisions. Any law or mechanism lacking minimum international human rights standards aimed at establishing truth and delivering justice will not be acceptable to victims and their relatives. Provisions such as pardons, the protection of victims and witnesses, the exhumation process, the statue of limitations and coordination between the commissions should be victim-centric and need to be reviewed.

If these demands are not addressed, and if attempts are made to deprive victims of justice under the pretext of seeking truth and reconciliation, such mechanisms will not only be called into question, but will be rejected by the victim community.

The Nepal Peace Trust Fund (NPTF) is all but forgotten, and so is the war’s legacy of violence. Surviving families and victims are fed up with the politics of compromise that sidelines their concerns, and the false commitments that arise from the establishment. Us victims will not follow secret accommodations made in Kathmandu that ignore grassroots realities. Known perpetrators openly walk the streets, pose for TV cameras in the company of party leaders, completely discarding the peace process. The instigating party that unleashed the bloodyshed sits in power, and does its best to ensure general amnesty with the acquiescence of its erstwhile enemies. It is hard to imagine that the kidnappings, disappearances, extrajudicial killings, rape and torture will be investigated in Nepal and the victims will ever get justice.

When victim groups who suffered from excesses by both sides visit the top brass of political parties, there are platitudes and assurances, but nothing ever happens. The president seems sincere, but can’t play a proactive role. Under intense international pressure, the two commissions are now ready to boycott this process if government adopts general amnesty provisions. Any law or mechanism lacking minimum international human rights standards aimed at establishing truth and delivering justice will not be acceptable to victims and their relatives. Provisions such as pardons, the protection of victims and witnesses, the exhumation process, the statue of limitations and coordination between the commissions should be victim-centric and need to be reviewed.

If these demands are not addressed, and if attempts are made to deprive victims of justice under the pretext of seeking truth and reconciliation, such mechanisms will not only be called into question, but will be rejected by the victim community.
BRICS is not anti-western

Brazil's high-profile participation in last week's BRICS Summit in New Delhi marked the beginning of a new era for the Portuguese-speaking South American nation into Asia. China has become Brazil's largest trading partner and bilateral trade grew from $2 billion five years ago to $7 billion last year. Brazil's trade with India has grown to $15 billion a year, and intra-BRICS trade is expected to double to $500 billion by next year. The Undersecretary-General for Political Affairs of Brazil's Ministry of External Affairs, Maria Edileuza Fontenele Reis, travelled to Kathmandu this week after attending the BRICS summit to inaugurate Brazil's new embassy here. She spoke to Nepali Times about Brazil's expectations from BRICS and the Rio+20 environment summit to be held in June.

How would you assess the accomplishments of the fourth BRICS summit in New Delhi?

We think it has really enhanced the capacity of the world's emerging powers to act together to reform global institutions. We are moving gradually, but as we are strengthening our political position in the international arena like UN, G20, or WTO, and also strengthening trade and cooperation within BRICS, the delays it will be ensured.

There has been some criticism that the Summit was dominated by China and Russia?

I was present during the negotiations, and I can say that is not true. Decisions are only taken by consensus, and BRICS member countries all have very strong and independent foreign policies. For example it was because of our insistence that the final declaration took up the Palestine issue so strongly, and on Syria it was Brazil that pushed for a condemnation of the killings of unarmed civilians, otherwise the declaration would have been equally critical of both sides. We are not an anti-western grouping, we stand for the recognition of our political position in the international arena like UN, G20, or WTO, and also strengthening trade and cooperation within BRICS.

What are the chances of a breakthrough at the Rio+20 conference on the environment in Brazil in June?

In 1992 we hosted the first global environment summit when it was not fashionable to talk about the environment. Twenty years later, we want to evaluate progress and look not just at climate change but also at sustainable development and promotion of a green economy in the context of poverty alleviation. Rio+20 is occurring after the Conference in Durban last year and before the Conference on Biodiversity in New Delhi in October. We want to examine the ecological, economic and social aspects of global climate change. After Copenhagen, Brazil passed a law to reduce its carbon emission by 38 per cent and protect the Amazon rainforest. We need a paradigm shift in the way we define sustainability so that forest-dweller’s rights to a better life can also be ensured.

Narayan Kaji Shrestha and agreed on increasing technical cooperation, investment, establishing a mechanism for regular political consultations and lifting requirements for visas for official and diplomatic passports. She also thanked Shrestha for Nepal’s support for the candidacy of Brazilian José Graziano da Silva as head of the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) last year.

Brazil is keen to share technical knowledge on agriculture, provide human resource training and improve the quality of Nepali coffee. Brazil would also like to increase its investment in Nepal, but the delays in the 400MW Lower Arun project have meant that the Brazilian multinational, Engevix, is on the verge of pulling out after six years.

Recently, the Energy Ministry allowed India’s Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam to increase the capacity of the Arun III upstream from 400MW to 900MW, making Engevix less viable. The Ministry has extended the license for Lower Arun by six months to reorient and restructure its engineering, but the Brazilians say they need at least 18 more months.

“The decision came out of the blue, it is quite frustrating,” says Brazil’s new ambassador to Nepal, Marcos Duprat Ribeiro (pictured, right), “Lower Arun is a showcase project and a satisfactory conclusion would send the right signals, attracting more Brazilian investors in the future in Nepal’s hydropower sector.”

Kunda Dixit

B

razil recently opened new embassies in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka this year. On hand to inaugurate the new embassy building in Kathmandu this week was the Brazilian Undersecretary-General for Political Affairs Maria Edileuza Fontenele Reis, who looks after Asia and BRICS at the Ministry of External Relations in Brasilia.

“We are so pleased we could finally open our embassy here,” Fontenele Reis told Nepali Times in an interview (see interview, above). “There is great potential to build bilateral cooperation in agriculture, hydropower and tourism.”

In three days of meetings, Fontenele Reis met Foreign Minister

Min Ratna Bajracharya and agreed on increasing technical cooperation, investment, establishing a mechanism for regular political consultations and lifting requirements for visas for official and diplomatic passports. She also thanked Shrestha for Nepal’s support for the candidacy of Brazilian José Graziano da Silva as head of the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) last year.

Brazil is keen to share technical knowledge on agriculture, provide human resource training and improve the quality of Nepali coffee. Brazil would also like to increase its investment in Nepal, but the delays in the 400MW Lower Arun project have meant that the Brazilian multinational, Engevix, is on the verge of pulling out after six years.

Recently, the Energy Ministry allowed India’s Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam to increase the capacity of the Arun III upstream from 400MW to 900MW, making Engevix less viable. The Ministry has extended the license for Lower Arun by six months to reorient and restructure its engineering, but the Brazilians say they need at least 18 more months.

“The decision came out of the blue, it is quite frustrating,” says Brazil’s new ambassador to Nepal, Marcos Duprat Ribeiro (pictured, right), “Lower Arun is a showcase project and a satisfactory conclusion would send the right signals, attracting more Brazilian investors in the future in Nepal’s hydropower sector.”

Kunda Dixit

B
Chinese flavour, Indian curry

The BRICS summit in New Delhi showed that China is emerging as the pre-eminent partner in the group

NEW DELHI — The Delhi Declaration and Action Plan adopted at the 4th BRICS Summit in New Delhi last week, would have quickly laid to rest any residual anxiety in western capitals that a serious rival focus of power and influence was beginning to take shape in the Indian capital.

One look at the wholly pedestrian Action Plan and any illusion of substantive intent would be quickly dispelled. It reads like trivial pursuits and should have been billed as a tentative calendar of prospective meetings and events rather than be given the status of an Action Plan.

The declaration bears the clear imprint of China and to a certain extent Russia on some key economic and political issues. The most notable example of this is the thinly veiled but unusually harsh criticism of the US-sponsored Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which is seen as mainly directed against China.

Unless India has been told it will have no place in the partnership why close our options? The Declaration obliquely criticises the US for causing excessive dollar liquidity, China is concerned because this reduces the value of its massive dollar assets and triggers hot money inflows.

But India would prefer that stimulus measures in the US continue so that export demand for its goods and services is not threatened. Despite the risks, India appears eager to receive more US investment in the hope that it would announce the setting up of a BRICS development bank on the lines of the World Bank but focused on financing projects in BRICS and other developing countries. However, caution seems to have won the day. An initiative that would have been seen as a major contribution by emerging economies in promoting growth and recovery in their own and other developing countries, strengthening their hands in pushing for reform of international financial institutions, and marking the grouping as a serious and authoritative player on the global stage, was instead consigned to a committee.

BRICS is here to stay as a familiar feature on the international landscape. It has the economic and political heft to play an influential role provided it is able to act together on key issues. In that sense, the Delhi Summit remained mostly a flag-waving exercise.

In the foreseeable future, the most realistic prospect for BRIC countries may be their working as a coalition on issues of common interest such as reforming international financial institutions, resisting protectionism and promoting development in developing countries.

There is no doubt that being part of this group gives each member that little extra room for manoeuvre vis-à-vis the established advanced countries. India and China working together in BRICS might also mitigate the elements of confrontation between them. (IPS)

Shyam Saran is former Indian Foreign Secretary and ambassador to Nepal. He is currently the chairman of Research and Information Systems for Developing Countries (RIS) think-tank and senior fellow at the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) in New Delhi.
As he looks down at another nearly lost half-decade of development in Nepal, Toni Hagen must be shaking his head

Sami, geologist-turned-development guru, first came to Nepal in 1950. In 1994, he published his first book on the country. Ten years later, he died in 2003. Hagen had started working on a final book, "Decentralisation and Development," to record the lessons learnt from his long acquaintance with Nepal's march to modernity and to compare it with Switzerland. After his death, Hagen's daughter, Karin, and other friends put the book together, compiling half-finished chapters. Harka Gurung gave it a final edit and wrote a preface before he himself was killed in the tragic helicopter crash in Ghusa in 2006.

Despite the ban on CFCs, there are still old refrigerators and air-conditioners around the world that use the chemical. Rather than allowing for CFC-based refrigerants to escape into the environment, EOS Climate pays for the destruction of these harmful gases through carbon markets. When the chemicals are finally destroyed, EOS Climate will share revenue with the Nepal government to help fund additional training and awareness about responsible refrigerant management and appliance recycling.

Says UNEP's Saurabh Kumar: "Nepal's experience proves that you can leverage carbon funds with a market-based solution to finance the disposal of chemicals which have gone, through carbon credits, to countries that have committed to also phase them out by 2030. The Nepal project demonstrates that similar carbon-market funded approach could be used to remove HCFCs as well."

Kunda Dixit

Paid to be green in Nepal

BIRGANJ – Eleven years ago, when 74 tons of a contraband gas used in refrigeration and air-conditioning were seized by customs at the Indo-Nepal border here, it was hailed internationally as a major victory in the campaign against smuggling of chemicals that destroy the Earth's protective ozone layer.

But no one thought of what to do with the nearly 900 cylinders of gas, and they have remained in a dusty and stuffy warehouse in Birganj since 2001. Now, after years of negotiations, the last of the chemicals will be shipped to the United States for destruction, and the entire process will be funded using carbon markets.

Today, the chemicals are to be made in its image. Since it is harmful to the ozone layer, it is also 10,900 times more powerful than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas.

Stage for the disbursement of these harmful gases through carbon markets. When the chemicals are finally destroyed, EOS Climate will share revenue with the Nepal government to help fund additional training and awareness about responsible refrigerant management and appliance recycling.

Says UNEP's Saurabh Kumar: "Nepal's experience proves that you can leverage carbon funds with a market-based solution to finance the disposal of chemicals which have gone, through carbon credits, to countries that have committed to also phase them out by 2030. The Nepal project demonstrates that similar carbon-market funded approach could be used to remove HCFCs as well."
then, Nepal’s leaders, kings, khangris and krantikaris have all aspired to “turn Nepal into Switzerland”. Hagen’s book is not about how to mould Nepal into a Switzerland, but to learn lessons from Nepal’s own mal-development and look at how democracy and federalism have delivered decentralised development in Switzerland.

In his preface, Gurung points to the little-known fact that the first Nepalis to visit Switzerland were Gurkhas who acted as guides to British mountaineering expeditions in the Alps in the late 19th century, and after whom Piz Gurkha and Gurkha Pass were named (and later renamed by the Swiss because it smacked of ‘colonialism’). What an irony that 50 years later, the tables were finally turned, and the Swiss arrived on Kangchenjunga to start climbing in the Himalaya.

Toni Hagen made a detailed geological map of Nepal, plotted sites for hydropower projects like Kulekhani and the Karnali Bend, proposed an east-west electric train artery, ropeways for mountain transport, and advocated rural eco-tourism. He was against the World Bank’s paradigm that “development follows roads”, arguing instead that roads should follow development, and they should create maximum employment during their construction. Wonder what Hagen would have thought of the mindless bulldozer roads that now scar the mountains through which he walked. The geologist soon found the development needs of Nepal so overwhelming and urgent, he wrote: “I found the people more important than the rocks.” Hagen’s book continues with his earlier works to deal mainly with transportation, hydropower and decentralised planning. It is EF Schumacher’s small-is-beautiful approach that leads him to advocate small run-of-the-river hydropower schemes, green roads, community-managed infrastructure and eco-tourism. We have ignored much of his advice. But not everything has gone wrong. Hagen was proud of the success that Nepal’s community forestry program achieved, he would have approved of the small hydropower projects for rural electrification, local trail bridges, the green roads being built under the Rural Access program, the village homestay tourism now being promoted in Lamjung, Dolakha and Rasuwa. He was an ardent advocate of community development through grassroots democracy.

But on balance, Nepal’s modern leaders have not been very smart. Not even as smart as Chandra Shamsher, who was way ahead of his time when he built a cargo ropeway to service Kathmandu in the 1920s. Hagen’s book has a photograph taken in 1959 with Jawaharlal Nehru, BP Koirala and himself during the Indian leader’s visit to Nepal. Nehru doesn’t look very happy, and one has to read MP Koirala’s memoir, A Role in Revolution to speculate why.

Nehru repeatedly warned BP’s brother and predecessor, MP, in long handwritten letters about letting in foreign experts like Hagen, saying they could not be trusted. One finds out in Decentralisation and Democracy that after Swiss experts advised tunnelling under Chandragiri near Pharping and building a shortcut to the plains via Kulekhani where a dam would be built, the Indians opposed it. Instead, they pushed through the circuitous Tribhuvan Highway that was ten times longer. Needless to say, 60 years later the ‘fast track’ from Kathmandu to the plains still hasn’t been built.

Decentralization and Development: The Role of Democratic Principles
Toni Hagen
Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 2012
374 pages
Rs 1,000

Decentralization and Development: The Role of Democratic Principles
Toni Hagen
Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 2012
374 pages
Rs 1,000

A road runs through it, A 391

Decentralization and Development: The Role of Democratic Principles
Toni Hagen
Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 2012
374 pages
Rs 1,000

A road runs through it, A 391

Decentralization and Development: The Role of Democratic Principles
Toni Hagen
Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 2012
374 pages
Rs 1,000

A road runs through it, A 391

Decentralization and Development: The Role of Democratic Principles
Toni Hagen
Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 2012
374 pages
Rs 1,000

A road runs through it, A 391
RISE WITH PRIDE, Kathmandu Cycle City 2020 is organising a mass cycle rally to promote cycling and cycle lanes. 6 April, 9am onwards, Kathmandu.

New Year’s Eve, welcome the new year with a bang and party the night away. New Year’s Eve, 12am, Garden of Dreams, Thamel.

6 April, 9am onwards, Khulla Manch (Ratnapark) at 9 am. The rally will start from Kathmandu to Pokhara. The organisers are looking forward to a big gathering this year. “Our aim is to gather a huge crowd and spread the message. The more supporters we have, the easier it will be to demand the government to make cycle lanes a priority in urban planning and the existing road expansion program,” says Rajan Kathet of KCC 2020.

The rally is being held on April 5 in an effort to pressure the government to build cycle lanes across Kathmandu and to show that there are enough cycling enthusiasts in the valley. Kathmandu Cycle City (KCC) 2020 which has been working relentlessly to make Kathmandu cycle-friendly by 2020 is organising the event along with Nepal Cycling Association, Roar 4 Youth Stand Up, Clean Air Network Nepal, Nepalese Youth for Climate Action, World Cyclists Foundation, Rotract Club of Kathmandu and Nepal Unites.

The organisers are looking forward to a big gathering this year. “Our aim is to gather a huge crowd and spread the message. The more supporters we have, the easier it will be to demand the government to make cycle lanes a priority in urban planning and the existing road expansion program,” says Rajan Kathet of KCC 2020. During the rally, the organizers will gift the prime minister a cycle and handover a petition letter to the government. Cycle enthusiasts are confident that building cycle lanes will encourage more people to use bicycles as a regular means of transport.

The rally will start from Khulla Manch (Ratnapark) at 9 am. For more information: Shaili Shrestha: 9803276895; Prashanta Khanal: 4464981, 981410236
Bovtie, elbow, fusilli, gnochhi, lumache, penne, tagliatelle, troppoli or spaghetti, Pasta Vostro, the four-month-old trattoria in Thamel, allows you to customise your own bowl of the boiled carb.

Pasta options are package purchased (not homemade), and though varied, lack the usual suspects like linguine, angel hair (ideal for pesto) or fettuccine—the flat friend of more creamy, robust sauces.

Shapes aside, a pasta made well is a pasta that you can chew and taste. Among those we sampled, the pastas were well-cooked and al dente and would likely pass Martha Stewart’s test for a chewable pasta: take a sliver of pasta from the boiling pot, preferably with a fork to keep your fingers intact, then flick the pasta against a wall. If it sticks, it’s al dente and ready to strain. (Try this at home and not at Pasta Vostro nor at any other restaurant for that matter).

Sauces and toppings at Pasta Vostro were rich and generous but overwhelming. The four cheese sauce was, indeed, cheesy, but the four cheese sauce was, indeed, cheesy, but the spoils of the pasta, hardly traceable. The sampled spaghetti swimming in a savoury yet soupy carbonara was surprisingly carrot-based.

Ultimately, the highlight of the review was not a pasta but an appetiser: the bacon wrapped sausages, a carnivore’s treat served with sweet mustard. Skip the garlic bread.

The space at Pasta Vostro is limited and face a line of urn-like casings of macro shots enshrine the Italian staple, spirals and zigzag, Mandala. Situated along the narrow, L-shaped corridor, from entrance to dining area to open-air kitchen and cash counter, are painted in hazard orange and sporadically stenciled black with artful pastas.

The sampled spaghetti swimming in a savoury yet soupy carbonara was supposedly carrot-based.

Ultimately, the highlight of the review was not a pasta but an appetiser: the bacon wrapped sausages, a carnivore’s treat served with sweet mustard. Skip the garlic bread.

The space at Pasta Vostro is limited and face a line of urn-like casings of macro shots enshrine the Italian staple, spirals and zigzag, Mandala. Situated along the narrow, L-shaped corridor, from entrance to dining area to open-air kitchen and cash counter, are painted in hazard orange and sporadically stenciled black with artful pastas.

The sampled spaghetti swimming in a savoury yet soupy carbonara was supposedly carrot-based.

Ultimately, the highlight of the review was not a pasta but an appetiser: the bacon wrapped sausages, a carnivore’s treat served with sweet mustard. Skip the garlic bread.

The space at Pasta Vostro is limited and face a line of urn-like casings of macro shots enshrine the Italian staple, spirals and zigzag, Mandala. Situated along the narrow, L-shaped corridor, from entrance to dining area to open-air kitchen and cash counter, are painted in hazard orange and sporadically stenciled black with artful pastas.

The sampled spaghetti swimming in a savoury yet soupy carbonara was supposedly carrot-based.

Ultimately, the highlight of the review was not a pasta but an appetiser: the bacon wrapped sausages, a carnivore’s treat served with sweet mustard. Skip the garlic bread.
The best film adaptations are the ones that take a little bit of poetic license with the original text and make the story their own. Having not read a single word of Suzanne Collins’s trilogy, the first of which the film, The Hunger Games is based upon, it is interesting to observe yet another teenage-young adult phenomenon translated onto the big screen.

The first thing that comes to light is that Katniss Evergreen (Jennifer Lawrence) is the polar opposite of Kristen Stewart’s irritating ‘Bella Swan’ from the ubiquitous Twilight series. As Bella longs and waits to be rescued by Edward, her vampire lover, four tedious (the last is yet to be made) films, The Hunger Games story begins immediately as Katniss speeds into action with her bow which she uses to hunt animals to feed her sister and mother. Katniss, as Bella waits. Unfortunately, just as it is unfair to compare the book to the film, it is a little unfair to compare heroines from popular novels however much one might find one of them superior to the other.

So let us dwell on the magnificent Katniss, one of the bravest, and most likeable heroines yet to grace the genre-skewed world of action movies. Katniss volunteers (instead of her little sister) to participate in ‘The Hunger Games’ a horrific competition forced upon the remaining 12 districts of a post-apocalyptic world by a totalitarian government. The games require a teenage boy and girl, picked through a lottery, from each district to participate in a globally televised reality show where the victor is the only one who remains standing after being released into the wild where they must survive on their own, and kill each other to win.

While there is an undeniable horror at the inherently voyeuristic nature of cinema that allows us to reflexively rejoice at the event of one nasty teenage offender falling another (there are some evil neo-Nazi lops, Uber Aryan blonde kids from District 1 that are specially trained to win each year in the games), it is also essential to state that without a measure of self-identification with the characters, no conventionally motivated film could succeed. Still, as with the deeply disturbing Lord of the Flies, the premise of any story (film or novel) where kids are made to kill each other, always invites food for thought. Perhaps it is simply that children are supposed to be innocent of adult faults, and when they take on adult traits, especially the particularly dreadful one of murder, it is all the more disturbing and therefore all the more powerful and, thus, as a tool should be used with caution and distinct purpose.

The Hunger Games is worth watching for Jennifer Lawrence’s portrayal of Katniss. Katniss is the archetype of what humanity ought to be. She is clear of eye and true of heart and we root for her because she represents the best of our flawed human race. In this way, her character manages to transcend gender. Watch the film, but at the risk of sounding overly didactic, be aware, because every time you want to cheer for Katniss, you are also somehow, however inadvertently, cheering at the death of a child. Even in fiction, this is a disturbing thought.

The Hunger Games is currently playing at GXY cinemas.

Porter burden

Nepal porters carry extraordinary loads, a 50kg sack of rice plus several cases of beer and fizzy drinks would not be atypical. With a basket (‘doko’) supported solely by a head-strap (‘nasmo’) porters can walk for hours resting as often as they ascend up the trail. Carrying this heavy load can be potentially dangerous at high altitudes (above 2,500m) where oxygen level is lower than in altitudes (above 2,500m) where carrying a 100 kg load and 20 per cent of the men carried more than 125 per cent. There were some who were outside our random sample that carried 200 per cent of their body weight (for example, a 50 kg porter carrying a 100 kg load and ascending Namche Hill).

It is true that the section of the popular Ml Everest trek where this study was performed is also used by porters carrying for “saujis” (merchants). These merchant porters carry significantly heavier loads (as they are paid per kg) than the porters on tourist treks, where the loads are limited to 30kg. So the average weight carried by porters as noted here may not reflect the true weight carried by porters on other tourist treks.

With the increasing popularity of trekking and mountaineering, many porters from different ethnic groups such as the Rais, Tamangs, Chhetris, and Brahmins, who may be accustomed to carrying heavy loads at lower altitudes, are now carrying these loads at high altitude, which was formerly the exclusive domain of Sherpas. High altitude medical experts caution against strenuous exertion under these hypoxic (low oxygen) conditions, since it may make the porters more susceptible to altitude sickness, hypothermia or frostbite. The good news is that organisations like the HRA (Himalayan Rescue Association), MMSN (Mountain Medicine Society of Nepal) and IPPG (International Porters Protection Group) are creating awareness and improving the plight of the porters, but more needs to be done.

The Hunger Games is currently playing at QFX cinemas.

BLACK AND WHITE: Chen Zihi, vice chairman of Standing Committee of the 11th National People’s Committee of China meets PM Baburam Bhattarai at Singa Darbar on Tuesday. Chen arrived on Monday for a five-day visit with a 16-member delegation.

DAY OUT: Kumari, the living goddess, leaves her house in a chariot to see the procession of Seto Macchendranath in Kathmandu on Monday.

Bikram Rai

Weekend Weather

Tuesday’s rain has partially removed the thick haze filter and there will be brighter sunshine over the weekend which in turn will raise the maximum temperature, near the ground, and lift the ambient moisture along the Himalayan mountains to create connection systems. This is normal during this time of the year, but these are not yet the monsoon rains. That doesn’t happen till mid-May. Expect cloud brightenings with afternoon showers and sometimes isolated localized storms with wind and even hail. The plains will remain mainly dry and hot.

Wednesday: Partly cloudy with a chance of isolated showers in the eastern and southern districts. The temperature will be slightly lower than the previous day.

Thursday: Clear sunny with a few scattered clouds in the eastern and southern districts. The temperature will be lower than the previous day.

Friday: Clear bright sunny with a few scattered clouds in the eastern and southern districts. The temperature will be lower than the previous day.

Saturday: Clear bright sunny with a few scattered clouds in the eastern and southern districts. The temperature will be lower than the previous day.

Sunday: Clear bright sunny with a few scattered clouds in the eastern and southern districts. The temperature will be lower than the previous day.
Cleaning out the closet

The Maoists, Nepal Army and Police have to face the victims and tell them what really happened during the war.

BY THE WAY
Anurag Acharya

In July 2009, the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission published its final report in which Nobel laureate and country’s President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was listed as one of the accused. Sirleaf went on to fight her personal battle to convince the people and the court that her initial support for Charles Taylor was a mistake which she proved in the later years by contributing to his downfall.

In 2010, Newsweek listed her among the ten best leaders in the world, Time magazine counted her among the top ten female leaders and The Economist called her the best president the country has ever seen. The reason was simple: Sirleaf was honest and did what she could to reconcile a war torn nation by spearheading the formation of an empowered Truth and Reconciliation Commission which had the capacity to indict even the head of the state.

Presently, international attention is focused on two countries of the region which have recently emerged from devastating civil wars, Sri Lanka and Nepal. The Sri Lankan government has refused to admit its role in war crimes and set up a Lesson Learnt and Reconciliation Committee (LLRC) which absolves state security forces of all charges. In Nepal, there is hope that the proposed truth commission and another one that is designed to look into disappearances will have broader jurisdiction and investigations will be more transparent.

The commissions must account for crimes committed by both sides. Although the Nepal Army has argued that it has already investigated its soldiers in a military court, and that civilian casualties are jurisdiction of the state, cases must be re-investigated by a civilian body.

The mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the commission to look into cases of disappearances should be expanded beyond the period of active conflict to include the last four years of transition, especially the Madhes movement.

The Maoist leadership must rise above partisan politics and their leaders must shed personal fears in order to establish their international credibility as a legitimate political force. They must form an impartial commission with a strong mandate. The opposition, for its part, must not use the reconstitution process to earn brownie points or start a political witch-hunt. Similarly, Madhes leaders have an important role to ensure that incidents like the Gaur massacre and mindless killings during the Madhes movement are fairly investigated.

Third, the legal standing of the commission’s reports must be pre-determined. While amnesty and reconciliation in consultation with the victims might be a good idea, there has to be a provision which guarantees legal standing of the commission’s investigations and forms a basis for further prosecution in the court of law.

We have seen in the past how commissions are formed, investigations are carried out and thick reports are filed, only to be shelved and gather dust. Hundreds of families have waited six years for justice and it would add insult to their injury if these commissions also meet the fate of the Rayamajhi and Mallick Commissions.

The change in power structure and resource distribution may resolve political conflict, but it will not wash away individual resentment. The tormentor and the tormented cannot coexist without shedding the baggage of the violent past that brought them together.

For that to happen, the minimum requirement is to tell the truth.

Families have the right to know what happened, and the warring sides must show courage to tell them how and why the person was killed.

This week saw considerable progress in the peace process. The parties have expressed an unequivocal commitment to integrate the combatants by mid-April which will remove the last hurdle for declaring the new constitution. There are still unresolved issues of federal units and governance which will test the leadership’s negotiation skills.

The parties must announce the formation of truth and disappearance commissions at the earliest. This will demonstrate that they mean business and buy them both time and goodwill needed to concentrate on constitution drafting.
Elections in Nepal have never been completely free or fair, and everyone has a favourite example of vote-buying, ballot-stuffing, or booth-capturing. Goons mobilised by political parties oftenbeck up rival candidates or block roads on election day so opposition voters can’t make it to the polling centres.

There were lots of proxy, underage and multiple voters in the 2008 CA election. The day so opposition voters can’t make it to the polling centres. The are just the visible irregularities, but what ultimately determines the election result in Nepal are things far more basic: most Nepalis do not know how the voting system works. There is a lot of mass voting where villagers are mobilised by local bigwigs in return for payment in cash or kind from candidates. Like in a lot of other things, we have weak institutional memory and quickly forget the corruption history or criminal record of candidates. Voter opinion is influenced by few weeks of campaigning, misinformation and vicious propaganda. Whoever makes the biggest noise has an edge. Parties know this better than anyone else, and campaign financing has become an integral part of the process, and this is usually ill-gotten or are donations from businesses who extract their pound of flesh once the party is elected. In this way, elections become a key feature in perpetuating the cycle of corruption. Until a candidate or party’s victory depends less on the ability to spend money and more on performance, credibility and integrity, elections will never be the determining facet of democracy. Electoral reform, therefore, has to be integrated into the implementation of the new constitution. The erosion of the image of parliamentary parties in the 1990s is in large part explained by the lack of performance and their behaviour during successive elections. The

The quality of democracy in Nepal will depend on serious electoral reform. Nepal’s Election Commission is introducing electronic voting nationwide in several elections in the coming years. But e-voting is not a panacea, and just because we go digital doesn’t mean things won’t be the same. Technology is not always benign, in fact it can open up avenues for massive fraud, money laundering, terrorism and dictatorial repression. The fact that a majority of people do not understand how information technology works gives immense power to those who do. The mainstay of electronic elections are hardware and software. Sure, it makes voting easy and convenient, accurate and reliable results can be announced almost instantaneously, but what if the underlying software running the machine has been designed to cheat? What if the circuitry has been redrawn to rig results? Who is checking if there are negotiations between political players and vendors to get ‘backdoor entry’ access to the electronic system? In case of disputed results or technological errors, do we have laws in place and the legal experience to handle them? Do we have the capacity for auditing, validation, encryption and data protection? When our government websites are so easily hacked and defaced, it is cause for worry. There have been many cases of error, manipulation and fraud with e-voting, and not all are confined to developing countries. Big changes in electoral processes should accompany similar adaptations in our legal and administrative systems. When cheating is mastered by the political hierarchy, that is where we need to clean things up. Technology by itself will not ensure honest elections. Any purchase of computers and software for elections should be scrutinised and the technology audited. Standardisation agencies should be well trained to deal with such systems, and until then, we should verify the systems through international agencies. The bugs within the voting hardware and software should be made public. There are alternative voting technologies that use free open-source systems that are maintained by the community, are hard to rig and have publicly listed index of weaknesses.

During the 2008 CA elections, the irregularities beat past records. Electronic elections alone will not make future polls in Nepal free and fair. There has to be a political commitment to play fair, and by the rules.
like to portray themselves as the party of the poor, but are now the richest ones around. Leaving aside our austere Mustang-riding prime minister, Maoist leaders drive around in the most expensive cars. Live in the most luxurious mansions and have a well-known penchant for the good life.

Like the people they tried to physically eliminate until five years ago, the Maoists have understood how money translates to political power. The desperation of Maoist and Madhesi leaders in the current coalition to rake it in is not just because of personal greed, it has a lot to do with ensuring cash flow for the next elections. Every sector of economic life is fair game for “pre-paid” kickbacks, cuts and extortion: casinos, real estate, unions, foreign employment.

If this is what the party that espouses the dictatorship of the proletariat looks like, imagine what the others are up to. If political leaders in Nepal are almost at zero credibility, it is because their loyalties lie not with the people but with themselves and those who funded their election campaigns.

The epidemic of corruption in Nepal today is a direct result of the conviction among political leaders that future elections can easily be rigged or bought, and there is no need to deliver development to the constituencies. The absence of local elections has ‘democratised’ corruption right down to the grassroots. The infamous all-party mechanism at VDCs and DDCs have become synonymous with massive and systematic corruption where local units of the parties are in cahoots to loot budgets.

In paper, parties are required to disclose their financial details and there is an upper ceiling for the money that parties and candidates can spend during their election campaigns, but few abide by the rules, mostly because there is no one to enforce them.

It is clear there is no point having elections, just for the sake of having them. The quality of democracy in Nepal will depend on serious electoral reform. If all goes well, there will be four elections in the country in the next few years: national elections, local elections, provincial elections when the country goes federal, and a presidential or prime ministerial election depending upon the governance system in the new constitution. We cannot afford anymore to elect crooks, undermine our hard-earned freedoms and squander the chance to uplift living standards through accountable leadership.

A good idea would be to establish a national fund for campaign financing, so the state subsidises parties for elections and levels the playing field somewhat. At the heart of any well-functioning democracy is a free and fair election process which depends on certain criteria: voters are not subjected to threats, intimidation or enticement, they have access to accurate information about the contesting candidates and the voting is based on a system that eliminates chances of rigging or errors to a bare minimum. For proof that this is possible, we only need to look next door at Bihar, where clean elections have yielded clean governments that serve the people. The CA election only had to be peaceful to be successful, but the success of the next elections will be measured on these standards.
The Maoist path to enlightenment

Prakash Adhikari in Annapurna Post, 25 March

The Maoists have had two chances to rule this country, and they have squandered both. They have flouted the rule of law, failed in governance, and their public support base is eroding. Senior civil servants and secretaries are resigning because of pressure from ministers, cadre and power-hungry Maoist unions. It is therefore stupid to expect a party like this to give people their rights or improve their livelihoods. Worse, the Maoists are openly coddling those found guilty of murder and other crimes and granting mass pardon to thousands more. It’s as if the Maoist prime minister wants to convey the message that his party can do anything, commit any crime and get away with it. Such impunity has further tarnished the domestic and international reputation of the party. It took a German minister to draw attention to this during a recent visit, and warn that aid to Nepal may be affected if the general amnesty proposal went through.

It is now clear that however much the Maoists talk about their ‘people’s war’ for societal transformation, all they have tried to do in the past four years is demolish democracy and support authoritarianism. The party still seems to think it needs guns to ensure victory in elections and doesn’t want to disarm, and its leaders keep threatening to return to the jungle, wage a people’s revolt or unleash rivers of blood.

In the midst of all this, the supreme leader of the Maoists, Prachanda, after waging a war that killed 15,000 Nepalis, disappeared and displaced thousands more has suddenly decided to become a follower of Gautam Buddha, the prince of peace and compassion. This could be considered a positive move if Prachanda suddenly had pangs of conscience about the suffering he unleashed, or because he is scared of being dragged to the war crimes tribunal. But first, the Maoist leader and his followers have to prove to us that they really mean it.

Why don’t the adherents of Prachandapath mark the next auspicious full moon day by meditating for enlightenment under the Bodhi tree? Let the former guerrillas in the camps and YCLs also shave their heads, dress in monks’ robes and chant “Buddham saranam gachhami, dhamam saranam gachhami, sangam saranam gachhami”? And let them say that they have forever forsaken the path of violence. Only then will it suit Prachanda and his disciples to lead the committee on Lumbini and welcome Ban Ki-moon. The UN chief’s visit may have been cancelled for now, but at some point he should come and bear witness to this transformation of the Maoists to a truly non-violent party.
“We are citizens”

Bishnumani Pokharel and Mithilesh Yadav in Nagarik, 2 April

Majurani Sada from Siraha district lives with her two sons, their wives and two
grandsons in a small hut on a piece of land owned by her landlord. She is a
Mushar, one of the most backward Dalit groups in Tarai who typically work as daily
wage labourers. Although Majurani was born in Siraha and has lived there all her
life, she does not have a citizenship card.

“I don’t really need the card, but without it my son cannot make one, nor can my
grandsons,” explains Majurani. She has travelled regularly to the administrative
offices, 20 km away in Lahan, but has returned empty handed every time. “If I
bribed the officers, maybe they would stop troubling me and give me my card,” says
Majurani.

Majurani along with 40 other landless families in her village have no documents
to prove their nationality and most of them have been denied citizenship. Although
Dalits who make up one third of Siraha’s population are entitled to acquire the cards
through a free and convenient process, the district officials have not been following
the stipulated procedures. Instead, issuing of citizenship has turned into a lucrative
business for civil servants, agents and police.

Even when a team went to the village to issue citizenship cards, the ones with
money quickly cashed in. But 70 year old Ram Lakhan was unlucky and his family
is still citizenship-less. “Those who had money, got their cards made. Nobody
bothered about us,” says Ram Lakhan. He adds: “My father was born here and so
was I. We are citizens of this country, but just don’t have documents to prove it. I
am tired of running around, maybe I will just save some money and bribe them.”

From the Nepali Press

15 Energy

Epson K109 Single Function

Save more with low running cost at less than a rupee per page

Epson K200 All-in-One

Reduce paper wastage with built-in duplexer

Work efficiently in network with built-in Ethernet connectivity

Optimise workflow productivity with laser-like printing speed @ ppm
Cash or credit? Both

Not a day goes by without a Constipated Assembly member making a donkey of him- or her-self. Sometimes they are caught selling red passports, others are arrested for being part of kidnapping rings, some are convicted murderers who drive around with the PM, others vandalise the Great Hall of the People. Compared to such fun and games, it would be trivial to bring up the case of a legislator who was caught red handed hiring someone much smarter than himself to sit for his SLC exam. The media should give the guy a break, he was just trying to further his education. His only mistake was to get caught.

As we heard last week, the restaurant business has collapsed because of the ongoing crackdown on driving under the influence. Sales of liquor have plummeted, and so has govt revenue from the tax on alcohol. The crackdown had reduced Nepal’s Gross National Happiness pretty drastically, but now comes word that it may actually bring down our GDP growth as well. Private hospitals have registered 80 per cent drop in income from their emergency wards because of the sharp reduction in the number of traffic accidents. Some hospitals may actually default on their bank loans, thus having a domino effect on the banking sector. There is one slight silver lining: the breathalysers have a limited number of plastic pipes so they have become a vector to pass on communicable diseases mouth-to-mouth, thus increasing business for hospitals.

The other reason Nepal’s economy is shrinking is because the casinos are going bust. So there is a plan afoot to get the cabinet to approve a proposal from the First Son and the erstwhile First Son-in-Law (now sleeping partners in the Yakyetiya Casino) to allow Nepalis in to gamble and inject cash into state coffers. For this, the scions of the former and current royal families have mobilised other casinos to donate generously to the war chests of cabinet members. The Baddies union gets a cool 15 percent take of the daily take in all KTM casinos, but that income has shrunk worryingly because of a drop in Indian and Bangladeshi gamblers. Legalising the entry of Nepalis would kill two chickens before they are hatched: the Baddies would get a source of income so they don’t have to extort us, and the state treasury would be regularly topped up.

Cash or credit? Well, as far as the Maobaddies are concerned they want both. But at the moment, they mostly want credit, and that is what the intra-party feud is all about. Smelling a coup, BRB wants to at least get some credit for untangling the peace process, while PKD wants to get all the credit for resolving the constitutional deadlock. To his credit, Comade Bhayankar wants to have all the credit, and if he can’t have it he doesn’t want anyone else to have it either.

The intra-party feud within the Mao Mas is now getting physical. They are splitting each other’s heads, so a party split may be near. Bal Krishna (‘Comrade Manslaughter’) Dhungel got a knock on his head in Salleri recently courtesy the ultra-hardliners. The Baidya faction of the Kranti-curry Union has declared all out war on rivals. In Kathmandu, the Kiran Ba faction doesn’t commute to Paris Hill anymore, it has moved in with Comrade Hitman at the Newa Council building in Kopundole where the revolutionaries are all masked, not because they want to protect their identity, but to ward off the stench of the nearby Goo-mati River.

Nepal and Brazil have a visa waiver agreement for diplomats of each other’s countries. But a visiting Brazilian minister had to wait one-and-half hours this week to get her visa on arrival at KTM. Which means PM BRB will get reciprocal treatment when he goes to Rio in June?