Everyone has to take a share of the blame for the futile deadlock on 27 May, and for the last four years of dilly-dallying, wheeling-dealing, back-stabbing and give-and-take. Politicians confused the country’s long-term interest with the short-term ambitions of egotistical party leaders. They confused genuine devolution of power away from Kathmandu with a disastrously unworkable ethnic division of the country. They engaged in ruthless brinkmanship right till the very end just so they could have the upper hand in elections in six months’ time.

When he addressed the nation on Sunday night, Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai (right) spoke not as a head of government, not as a leader of all Nepalis, not as a statesman, but as a defensive, haughty party boss delivering his first campaign speech.

Editorial
We have a situation here

Lenin and Stalin carved the Soviet Union up into ethnic Soviet republics with a token nod to self-determination, but kept totalitarian power centred in the Kremlin. Can we expect any better from a party that keeps the portraits of Lenin and Stalin on the wall of its headquarter?

In the next six months we have to try to patch a perilously frayed social fabric and protect our pluralistic democracy during a polarised and volatile campaign for the next election.
No constitution at all may be better than a fatally-flawed one.

The last four years. The next time we sit down to write a constitution, we will have to start from scratch.

The past week has also been characterised by the usual blame game. Let's face it, all sides were guilty of politics with the constitution and the people were squandering the opportunity to chart out a just and fair future.

They confused the country's long-term interest with the ambitions of egotistical party leaders. They confused genuine devotion of power away from Kathmandu with a disastrously unworkable ethnic division. They engaged in ruthless brinkmanship right until the end, just so they could have the upper hand in elections in six months time. Anyone who questioned this was immediately labelled status quoist Brahmin-Chhetri elite clique out to protect privilege and power.

If Prime Minister Bhutan’s speech on Sunday night was anything to go by, the next six months will be a struggle between those who want to strengthen democracy and those who have repeatedly and publicly stated that their end goal is to capture total state power. It will be between those who want to protect national unity and co-existence, and those who do not.

I think we are basically decent and peaceful people, with a high threshold for tolerance and pain. They know their rights, but expect little out of the politicians. They are not racist and don’t believe promises of a utopian New Nepal.

The priority now is to get this country back on its feet. The NC and UML must let go of their obstructive appetites and join a government of national unity ahead of elections. It is all uncharted territory from here on, and it may make sense to let things settle down a bit by holding parliamentary elections in November, and putting off a constitutional debate until there is more stability.

Kumar

Amrit Gurung I am a Nepali like yours, because only then would the diversity in our culture and traditions be slowly fading out, we are creating more discrimination. It does not matter whether they are high-caste Brahmins or Dalits, both will have to struggle and will be ignored by the state. I am sick of being identified by my surname and wish people would try to understand my views rather than judge me on the basis of my family name. At a time when sumnaries and ethnic identities should be showing the way, we are creating more ethnic barriers. I am afraid such practices will make Nepal less inclusive and peaceful for another hundred years.

Abhishek Gurung

Abhishek Gurung speaks the truth. We are unique in many respects but focusing only on our difference won't take us ahead. I am a Chhetri, but my family is as mixed as can be. I strongly oppose any state-led policies that my fellow-chetris and my fellow-brahmins have not been part of the ruling elite. So instead of seeing each other as enemies, let's come together and work as one.

Dhundubhar

The justice that is being demanded on the streets is not for privileged Janajati like Amrit Gurung, but for those who have been completely neglected by the state. The centre has hardly shown any interest in our culture, language and tradition and has only promoted the culture of the ruling castes. I am sick of being identified by my surname and wish people would try to understand my views rather than judge me on the basis of my family name. At a time when sumnaries and ethnic identities should be showing the way, we are creating more ethnic barriers. I am afraid such practices will make Nepal less inclusive and peaceful for another hundred years.

Robin

I share Amrit Gurung's sentiments. I am an educated and privileged Nepali. I don't have strong links or are poor then I would have been a Nepali. I am sick of being identified by my surname and wish people would try to understand my views rather than judge me on the basis of my family name. At a time when sumnaries and ethnic identities should be showing the way, we are creating more ethnic barriers. I am afraid such practices will make Nepal less inclusive and peaceful for another hundred years.

Sunil Pandey

I am worried that Nepal might disintegrate for reassuring me that there are many moderate people in Nepal who think like yours, because only then would the diversity in our culture and traditions be slowly fading out, we are creating more discrimination. It does not matter whether they are high-caste Brahmins or Dalits, both will have to struggle and will be ignored by the state. I am sick of being identified by my surname and wish people would try to understand my views rather than judge me on the basis of my family name. At a time when sumnaries and ethnic identities should be showing the way, we are creating more ethnic barriers. I am afraid such practices will make Nepal less inclusive and peaceful for another hundred years.

Anonymous

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Pratik Limbu

Certain groups have been suppressed for centuries, but it is not possible to uplift these communities without divining the country while keeping our Nepali identity intact. In a Limbu village, Amrit Gurung I am a Nepali first. Let's focus on education and try to build a positive and peaceful environment to smooth the transition phase.
Nepal’s political class and civil society are lamenting the unceremonious demise of the Constituent Assembly. Many internationals are mortified by the turn of events, seen as one more proof of the chicanery of our political leaders.

Indeed, the loss of four years has been nothing less than heartbreaking, a time that should have been spent on healing, rehabilitation and reconstruction. But the CA emerged as a divisive arena rather than a place of compromise amidst diverse demands. If what we want is a good, representative constitution that promises political stability, economic growth and inclusion, we may have been saved from distress.

The primary responsibility for the CA’s failure goes to the Maoists as the largest party and part of the state establishment of Nepal since coming above ground in 2006. Pushpa Kamal Dahal manipulated the House for his own purpose, and his radical populism pushed the other parties towards unshyly compromises that would have made it into the final document.

The entire four-year process of constitution-drafting was conducted under duress, amidst Maoist intimidation from start to finish. The CA and Legislature-Parliament were labourised under the shadow of the gun: the cantonments with their combatants remained under Maoist chain-of-command throughout until early April 2012.

The rules of procedure of the CA itself made compromise difficult. The thematic committees required only 50 per cent majority to send their reports to the House, which were then put to vote. A handful of party leaders sitting across the sofa believed they could decide the fate of the entire country. A Constitutional Court had the agreed text in their hands. A handful of party leaders sitting across the sofa believed they could decide the fate of the entire country.

We were being handed a system where the president would have a supposed constitutional position but be directly elected from the people, while the prime minister would be chief executive, but he indirectly elected through the legislature. In the Nepali context, this system was readymade for the evolution of an autocratic presidency, something we would have had to fight for years to reverse. If the fount of all social justice, economic growth and social development is democratic practice, then we were about to lose it with our eyes wide open.

The constitution, if promulgated according to the 15 May agreement, would have introduced a mixed election system, with 55 per cent of the MPs directly-elected and 45 per cent through proportional representation. This privileging of the proportional system, while promoted as a promise to reverse. If the fount of all social justice, economic growth and social development is democratic practice, then we were about to lose it with our eyes wide open.

The constitution should be promulgated, and fatigue. That is not how a constitution should be promulgated, and we now know what not to do when we get around to it again.

A longer version of this article can be accessed at www.kanakmanidixit.com
Conveniently left

There are conflicting accounts about who delivered the coup de grâce to the constitution on Sunday night. In his off-the-cuff address to the nation Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai blamed “status quoists” in the NC and UML. The NC and UML say it was the Maoists who deliberately avoided a last-minute compromise.

The NC and UML have never really felt any ownership for the demand of a constituent assembly nor for federalism based on ethnicity. These were not their key demands of the 2006 democracy movement, and they went along with it only because the Maoists had to be appeased for peace.

The CA was just a means to an end for the Maoists, and when it was no longer useful, they let it go. Identity-based federalism was proving to be intractable, but the parties had found a workable formula in the offer by Janajati activists late on Sunday to accept multiple-ethnic labels. But the Madhesis and Pushpa Kamal Dahal decided to let the CA lapse and announce elections.

It is clear that the 22 November election will be an election campaign in which ethnicity and politics will be mixed into a highly combustible powder. Left-leaning commentators are saying social harmony is a euphemism for perpetuating the status quo, almost supporting a descent into anarchic violence. As if communal co-existence and equality are mutually exclusive.

It is necessary to acknowledge past wrongs for the state to take steps to correct them. But does that have to be through extreme hate speech and stoking a revenge mentality unless a questionable model of federalism is approved? The openly racist slogans at the Janajati and Bahun-Chettri demonstrations across Nepalis have moved on, but our communal communists are still dreaming of utopia.

The disillusionment is now complete: except for the party cadre and other opportunists no one really believes the Maoists have the people’s well-being at heart when they deliver grand rhetoric to win support for perpetuating the status quo, and stoking a revenge mentality through extreme hate speech.

A referendum would allow the people to directly vote for what they think is best for them. It would allow Nepal’s ethnic groups to have their states, all problems will resolve themselves. We have seen from Yugoslavia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Nigeria that it never happens that way. The hate-mongering last week between Rai and Limbu activists over rival claims in Sunsari could be a sign of things to come in other contested territories.

In the marketplace of ideas, public intellectuals are supposed to find meeting points, a common minimum understanding to steer the country towards a peaceful resolution, not become communalists whipping up antagonism and resentment.

What an irony that the so-called status quoists have more constructive ideas about workable models of federalism than the red elite. They are offering practical solutions on making federalism work, to realistically improve access of the marginalised to resources and equalise state-community relations. Advocates of non-ethnic federalism, many of them Janajatis themselves, have done pioneering work in decentralisation and community models in the country. But all we hear from the Maoists and their recent converts are slogans. Nepalis are up to here with slogans.

A debate is healthy when both sides come up with compelling arguments. At least this is how it works in democratic and pluralistic societies. Hateful remarks, accusations and provocations are best suited to propaganda-driven communist dictatorships. People don’t believe anymore that ‘eggs will have to be broken to make an omelette’. Nepalis have moved on, but our communal communists are still dreaming of utopia.

The disillusionment is now complete: except for the party cadre and other opportunists no one really believes the Maoists have the people’s well-being at heart when they deliver grand speeches about liberation. The comrades know this, and that is why they will be trying to use the ethnic card in November’s elections.

On an issue as critical as state restructuring and system of governance, it may be best to let people decide for themselves. A referendum would allow Nepalis to directly vote for what they think is best for them. Let the people decide, not the pundits, they have always displayed more common sense and compassion.

The Human Touch

As Nepal’s most-modern printing facility, Jagadamba Press is known for its state-of-the-art equipment. But we never forget the human touch.
The Euro faces its verdict

Salvaging the Euro dream is a possibility, but how many want it?

The dollar can be expected to rise further in the future if the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) does not intervene. RBI’s target for arbitrage and speculation in futures and options markets, and its order to exporters of repatriating INR instead of holding dollars seem to have been ineffective so far. There is nothing we in Nepal can do but wait, and watch, and suffer.

For an import based country like ours, higher exchange rates will put pressure on import prices and push inflation, which will be at 5.5 per cent next year. Merchandise import has increased by 10 per cent to Rs 339.84 billion in the last nine months, and the appreciation of the dollar is unlikely to dampen these figures.

The strong dollar will also make payment of foreign loans and interests expensive. The Rs 20 billion allocated by the government to pay the principle and interest in the current fiscal year’s projects will no longer be sufficient. Since fuel prices are bound to rise if this trend continues, expect longer queues at the gas stations, and more political instability as various pressure groups try to use price hikes to fuel street protests.

However, the rising dollar has helped inflate Nepal’s economic figures. If you looked beyond the political news last week, you would have noticed some positive developments on the economic front. Nepal’s export has already risen by 15.7 per cent this fiscal year, from Rs 284 billion in the same period. Income from tourism has risen by 28.5 per cent. A lot of this has to do with the appreciation of the dollar.

After remaining in deficit for two years, the country’s balance of payments registered its highest ever surplus of Rs 91.37 billion during the first three quarters of 2011/12 fiscal year. The gross foreign exchange reserves surged by 42.2 per cent to Rs 386.96 billion in mid-April 2012 from Rs 272.15 billion last year.

The dollar alone is certainly not responsible for these figures. What it shows is that despite political uncertainty, poverty and strikes, our economy managed to do more than just stay afloat. The test will be to monitor if these figures drop and by how much when the dollar stabilises. The Nepal Investment Board was finally given charge of large-scale prestige projects, but this coincided with the demise of the constitution. It won’t help ally investor of fearing doing business in Nepal if the country doesn’t have a legislature, and not even a constitution.

But if we keep waiting for politics to settle down, we may wait forever. So let’s move while we can.

The creation of the euro just over a decade ago was a courageous and unique experiment. Today, the outcome – whether the euro will survive, and whether the Europeans are right to keep it – is very much in doubt.

The euro shares important features with versions of the old gold standard, under which countries fixed their exchange rates relative to each other by setting the price at which domestic currency could be redeemed in gold. But there are three differences between the euro and the gold standard – none of which is particularly reassuring at this moment.

First, the gold standard’s central premise was that there was a finite quantity of gold in the world. By contrast, the European Central Bank can create more euros if desired. Governments and investors know this, and the result has been much higher debt-to-GDP ratios, with the Eurozone recording a debt-to-GDP ratio as high as 90 per cent at present. If the ECB threatens to cut off support, the whole house of cards can come tumbling down.

Second, financial markets have become huge relative to anything seen under the gold standard. With the backing of their governments, European banks have become relative to some national economies. But these banks have been operating on a grand scale of debt and yet have little shareholder capital – the essential buffer against potential losses. Any shock to sovereign debt or further downturn in local economies will be transmitted through an overleveraged and undercapitalised banking system to other European countries and beyond.

Finally, for all the talk today of the discipline that the gold standard supposedly provided, countries adhered to it regularly suspended convertibility – meaning that the domestic currency could no longer be converted freely into gold. But today’s Europeans have no domestic currency – just the euro. If any country – for example, Greece – left the euro, all contracts in that country would have to be rewritten. The disruption, particularly to credit, would be profound.

The news today is on how hard it is for the Eurozone periphery to adjust and return to growth, owing to the combination of high public debt and actual or perceived austerity measures. But there is a flip side to the problem: capital is flowing to Germany as the regional safe haven, making credit more readily available there. The dynamics of adjustment within the Eurozone exacerbate the underlying imbalances – Germany is becoming more competitive while the periphery remains uncompetitive.

The recent Greek elections have brought more radical parties to the fore. Alexis Tsipras, the head of the Coalition of the Radical Left has a valid point. ‘Internal devaluation’ – cutting wages and prices – is failing as a strategy. His alternative appears to be to abandon the euro. If Greece can’t do better than this, he argues, then let her leave.

But this is not about Greece any longer. Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland face the same issues, but are at an earlier stage in the backlash. Unemployment is rising, their economies are not becoming more competitive, and the interest rates on their debt continue to rise. These countries may eventually decide to leave. And, even if they don’t make that choice, fear of such exits can easily become self-fulfilling.

The Euro system was designed to deliver prosperity and stability for all. It has clearly failed for some countries, and may fail for many. Severe mismanagement by European politicians has caused damage that will last for decades.

Perhaps a stronger fiscal union, a central ministry of finance, and debt guarantees would reduce the difficulties and imbalances enough to allow the euro to survive. Perhaps adjustment will start to work just in time.

There is a lot of shouting in the jury room, but expect a verdict soon.

Peter Boone and Simon Johnson

Peter Boone is the chairman of Effective Intervention at the London School of Economics. Simon Johnson is a former chief economist at IMF.

www.project Syndicate.com
Phurba Tamang (pic. right top) has been running the Tenzing Hillary Everest Marathon for three years and has won all three, this time beating his own record by running downhill from Base Camp to Namche in a lightning 3 hours 41 minutes and 31 seconds.

The world’s highest marathon race has been organised every year for the last 10 years, and has participants from all over the world with 93 foreigners and 62 Nepali runners this year.

In the women’s race, Ang Futi Sherpa (pic. right below) won the title for the fifth time in 5 hours 14 minutes 44 seconds ahead of Mingma Lama who finished it in 5 hours 15 minutes 56 seconds while Tashi Jangmu Sherpa was third at 5 hours 43 minutes 23 seconds.

Tamang, who also won the race in 2009 and 2010, took the lead right from the start and maintained it till the finishing line for the third time. He had to drop out from last year’s...
when British guitarist Oz Bayldon (see box) came to Nepal in 2002 to participate in an international music festival, little did he know he would be breaking world records and helping build an orphanage in Nepal. On 10 May, Music4children, the London-based charity founded by Bayldon performed on top of 6,476m high Mera peak for 40 minutes and broke the world record for the highest gig. This was the group's second record in seven years.

Bayldon says he became eager to work for Nepali children after his experiences with street children ten years ago.

"As I was walking around Kathmandu, I met a disabled child begging on the streets. I was buying him some food and when I found myself surrounded by 30 street kids and 1 fed them all for less than £30 pounds. That's how Music4children was born," recalls the 40-year-old.

Bayldon also helps children from poor families in his hometown in south London by offering them free DJ, drama and dance lessons at his pub, The White Lion.

Music4children first entered the record books in 2005 for the world's highest performance at Kalapathar Base Camp at 5.545m. The record was surpassed by a German band in Bolivia, but Bayldon was determined to reclaim the title.

"The Germans stole our record and we are here to win it back," he said before his team of 10 volunteers including four musicians, two DJs, photographers and cameramen left for their two week expedition to Mera.

The money collected in 2005 was handed over to Help Network Nepal, a charity started by Nepalis living abroad, which used the funds to build an orphanage in Dhulikhel. Bayldon says the £30,000 pounds raised from this year's gig will help cover the operating costs of the orphanage for the next three years.

Dinesh Deskota of Adventure First Treks and Expeditions who has been involved with Music4children from the beginning is impressed with the team's commitment and dedication. He says, "Most climbers come to set individual records, usually on Mt Everest. Even though none of the volunteers are professional climbers, they travelled halfway across the world, took part in a difficult trek and performed in the freezing cold just to support Nepali children."

Bayldon, however, is not satisfied with being a record holder. He now wants to raise funds for children around the world and looks forward to performing under more challenging conditions. "We have gigs lined up in the Amazonian rainforest, at the North Pole, and one in Mexico where we will be base jumping into a crater. We are just getting started," he says, grinning.

"The Germans stole our record and we are here to win it back," he said before his team of 10 volunteers

Marathon

race for health reasons. Kumar Rajbhandari finished a close second with a time of 3 hours 54 minutes 51 seconds and defending champion Sudip Kulung Rai finished third at 4 hours 54 seconds.

"I want to compete in the race next year and make a new record by winning the marathon the fourth time," says Tamang who also took a $1,000 cash prize.

"The Everest marathon is a unique adventure sport and serves as a big boost to Nepal’s tourism industry just at the end of the mountain trekking season," says marathon organiser Shikhar Pandey.

Besides the Tenzing Hillary Everest Marathon, there is a separate event called the Everest Marathon that has been organized for the past 15 years along the same route and the next event is in November.

The marathon marks 29 May International Everest Day, the date of the first ascent of Mt Everest by Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and Sir Edmund Hillary in 1953.

www.everestmarathon.com

Faster than the rest, by Sagun Lawoti, #300

Marathon

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Haiiku Hangout, explore unconventional ways of writing haiiku while you sip tea and hangout. 9 June, 9am to 3pm, Sarvanam Theatre, Kalikasthan

Saturday Birdwatching, Bird Conservation Nepal is organising birdwatching trips to mark World Environment Day. Stroll through the forests of Nagarjun as you observe rare birds. 2 June, 5.30 am, Nagarjun Gate, 01413357766

Spahki Fest ’12, Beat the heat this summer with water football, live music and a lot of food and beverages to keep you cool. Ro 1409, 2 June, 10am onwards, Godawari Village Resort, www.water-football.com

ALBATROSS UNPLUGGED, Don’t miss a live performance by Albatross. 2 June, 7-30 pm, Albatross, Lazimpat

Live Music Night, Shabram and Cannibaz band playing every Wednesday, Absolute Bar, Hotel Norayani Complex.

Live music at Jazzabella Café, Every Wednesday and Friday 6pm onwards, Jazzabella café, Jhamkhel, Patan. Call 2114079

NEPAL APPRECIATION, an art exhibition by Miriam E Krantz. 24 May to 5 June. 10.30 am to 8pm, closed on Saturdays, Park Gallery, Pulchowk. 5522307, www.parkgallery.com.np

Peace, 17 artists have come together to set up an art exhibition celebrating Buddha Jayanti. 3 May to 3 June, 7am to 5.30 pm, The Art Shop, Durbar Marg, 4267863, 9841448488

SIGN, Live music by SIGN band every week except Tuesdays and Wednesdays. 7.30 pm onwards, Corner Bar, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat. Call 4411818

CAFÉ HESSED, for those with a sweet tooth, offers a delicious range of cupcakes and doughnuts. Jhamkhel

New Tushita Restaurant, relaxing ambiance and good food. Don’t miss out on their penne with creamy bacon and mushroom sauce. Lazimpat, 4442957

Boudha Stupa Restaurant & Café, enjoy wood-fired pizza with a superb view of Boudha stupa. Boudha, 2130881

Moondance Restaurant, one of the few places in Pokhara that you just can’t miss, wash down its superb pizza and Lemon Chicken with a glass of mojito. Pokhara

Cafe Du Temple, famous for its delicious food, warm ambiance and beautiful roof top view. Patan Durbar Square, 5537127. Boudha, 2142056

Cinnamon Grill and Lounge, mouth watering delicacies with live music. Try the grilled tenderloin steak and quiche lorraine with fresh fruit salad. Jhamkhel, 3921328

Sal’s Pizza, almost round, almost cheap, always delicious, the cheesiest pizzas in town. Lazimpat, behind Jazz Upstairs

Café Coffee and Cocktail Café, coffee house during the day and a cosy

Put your body, mind, and spirit in harmony

Learning from Master Harold

Since its inception, One World Theatre has made it a point to showcase plays on social justice issues. Their latest production, Master Harold and the boys is set in apartheid South Africa and explores the fragile bond between a young white boy, Master Harold (or Hally) and his middle-aged black servants Sam and Willie.

Director Deborah Merola’s adaptation of Athol Fugard’s drama opens in an English style tea-room in the 1950s. We are introduced to Sam and Willie, played by Rajkumar Pudasaini and Ashant Sharma respectively who are clearing the room, while engaging in childish banter about balcony championships and the possibility of Willie’s girlfriend having two left feet when an angst-ridden Hally portrayed by Alan Gurung makes his entry. In a world where inter-racial relationship is forbidden, the three characters struggle to maintain their camaraderie while upholding social norms. Hally in particular is troubled by the injustices perpetrated by his people against Sam and Willie.

Rajkumar Pudasaini gives an excellent performance, switching effortlessly from the role of a humble servant to a strong, dignified black man. Ashant Sharma’s goofy starts provide comic relief in an otherwise intense play. Debutant Gurung captures the cynical Hally beautifully and is a promising actor. Watch out for the gaps between Sam and Willie. Even though the play is based 50 years ago, Nepali audience can easily relate to the characters’ plight. Like Nepal, South Africa also faced numerous problems during its peace process and working a fair post-apartheid constitution was a huge battle. Sam and Hally’s conversation about social reformers closely parallels our own conversations about the need for a saviour. And Fugard’s analogy of the world as ballroom dancing where you never collide with another is an apt description of Nepali society.

Shabhyata Timisina

Directed by Deborah Merola
Produced by Mira Hosali
Moksh, Jhamkhel
Opening 31 May till 3 June, 6.30 pm onwards, Corner Bar, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat. Rs 500 or Rs 200 (for students) oneworldtheatreenepal@gmail.com or 9801854122
T

The Factory at Mandala Street is one of those few places in Thamel which was established not for back packers but for Kathmandu’s young and urbane crowd. Very popular amongst the who’s who of the valley, The Factory goes wrong— the food lacks zing. piquancy and zest. This is where The Factory and I wanted to give them the benefit of doubt—maybe they were just having an off day. But that streak of ‘offness’ lasted throughout our meal.

Someone has gone through a lot of trouble creating intricate designs with rope curtains on the windows giving the place a trippy feel. The resto-bar is apparently packed in the evenings but it was very quite during the day. Considering we were the only two diners, the service could have been better. I had heard a lot of good things about The Factory and I wanted to give them the benefit of doubt—maybe they were just having an off day. But that streak of ‘offness’ lasted throughout our meal.

Maybe deciding to order Thai dishes wasn’t the best idea— but that’s me providing them with an excuse. For what right does a restaurant have to display dishes on its menu that it’s not too sure about. The Som Tam Kung lacked crunch and was bland— no fire, no fish oil and there was more carrot than green papaya. The Sauteed Lemon Garlic Prawns weren’t the best idea— but that’s me providing them with an excuse. For what right does a restaurant have to display dishes on its menu that it’s not too sure about. The Som Tam Kung lacked crunch and was bland— no fire, no fish oil and there was more carrot than green papaya. The Sauteed Lemon Garlic Prawns was good about that dish was the plain BBQ Chicken Thai Style was just a disaster. The recommended dish the Factory and I wanted to give them the benefit of doubt—maybe they were just having an off day. But that streak of ‘offness’ lasted throughout our meal.

The mixed Chicken and Shrimp was, in a word, disastrous. The recommended BBQ Chicken Thai Style was just a dry chicken cutlet served with rice and sweet chilli sauce. At the cost of sounding nitpicky, the only thing that was good about that dish was the plain boiled rice. Thai cuisine is defined by its robust shrimp, garlic, lemongrass and chili paste that come together to create dishes that are exquisite and packed with piquancy and zest. This is where The Factory goes wrong— the food lacks zing.

The cheesecake was supposed to be the restaurant’s saving grace as vouched by a fellow foodie, but the dessert was not available on the day we were there. The dishes are well presented and generously portioned. The prices are reasonable and the place itself is a definite must visit, if for nothing else than to see and be seen. It’s such a pity about the food though. Ruby Tuesday

Across borders

Starting 2 June photo.circle is offering photography classes for amateurs and enthusiasts. The classes will take place on the first Saturday of every English month. Vietnamese based Nepali photographer Roahe Trapa, and Spanish photographer Arantxa Cedillo will facilitate the first session. They will be sharing their experiences of working in two different continents and cultures.

The cakes are served daily at The Factory, for an excellent range of North Indian delicacies, try their unbeatable Kashmiri Gosht. Thapathali

Lunch and a glass of wine or beer inside the peaceful Garden of Dreams. BBQ lunch and a glass of wine or beer Thamaltown.com,

Enjoy scrumptious Italian cuisine at Picnic, an Italian restaurant in Patan. The Sautéed Lemon Garlic Prawns was, in a word, disastrous. The recommended BBQ Chicken Thai Style was just a dry chicken cutlet served with rice and sweet chilli sauce. At the cost of sounding nitpicky, the only thing that was good about that dish was the plain boiled rice. Thai cuisine is defined by its robust shrimp, garlic, lemongrass and chili paste that come together to create dishes that are exquisite and packed with piquancy and zest. This is where The Factory goes wrong— the food lacks zing.

The cheesecake was supposed to be the restaurant’s saving grace as vouched by a fellow foodie, but the dessert was not available on the day we were there. The dishes are well presented and generously portioned. The prices are reasonable and the place itself is a definite must visit, if for nothing else than to see and be seen. It’s such a pity about the food though. Ruby Tuesday

Look for Sagarmatha Complex and Mandala Street in Thamel. The flight of stairs leading up to Factory is on the left.

The Factory

One night and two days at Rs 5000 and two nights and three days at Rs 7000; call 447948, Gokarna

Shangri La Village Resort in Pokhara.

355/7507/7524

Holiday at Grand Norton Hotel, enjoy a quiet weekend at Gokarna.

One night and two days at Rs 4500

For the best Monsoon Madness, escape the heat this summer with a two days and three nights package at Shangri La Village Resort in Pokhara. Rs 4999

One night and two days at Rs 4500

Sedih Height, lakeside, 977-61-466370, www.waterfronthotelnepal.com

WATER FRONT RESORT, this eco-friendly resort has it all whether it be birdwatching, paragliding, horse riding, mountain biking or boating.

SINGMA FOOD COURT, for the best Singaporean and Malaysian cuisine in town, Pulchowk, 509892 and Dharatitole, 4416078

CAFE SENA, enjoy scrumptious brunch and indulge in crepes with sugar and lemon. Jhamsikhel

Kaiser Cafe Restaurant & Bar, have a BBQ lunch and a glass of wine or beer inside the peaceful Garden of Dreams. Thamel

Picnic, an Italian restaurant in Patan. The Sautéed Lemon Garlic Prawns was, in a word, disastrous. The recommended BBQ Chicken Thai Style was just a dry chicken cutlet served with rice and sweet chilli sauce. At the cost of sounding nitpicky, the only thing that was good about that dish was the plain boiled rice. Thai cuisine is defined by its robust shrimp, garlic, lemongrass and chili paste that come together to create dishes that are exquisite and packed with piquancy and zest. This is where The Factory goes wrong— the food lacks zing.
Controversial cholesterol

DHANVAITARI
Buddha Sanyat, MD

A new finding published recently in the medical journal Lancet, shows that high levels of high density lipoprotein (HDL), the good cholesterol, may not be as good as it was once thought to be. This discovery has caught doctors, scientists, and drug companies off guard.

HDL, unlike the bad cholesterol, low density lipoprotein (LDL), carries cholesterol out of the arteries and prevents blockages and disease in the lumen of the arteries. Hence it was believed that HDL protects the heart and ensures a healthy supply of blood and nutrients.

However, Lancet has published very disturbing yet compelling evidence which disproves earlier theories about HDL. According to the report, heart attack rates among people who are genetically predisposed to high levels of HDL and those with lower levels of HDL were no different.

In all fairness, there is indeed an immense body of evidence that associates high levels of HDL with low levels of heart attacks. But there is a difference between association and causal effect. For example, at one time there was only an association between cigarette smoking and lung cancer, but now we can authentically state that smoking causes lung cancer. Such causal data regarding low levels of HDL and increased incidence of heart disease is lacking.

Of course the results from other ongoing research studying the link between HDL and heart diseases are awaited and now more than ever, scientists are holding their breath to see how this cholesterol saga unfolds. Drug companies are sorely disappointed because they were working on commercial drugs which would directly help increase HDL levels. If future studies of HDL successfully replicate the results of the Lancet report, these drugs might no longer be necessary.

Thankfully the Lancet study has not influenced two important dogmas: high levels of cholesterol (especially LDL) are clear-cut risk factor for heart attacks and statins are still the drug of choice for prevention and treatment of heart attacks in susceptible individuals. So if you are an adult, check your lipid profile regularly. And if it’s on the higher side, try changing your eating habits and lifestyle, or use statins after consulting your doctor.

The White Ribbon

Michael Haneke, the 70-year-old Austrian filmmaker, made his first feature film when he was 47. Despite this slightly tardy start, as of this week, Haneke has become one of the very few to win the incredibly prestigious Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival twice over. His first win was in 2009 for the film The White Ribbon, a powerful, disturbing, yet absolutely riveting film set in a small protestant German town just before the beginning of the First World War. His second win, this week, is for his film Amour which follows an ailing elderly couple through their last days together.

In honour of this week’s win, the Palme D’or being the highest prize in the world of serious cinema, I’d like to revisit The White Ribbon, an ailing elderly couple through their last days together. Michael Haneke, the 70-year-old Austrian filmmaker, made his first feature film when he was 47. Despite this slightly tardy start, as of this week, Haneke has become one of the very few to win the incredibly prestigious Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival twice over. His first win was in 2009 for the film The White Ribbon, a powerful, disturbing, yet absolutely riveting film set in a small protestant German town just before the beginning of the First World War. His second win, this week, is for his film Amour which follows an ailing elderly couple through their last days together.

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Out of the darkness
A national unity government with elections by November is the least parties can now give dejected Nepalis

A long chapter in Nepal’s political transition that started with the 12-point agreement in November 2005 to the April 2006 democracy movement and ceasefire, the Madhes movement, and the 2008 CA elections ended on 27 May. And it was a letdown.

The dissolution of the CA has left Nepalis want the parties, for popular support, but the CA was hit the streets and mobilised put pressure on the parties. They hit the streets and mobilised popular support, but the CA was dissolved before a constitution addressing those demands could be passed. Hapless CA members got a lot of flak for lazing about at taxpayer’s expense, but the culture of dissent it established by challenging the frontiers of traditional loyalties and rising above partisan interests to fight for collective rights, is a valuable contribution that will make Nepali democracy much stronger in the days to come.

After letting the CA lapse, Baburam Bhattarai called for fresh elections in November. In spite of grave disillusionment the people will still vote, but the parties must first work together to form a national unity government. The Maoists and Madhesis must understand that as a matter of principle they can’t, and shouldn’t, go it alone.

The NC and UML must also call off their protest programs and engage constructively in the government formation process. Nepal want the parties, for once, to focus on the people’s needs and not their personal greed. A smooth formation of a national unity government is the least parties can do to regain the trust of their dejected constituents.

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A smooth formation of a national unity government is the least parties can do to regain the trust of their dejected constituents.
When a member of a family is disappeared, that family is completely destroyed. If the sons or daughters of our politicians were taken like my brother was, perhaps then they would understand our experience and feelings and be willing to do something about it.” Rajeev Kumar Karna, brother of Sanjeev Kumar Karna.

Purnimaya Lama never abandoned her quest for justice. Her husband Arjun was taken by Maoist cadres in 2005. Witnesses say they held him for two months before he was killed.

Yet again Nepal’s political leaders are stalling on commitments to prosecute and punish those among them responsible for human rights abuses during the conflict. As they haggle to save their own skins, the voices of victims and their families demanding justice continue to be ignored.

Legislation to replace bills creating a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and a Commission on Disappearances with a new draft that lacks clauses prohibiting amnesty for serious abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law carried out during the armed conflict. The NC, UML and Maoists have apparently agreed to reduce the commissions’ mandate to truth-telling and reconciliation, making it unlikely that anyone would be tried and punished for these horrendous crimes. After a long hard struggle,

Robert Godden
Robert Godden is the Asia-Pacific Campaign Coordinator at the International Secretariat of Amnesty International (AI) based in Hong Kong and has worked in Nepal between 2009-11.

Sanjeev Kumar Karna, Durgesh Kumar Labh, Pramod Narayan Mandal, Shailendra Yadav and Jitendra Jha were shot dead by the Kamala river, after being arrested by security forces on 8 October 2003. They were allegedly involved in Maoist student activities.

“The government does not want to address incidents from the conflict years. They do not want to prosecute the accused because the very powerful are involved. First the Nepal Army and second the Maoist party. There are agreements saying such crimes should be punished but I feel there is a tacit agreement to brush everything under the carpet”. Govinda Bandi, Senior Legal Advisor, International Commission of Jurists. The tap where Sanjeev Kumar Karna was bathing in the outskirts of Janakpur, (above) when a joint team of the Police and Army arrested him and four other young men in October 2003. Karna and his four friends were later killed by the banks of a river and buried.

Sanjeev Kumar Karna, Purnimaya Ghimire and Rajeev Karki were shot dead by the Kamala river, after being arrested by security forces on 8 October 2003. They were allegedly involved in Maoist student activities.

“Truth without justice will not only be questioned, it will be unacceptable to us. The community of victims will be compelled to reject such meaningless transitional justice laws and mechanisms,” Ram Kumar Bhandari, Chairperson of National Network of Families of the Disappeared and Missing (NEFAD).

Amnesty for crimes like these would violate international laws and the commitments Nepal has made through the United Nations. It would also violate the terms of Nepal’s Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the Interim Constitution and indeed the rulings of its own Supreme Court. Nepali leaders calling for an amnesty are ignoring the voices of those most affected by the years of conflict and promoting their own self-interests instead.

The fate of some 1,300 people who disappeared during the armed conflict remains unknown. Sanjeev Kumar Karna was among the missing. He and a group of friends were beaten and arrested by army and police while on a picnic in October 2003. Five never returned. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) exhume the last of five bodies believed to be these victims from the banks of the Kamala River in 2011; they had apparently been blindfolded and executed, but it has yet to confirm positive identification of the remains. A police officer the NHCR recommended for prosecution was promoted to a senior position – further insult to the victims and their families.

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Kathmandu Dealers

Outside Kathmandu Dealers

Kathmandu Dealers

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Unceremonious demise

Editorial, Nepal Samacharpatra, 29 May

Despite drafting a near finished constitution, Nepal’s Constituent Assembly was dissolved because it failed to address some crucial issues. There is little doubt that leaders of the major political parties are responsible for the CA’s demise. Nepal’s CA was internationally recognised as a unique model of inclusion and representation. But its failure to live up to its reputation has led to widespread speculation that constitution drafting is a technical affair which should be left to the experts.

In four years of extended tenure, there were only 122 CA meetings. Initially Nepalis were hopeful that the CA would address the pressing concerns of the nation. But admiration quickly turned to seething anger when people realised that the body was becoming part of the problem by spending millions of tax payers’ money without any tangible return, and its 601 members were loathed for their incompetence. The unfortunate turn of events mean that seeking fresh mandate is our only viable option. Thus the government’s decision to hold elections in November must be seen in this light. However, the work done by this largest representative body should not go to waste and the future CA must build on these accomplishments to save valuable time and resources.

Blame Bhattarai

Kishor Nepal, Nagarik, 29 May

After dissolving the Constituent Assembly, Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai used the election card, the strongest asset of democracy, purely for political longevity. He made such a major announcement without consulting any stake holders or even his own party. It might come as a surprise to many, but Bhattarai used the farce of fresh elections to weaken Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s stature.

The campaign to demonise Dahal and tarnish his reputation and personality started gaining momentum just as we were concluding the peace process. His way of life, working style and straight forward attitude didn’t sit well with the elites of Kathmandu. However, if it wasn’t for Dahal’s relentless efforts to peacefully transform the Maoist party, Nepal’s democracy would still be entangled in a web of violence. Even a stern leader like Girija Prasad Koirala held Dahal in great regard.

Dahal, who was revered as the ultimate poster-boy for people’s war and celebrated as the great hero of the revolution until three years ago is now seen as a traitor and murderer of 15,000 Nepalis. While Bhattarai has portrayed himself as the self sacrificing underdog due to which his popularity has soared.

It is unfortunate that the Maoist chairman is being targeted by Bhattarai in such a manner. If the constitution had been written by Bhattarai in such a manner. If Marxists in multi-ethnic Nepal’s would get immense popularity. It is neither fair nor politically wise to go against the aspirations of majority of Nepal’s for the sake of a few leaders.

Angry we may be, we still have to work together.

“Angry we may be, we still have to work together.”

Interview with Baburam Bhattarai, Nayapatrika, 31 May

Despite lofty claims from all sides, the CA was dissolved without declaring a new constitution. What went wrong? This is not a time for blame game because no matter who did what, there is no alternative to consensus. So angry as we may be, we still have to be patient and work together.

Then why did the leaders make encouraging remarks on Sunday afternoon saying they were near consensus? We had proposed a final negotiation on SRC’s 14 state and 6 state models and requested the parties to forge consensus on these two documents. We also said that we were ready for multi-ethnic Gentry federalism with names that reflect common aspirations. This had created an environment for consensus. But some NC and UML leaders looked set to fail the statute drafting process and dissolve the CA. Their demand was clear—there will be no identity based federalism which was unacceptable to us.

Why did you not postpone the federalism issue if it endangered the entire constitution declaration process? The whole purpose of writing a new constitution was to institutionalise the rights of marginalised communities and without federalism the exercise was meaningless. It is neither fair nor politically wise to go against the aspirations of majority of Nepal’s for the sake of a few leaders.

Couldn’t you declare the draft of the constitution and then call a referendum? Until the CA was alive, referendum was impossible because it was a legitimate alternative to consensus. So angry as we may be, we still have to be patient and wait for the CA which will deal a further blow to his status.

What is the way forward? The tamper is high now and it will take time to subside. But I am confident everyone will realise we have no other option than to hold fresh elections and it will be impossible to have elections until all parties come together.

We cannot hold CA elections again. New constitution must be declared by the legislature parliament.

Ram Sharan Mahat, NC central committee member, quoted in Annapurna Post, 31 May.

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Cash grows on trees
Dev Pachchhalya in Palpa in himalkhabar.com, 25 May

When Dhan Bahadur Pun retired from the Indian Army he could have followed his friends and joined a private security firm abroad. But he returned to his ancestral farm in Palpa at age 51 and decided to make a living from his dairy farm and orchard.

But his brothers in Thailand told him about this wonder tree for which there was high demand in the perfume, incense and pharmaceutical industry.

Called agarwood, the tree is found in southeast Asia and Assam, but is endangered and its export is banned in Vietnam and other countries. But Pun’s 300 ropani farm in Palpa’s Bharse village is now lush with adolescent agarwood, and there are another 100,000 saplings ready for transplantation.

The tree by itself is not fragrant, but secretes a thick resin when attacked by a mould which gives it its distinctive aroma and has been traditionally used as incense. Agarwood is now in high demand in the perfume industry.

This is not another get-rich-quick story. It takes 15 years before the trees are mature enough to harvest, but Pun says it is worth the wait because the wood commands prices as high as $30,000 per kg in the Middle East, Japan, Taiwan and China.

Pun’s farm employs up to 40 people and he has put in Rs 7 million of his own savings. He says this is a long-term investment because he won’t know the grade of agarwood that he will harvest for another 10 years. He started out with a few saplings imported from Thailand, but has now expanded his nursery and brought in two specialists from Assam to help him in the farm where he also raises 15 water buffaloes and 75 goats.

The trees have been planted six metres apart, and in between Pun has planted local fruit and fodder trees and he is helped by his wife, Rukmaya and elder son, Ram. “My younger son doesn’t want to farm. He is studying commerce in Chitwan, maybe he will manage the farm when the agarwood harvest starts coming in.”

Pun is also helping his ancestral village manage local schools, conserve surrounding forests and in local development.

Unlike other businessmen in Nepal who don’t like competition, Pun is offering farmers from across Nepal his seedlings at cost price. Pun is using his military background to plan his farm with precision. He uses a GPS to calculate the location, slope and altitude of his farm and says 1,500 metres is the ideal altitude for agarwood farming in Nepal. Because of higher rainfall conditions are best in eastern Nepal.

Says Pun: “Agarwood has huge potential to increase farmer income since across the world native agarwood is almost gone and it must be grown as a cash crop in plantations.”
Primordial Minister BRB has been accused by critics of behaving unconstitutionally. What else is the man supposed to do? If there is no constitution, everything he does is going to be unconstitutional. In fact, any step he takes from here on (announcing elections, remaining as prime minister, resigning as prime minister, forming a national unity government, flying business class to Rio (for the environment summit) is going to be illegal.

Being the cunning high caste communists that they are, BRB and PKD pulled the rug from underneath the clueless NC and UML and refused to compromise on federalism on Sunday night, announce elections and then heaped blame on the NC and UML themselves for obstructing the constitution. Poor Makunay and Jhusil didn't know what hit them. They were just sitting around twiddling their thumbs at Suchanay's office, and when summoned to Balu Water ostensibly to declare a state of emergency, PKD looked away and BRB didn't even meet them.

Will someone tell the glorious Nepal Army that the royal days are over, and they don't need to bring out the big guns and wake everyone up at an ungodly hour to welcome Republic Day in the same way they used to wake up Kingji on his birthday? On Monday, as everyone was hungover, the capital was awoken to the sound of heavy artillery opening up at the centre of the city. Is the NAHQ in austerity mode or what? The cannonade included only five shots, instead of the usual 31-gun salute.

Now that protest season is in full swing, Nepal's beggars have decided they will be choosers. Begging bowls in hand, they gheraoed a temple in Biratnagar last week to protest stingy devotees, and held placards demanding alms "no less than Rs 5". That should be doable. What would be slightly more complicated is if they also wanted a non-territorial province. But if it's any consolation, given the national debt and our balance of payments deficit, the whole country can be set aside for us beggars.

This year on the Hillary Step on the South Ridge of Mt Everest, it got a lot of bad press, but Nepal's tourism authoritarians should be proud of what they have achieved. Royalty (don't we need to change that word in these politically correct times?) from mountain-wearing bans on Mt Everest alone this year surpassed $3 million. As far as Chomolungma goes, our motto should be: "Climb Mt Everest: The More the Merrier."

With the numbers of climbers projected to increase to about 2,000 per season from the Nepal side alone, we have to implement a Master Plan to ease future congestion on Mt Everest. The proposal calls for a cable car service with all-around glass gondolas from Base Camp to the South Summit from where climbers can take up-down escalators to the top where there will be a revolving restaurant and a coin-operated gas station dispensing artificial oxygen.

Now that Bohemians and Chhetris are also classified as aboriginals, maybe NEFIN should give membership to the upper crusts and call it a truce. That way, maybe Ashok Rai's Janajati Party can also get the Brahmin-Chhetri vote.

While everybody is wondering whether K-Town is going to be declared the capital of Newa Rajya, the capital of Tamsaling or the capital of SAARC, the Mule's mole in Balu Water reports that Com. Yummy has become so obsessed with the idea of settling down permanently as First Lady that she now regularly dons haku patasi and entertains Hubby's guests with a revolutionary menu of MoMo chas and Chhoila. The only departure from this was Comrade Hasiya's conspicuous commie red sari during the Republic Day function.

Now that elections are coming, shops are springing up with campaign paraphernalia like used tyres, placards, banners, and lathis. But the hottest items are effigies of various political leaders. There is even an effigy-on-demand shop in Lahan which can deliver a highly inflammable lookalike of BRB in half-an-hour.