Nepal’s governance is like a game of snakes and ladders, as this image from Thursday afternoon at Singha Durbar shows.

The date for elections declared by Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai on 27 May came and went on Thursday. Normally, a government that can’t hold elections as scheduled has to resign, but Bhattarai has resisted pressure from the president, opposition parties, and rivals within his own party to cling on.

In Thursday’s address to the nation, Bhattarai sought to buy more time by saying he would “accelerate efforts” to work for a consensus among the political parties to form an election government. This was as per an agreement made by Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and President Ram Baran Yadav to get Bhattarai to take immediate steps on a consensus government to set the date for next elections in return for passing the partial budget this week.

Saying “I want to tell it to you like this”, Bhattarai laid out a list of achievements in the peace process despite the “fierce” obstacles he faced from the opposition. He said he was willing to “make any sacrifice” in order to achieve an all-party consensus for elections by April, but fell short of directly saying he would step down. However, most are sceptical that an agreement on a consensus government that eluded the main parties for six months will suddenly happen in two weeks.
Politicians in Nepal is so stuck that when it does move, it does so in fits and starts. The president passes a budget that isn't a budget because to oppose it would mean that the country's economy would grind to a halt. Not that the country is going anywhere, but not having even a partial budget now would have created an even worse, and truly economic mess than we are in at the moment.

The opposition strategy was to make the budget a bargaining chip in negotiations over an leadership of an election government. But the wily Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai called their bluff. No politician, in the final analysis, wants to be seen opposing a budget that feeds salaries and allowances to the state system. Not even the president could afford to do that.

So the opposition winked to Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal to take their private acceptance of a two-thirds budget to the president on condition that he (Dahal) would get Prime Minister Bhattarai to step aside. We get the feeling that the NC and the UML, out of desperation, doth protest too much. Dahal, whose animus towards Bhattarai is well known, was willing to mediate. It was a face-saving device all around. So the budget was passed in the nick of time before the president could legally hold Bhattarai out for failing to hold elections as scheduled on 22 November, and failing to set a new date. You with us so far?

Elections have been announced, but no date has been set, which essentially gives Bhattarai open terrain to carry on for the foreseeable future as caretaker. At this rate he can ensure that there is a deadlock in negotiations with the NC and UML by refusing to step down till mid-December. The Election Commission deadline to organise elections by May 2013. In that case, he will remain lame duck for the whole of 2013. The opposition, for its part, is so paralyzed by paranoia that it has handed the prime minister victory on a platter by making his resignation a single-point agenda, and having no Plan B. This only deadlocks benefits only Bhattarai because he can keep blaming the NC for being obstinate and holding up elections.

It’s not that our PhD prime minister is exceedingly smart, it’s just that the NC is exceptionally daft. It’s central committee is so polarized that the NC is in effect two parties. It cannot come up with a candidate to replace Bhattarai, and it doesn’t have a proactive vision for the country that would be an alternative to the prime minister’s agenda. And most importantly, the NC is fiddling the same discredited batons, and is engaging out its agile and dynamic hitters. Forget the quarrel over who gets to be prime minister, even as an election campaign strategy this is a blunder.

It no longer suffices to say we can’t let Bhattarai continue because he will cheat, what we really want to know is how is the opposition going to prevent that staying out of government? It is no longer enough to say that the Maoists are out to grab power when the only way to prevent that is to pave the way for elections by joining an interim-government.

The so-called ‘leaders’ of our country don’t seem to have learnt from the stinging slaps on the cheeks they have got. The whacks on the faces of Messrs Khanal, Koirala, and now Dahal, are not just reminders to the party bosses about the outrage the public and their own cadre feel about their behaviour.

The country has no stomach for another agitation. The NC and UML are badly advised if they think the people will spontaneously pour out into the streets to oust Bhattarai. They want our bickering politicians to sort out their quarrels, agree on an all-party election government, and hold polls in six months time and let the chips fall where they may. Is that too much to ask?

It's fascinating to see these old politicians, but the portraits are not that different from people we see in the remote hills of Nepal even today. It is amazing how little has changed in a century and a half. If anything, he has become harder for such people because of degradation and depletion of natural resources.

Nepal needs educated and independent men and women to lead. Like the editorial suggests, keeping the exact same position a year from the polls are impartial and fair if it is the need of the people and nation. Nepal needs educated and financially independent men and women to lead. The leaders that have come before were all beggars and they had only one idea in mind: to steal the wealth of Nepal for their own personal gain. If we cannot find a way to get rid of them, then we deserve the fate we are dealt with.

Anonymous

NO MOVEMENT

Great analysis by Anurag Acharya (‘No movement’, #300). There is no alternative to fresh polls and now that the ‘new’ election date has been finalized, the leaders have to come to an agreement on the number of constituencies and the nature of federalism.

Reason

Elections, elections, elections. Irrespective of the same old set of incompetents or replacing one set of incompetents with another via election is no solution.

KK Sharma

THE FIRST PHOTOGRAPHS

Thank you Nepal Times for bringing the photos of Nepal from 150 years ago into public view (‘The first photographs of us’, #300). It seems the British residents in Kathmandu did something good after all instead of just meddling around with Nepal’s internal politics. Thanks to them we can now reflect back and see ‘who we were as peoples and as a nation a century and a half ago. The pictures show naive, innocent, and simple Nepalis who lived in extreme poverty and the concept of being photographed was so foreign to them that none of them are smiling.

Srijana Koirala

For approved infrastructure projects.

The withholding tax rate for foreign investors is 15% and this rate is reduced to less than 5% for approved infrastructure projects. Labour laws are also far more flexible. Because of infrastructure problems and dismal procedures in labour laws, we still will be unable to compete. We only have double tax agreements (DTAs) with seven countries, but we have labour exporting agreements with more than 30 countries. This shows where the government priority lies.

Anjan Neupane

ON THE WEB

www.nepaltimes.com
One of the hallmarks of Nepal’s prolonged transition is that it has led to a crisis of legitimacy at all levels. The system of checks and balances is weakened and contending claims of authority and legitimacy within institutions of the state are breeding contention and conflict.

The endemic corruption at the national level has trickled down to the grassroots where the absence of elections has eroded accountability. Deteriorating law and order, impunity, and political interference are all indications of an ailing state, and nowhere are the symptoms more glaring than in the country’s universities and medical institutions.

Tribhuvan University is now so plagued by politics that it is closed more days in a year than it is open. Kathmandu University, which was spared such interference, last week saw the unceremonial removal by the government of its long serving founder, Suresh Raj Sharma.

In the last six months doctors, staff, and students of two leading hospitals in the country have been on a warpath. Govinda KC of the TU-affiliated Institute of Medicine (IoM) went on a fast unto death in July against political interference in the hospital administration. Top positions at the hospital had been vacant for almost a year because the political parties competed to put up their own candidates.

“This is no place for politics. We take life and death decisions here,” a doctor at the Teaching Hospital told me. However, last week’s appointment of Bhagwan Koirala, one of the country’s leading and most respected surgeons to the top job has been universally welcomed.

A recent UN report has lauded Nepal’s efforts in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, particularly in reducing child and maternal mortality. Another survey conducted by the Nick Simons Institute (NSI) on doctors who graduated from IoM between 1983-2004 suggests doctors with rural background or those with paramedical experience were more likely to serve in rural areas.

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Making us sick
Unhealthy politics is turning into an epidemic that has infected hospitals and schools.

In Maharajganj, Dhulikhel, and Patan, the motivation of the politicians installing their cronies and relatives is clear: to lay their hands on the Rs 3 million or so ‘donations’ that students have to pay for their medical degrees.

“Patan Hospital is among very few government institutions which does not lose money, we have proved that over the years. There is no need to fix something that isn’t broken,” says Lila Raj Acharya of the hospital management.

Students got involved in the protest after the new management allegedly threatened to cancel admission of the first year students and suspend the scholarships of others. Sixty per cent of students in PAHS are from remote districts studying on scholarships who will serve in the villages when they graduate. (See page 4)

A student from a remote mid-west district told me that she had already given up on her dream of becoming a doctor when PAHS provided her with an opportunity. “When I graduate and go back to the village, the people won’t have to travel for days for treatment,” she told me.

Corrosive national politics has infected government medical schools and now threatens to undermine the commitment and motivation of students like her who see a medical degree not in commercial terms but as a public service.

A thoroughly disgusted PAHS adviser told me the other day: “The new vice chancellor was appointed as a fund raiser for her brother’s party. She is incompetent and untactful, she must go.”
Bad prescription

KIM LAMA

The only medical school in Nepal designed specially to train doctors to serve in rural areas has been paralysed by the political appointment of a new chief. Angry staff at the Patan Academy of Health Sciences (PAHS) have partially shut down the hospital in protest for the third week running.

Nepal’s private and government medical schools produce 1,500 doctors each year, but half of them migrate overseas and the ones that stay in Nepal choose to work in urban areas. But PAHS was designed to train doctors to serve in district hospitals. Sixty per cent of the students are from underprivileged families, and their scholarship requires them to work for up to four years in rural areas after they graduate.

However, political appointment of new vice chancellors this year has plagued both PAHS and TU Teaching Hospital (TUTH) in Maharajganj which were set up with similar philosophies of training rural doctors at a time when medical schools were being set up with similar philosophies of training rural doctors.

A fast unto death hunger strike in July by Govind KC, a TUTH doctor, forced the government to cancel the nomination of a political appointee there. In PAHS, there is deep concern among doctors and international partners that the appointment of the politically connected new Vice Chancellor Sangita Bhandari to replace founder, Arjun Karki, will undermine the hospital’s mission to train rural doctors.

“The new VC has not respected the abilities of the founding faculty members,” says Bharat Yadav, professor and chair of the Department of General Practice at PAHS. “We have built this academy from the ground up, but she and other recruits do not understand our mission.”

Bhandari, who is related to powerful Madhesi politician and former minister Sarat Singh Bhandari, has told media that she faces opposition in PAHS because she has tried to clean up the hospital of corruption. Her appointment of Soumya Bajracharya as rector prompted PAHS staff to stage sit-ins and lock-outs of the hospital. Bhandari brought in the police to break the protests. Stakeholders convinced agitating staff on Sunday that they would not let their struggle affect medical treatment and care of patients.

Kedar Baral, professor and chair of the Department of Community Health, says PAHS’ entrance criteria and curriculum are designed to bring out motivated doctors. “The current VC wants to change the entrance criteria, and recruit more students who pay huge fees,” says Baral. “This will turn PAHS into just another medical school. It will no longer be a school for rural physicians.”

Shrijana Shrestha, professor of pediatrics, says PAHS staff had initially given Vice Chancellor Bhandari the benefit of doubt, but the new chief showed scant regard for the hospital’s mission, and has been disrespectful of faculty. “The current dispute risks the mission of service of PAHS, and Bhandari is a bad role model,” Shrestha adds.

PAHS has tried to change the trend of Nepali medical students migrating abroad or gravitating to private clinics in cities. Its International Advisory Board took a strategic and difficult approach different from traditional medical education in Nepal by selecting competent and compassionate students using IQ and personality characteristics testing, and teaching an innovative curriculum that is strongly community orientated.

"PAHS actively recruits capable students from rural and remote Nepal with the view that these students with existing ties will more likely want to serve in those areas," says Katrina Butterworth, professor of General Practice at PAHS.

Over the past decade, the International Advisory Board has involved over 200 educators, scientists, doctors, and other health care practitioners from all over the world. One such volunteer doctor is Darren Nichols from the University of Alberta in Canada.

Says Nichols: “We are volunteers who share the vision of building peace in Nepal through health equity. PAHS has a brave and visionary mission of serving the neediest people of Nepal, a mission that has attracted a global following.”

The dispute has threatened ten years of work by PAHS founder, Arjun Karki, and his team to develop the institute as a role model not just for Nepal but for other developing countries. A private medical school in Nepal charges more than Rs 6 million for an MBBS education. PAHS costs less than half of that for applicants, but 60 per cent of its students are on full or partial scholarships. More than 80 per cent of students are from outside Kathmandu, more than half of the students are women, and many are from marginalised communities.

Associate Professor, Sabita Rana, says the political appointment of an inappropriate vice chancellor threatens to unravel PAHS’ achievements. “We risk losing local faculty who have sacrificed long hours to teach PAHS’ mission to train rural doctors. We risk losing our essential international partners, and our students are from outside Kathmandu, more than half of the students are women, and many are from marginalised communities.”

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NEW YORK – China is at a crucial point today, as it was in 1978, when the market reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping opened its economy to the world.

Deng was substantially influenced by an early visit to Singapore, where accelerated growth and prosperity had come decades earlier. Understanding other developing countries’ successes and shortcomings has been – and remains – an important part of China’s approach to formulating its growth strategy.

Like Singapore, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan in their first few decades of modern growth, China has been ruled by a single party, Singapore’s People’s Action Party (PAP) remains dominant, though that appears to be changing. The others evolved into multi-party democracies during the middle-income transition. China, too, has now reached this critical last leg of the long march to advanced-country status in terms of economic structure and income levels.

China’s new leader must learn from Singapore’s experience with legitimacy of single-party rule through growth and eliminating corruption successfully. Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore and Mao Zedong and Deng in China gained their peoples’ trust as founders and initial reformers. But that trust dissipated. Succeeding generations of leaders do not inherit it completely, and must earn it. That is all the more reason for them to heed the lessons of history.

China’s new leaders should first reassert the Party’s role as defender of the general interest by creating an environment in which narrow interests, seeking to protect their growing influence and wealth, do not taint complex policy choices. They must demonstrate that the Party’s power, legitimacy, and substantial assets are held in trust for the benefit of all Chinese, above all by fostering a pattern of inclusive growth and a system of equal opportunity with a meritocratic foundation.

There are times when muddling through (or, in the Chinese version, crossing the river by feeling the stones) is the safest option for China’s other new leaders. In fact, it is the most dangerous. The only safe option is a radical realignment of the Party with the general interest. The issue, then, is whether the reformers who carry the real spirit of the 1949 revolution will win the battle for equitable and inclusive growth. The optimistic (and I believe realistic) view is that the Chinese people, through a variety of channels, including social media, will weigh in, empowering reformers to push through a progressive agenda.

Time will tell. But it is hard to overstate the outcome’s importance to the rest of the world. Virtually all developing countries – and, increasingly, the advanced countries as well – will be affected one way or another as they, too, struggle to achieve stable and sustainable growth and employment patterns.

www.project-syndicate.com

Michael Spence, a Nobel laureate in economics, is Professor of Economics at New York University’s Stern School of Business and Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution. His latest book is The Next Convergence: The Future of Economic Growth in a Multi-Speed World.

www.thenextconvergence.com
The assurance of a calm and peaceful mind and the ability to better handle life’s ups and downs have Nepalis and foreigners flocking to meditation retreats around the country.

Those seeking a spiritual experience in Nepal have increased significantly over the last ten years, and meditation tourism is now nearly on par with trekking. Last year, nine percent of all tourist arrivals to Nepal were for pilgrimage purposes compared to 11 percent for trekking.

A substantial portion of pilgrims came to attend meditation and yoga courses at ashrams and monasteries in Nepal. Among the most popular is Vipassana meditation, even though it involves a strict, ten-day schedule that includes meditating ten hours a day and abstaining from talking.

Angelique van Leeuwen (pic, right), a 36-year-old writer and photographer from Holland, completed a ten-day course in August. “It was tough but doable,” she says, “my mind was on 24/7 overdrive, and Vipassana was intense, but the technique made me more focused, I feel more calm.”

With the celebrations and indulgences of Dasain and Tihar behind them, a lot of Nepalis are also joining the courses to detoxify their minds and bodies. Roop Jyoti, a Vipassana meditation guru, says the technique teaches people how not to get upset in life.

“People are looking for peace of mind,” Jyoti explains, “after you sit through a course you can deal with your anger and fear and emotions in a better way, it cleans your mind of all the impurities, and also makes you physically healthy.”

Vipassana is an ancient meditation technique taught and practiced by the Buddha 2,500 years ago, and it was revived and popularised in India in 1969. There are now Vipassana meditation centres in 25 countries, and in Nepal they are in Lumbini, Pokhara, Birganj, Chitwan, Sorkhet, and Kathmandu.

During a course, students are taught a breathing technique called anapana before progressing to Vipassana which literally means ‘to see things as they really are’. The aim is to develop a calm and equanimous mind by observing the breath and sensations in the body to subdue craving and aversion.

But with a demanding daily schedule that includes rising at 4am and ten hours of seated meditation, Vipassana is not for the faint hearted or weak willed. There are five ‘sila’ (moral rules) which students must follow: not to kill, lie, steal, undertake sexual misconduct or consume intoxicants.

They must also abstain from making eye-contact, reading or writing and, perhaps the most difficult for some, maintain noble silence, only talking about the technique with teachers.

Despite the intensity of the sessions, the number of people attending Vipassana courses has grown in the Kapan centre alone from 2,500 people three years ago to nearly 5,000 last year.

When the centre started in 1981, most of those taking the course were Buddhists, now all religions and nationalities take part.

“People in their 80s are coming, teenagers, medical doctors, and professionals, males and females, it is very diverse,” Jyoti says.

After reading about Vipassana in a newspaper 15 years ago, Nanda Kumar Sharma felt compelled to enrol. Since then the 44-year-old has completed nine more courses and is currently a volunteer administrator at the centre.

“At the time I was feeling nervous and my mind was very stressed,” says Sharma, who meditates daily to better manage stress and attends a ten-day course nearly every year.

Meditation may be the real path to gross national happiness
VIPASSANA MEDITATION
Eight meditation centres in Nepal offer 10, 20, 30 and 45-day, and children’s courses.
Cost: By donation, food and accommodation included.
Contact: Jyoti Bhawan, Kantipath +977 1 4250581
nvc@mail.com.np
www.np.dhamma.org

KOPAN MONASTERY
Seven and ten-day introductory Tibetan Buddhism and meditation courses run monthly March-October at Kopan Monastery, Kathmandu. Other courses available.
Cost: $80/$110 including food and accommodation.
Contact: + 977 1 4821268, kopan@mail.com.np
www.kopan-monastery.com

GANDEN YOGA CHOZIN
Weekend Introductory Tibetan Buddhist courses and retreats in Kaski District, Pokhara.
Cost: Rs 4,500 including food and accommodation.
Contact: +977 61 462823, +977 9846397646 www.pokharabuddhistcentre.com

HIMALAYAN BUDDHIST MEDITATION CENTRE
Weekly introductory meditation classes in Mahayana Buddhism and guided meditation classes at Hotel Himalaya Yoga, Thamel, Kathmandu.
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Where to meditate

Consulting Opportunity

SNV Netherlands Development Organisation is a leading international organisation that specialises in capacity development support to government, non-government and private sector organisations. SNV aims to achieve impact by providing advisory services, facilitating knowledge development, networking, strengthening local capacity building, and carrying out advocacy at national and international levels. SNV is committed to reduction of poverty through advisory services especially in Agriculture, Water, Sanitation & Hygiene and Renewable Energy sectors.

The Ministry of Agriculture Development (MoAD) is implementing the High Value Agriculture Project in Hills and Mountain Areas (HVAP) with financial support from International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in partnership with SNV Netherlands Development Organisation and the Agro Enterprise Centre (AEC). The project aims to integrate poor people in rural areas especially women and marginalised groups in high value chains and markets for improved income, employment opportunities and ability to respond to market demand and opportunities based on marketing agreements with private agribusinesses. As an implementing partner and a technical support provider, SNV Nepal is responsible for the implementation of pre-poor value chain development.

International Consultant for Capacity Assessment-Vacancy Code 2012-23

The objective of this assignment is to develop AEC’s overall direction setting, strategic priorities and options based on organisation strong experiences and floridation.

Requirements:

- Advanced university degree in relevant field having at least 10 years of work experience with private agencies and agriculture sector;
- Experience on strategic planning, organisational assessment, monitoring and institutional development including gender and social inclusion issues;
- Experience conducting qualitative and quantitative research/methodology;
- Clear understanding of methodology and experience of using different tools and techniques including multiple-Hotlink analysis;
- Proven experience of preparing strategic plans of private sector business promotion organisations;
- The consultant should have a native Nepali level of fluency;
- Work experience in the field of development and rural areas will be an additional advantage.

Interested candidates are requested to visit: http://hwap.gov.np/noticeDetail.php?id=2 to review the Terms of Reference before applying.

Your application should include:

- A short technical and financial proposal
- An updated CV
- Abstracts of the documents previously completed

Application needs to be received in electronic copies latest by 27 November 2012 at nepal@snw.org stating the vacancy code 2012-23 in the subject line.

We do not appreciate third-party mediation based on this advertisement.

Data entered by: Sukumar Pradhan

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hbmc.programs@gmail.com
www.fpmt-hbmc.org
**LIVING PICTURES.** watch Nepali and Finish films every Wednesday evening, 31 October to 28 November, 9.30pm, Makhan Restaurant, Jhamaka.

**MOUNTAIN FILM FESTIVAL.** witness films that explore the diverse and complex ways in which people relate to mountains at the tenth edition of KMFF, and also take part in discussions, on-demand screenings, guest lectures, book and photography exhibitions, and workshops for aspiring filmmakers. 7 to 11 December, 11 am to 5 pm, Rashtriya Shalla Ghalia, Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap, (01)4440635/5542544. www.kmff.org

**KATHMANDU INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN FILM FESTIVAL.** witness films that explore the diverse and complex ways in which people relate to mountains at the tenth edition of KMFF, and also take part in discussions, on-demand screenings, guest lectures, book and photography exhibitions, and workshops for aspiring filmmakers. 7 to 11 December, 11 am to 5 pm, Rashtriya Shalla Ghalia, Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap, (01)4440635/5542544. www.kmff.org

**INTRODUCTION TO UJING.** learn the art of video jockeying with renowned video director and light designer Mathieu Crette. Rs 1,500, 2, 3, 4, 24 November, 10am to 5pm, Satya Arts Collectiv, Jwalakhel, apply by 18 November, shreyas@satya.org

**SATYA ROOFTOP SALE.** donate clothes, appliances, books or decorations to Satya rooftop sale, 8am to 4pm, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, November 10 to 24 November, Mathieu Crette, video director and light designer to 24 November, 10am to 5pm, Satya Arts Collectiv, Jwalakhel, apply by 18 November, shreyas@satya.org

**THAMEL MALL FESTIVAL.** enjoy Japanese, Newari, Manipuri, Tibetan, Korean, and Chinese food, and take advantage of discounts on clothing, jewelry, fancy and accessories. 2 December, 10am to 9pm, Thamel Mall, 9841810397.

**ADULTS in Nepal between tradition and modernity.** an exhibition of Thomas Koh’s works which demonstrate the role of adult girls in Nepali society. 7 to 19 December, 10am to 8pm, Indigo Gallery, Naxal, (01)453580.

Stolen childhood, participate in this photography and documentary competition which aims to record lost childhoods, and win prizes worth Rs 50,000. Entry fee Rs 300 for photography, Rs 500 for documentary. 21 November, 10pm onwards, Nepal Tourism Board, 9811214828.

**DIYANA.** enjoy great food at an affordable price. Shrimp cocktails, grilled fish, and desserts are favourites among guests. Lakeside, Pokhara, Chilly Bar and Restaurant, quality food and wide selection of drinks with great views of Phewa Lake. Lakeside, Hallanchok, Pokhara, (061)4520014/463163.

**KOSM INTER-COLLEGE MUSIC COMPETITION.** rock the living daylights out of your competitors, and win up to Rs 140,000 in cash and kind. Rs 500 registration fee. 15 December, 10am to 7pm, Fun Park, Bhrikuti Mandap, (01)5019097.

**THAMEL MALL FESTIVAL.** enjoy Japanese, Newari, Manipuri, Tibetan, Korean, and Chinese food, and take advantage of discounts on clothing, jewelry, fancy and accessories. 2 December, 10am to 9pm, Thamel Mall, 9841810397.

**TASS and TAWA.** savour a wide variety of Nepali meal dishes and reserve your palace for the heavenly Chusta. Pulchowk, Kathmandu.

**BRAIN’S GRILL.** enjoy burgers, steaks, and Tex-Mex cuisine at this American-styled steakhouse. Dilligar.

**SHAMBALING HOTEL.** this newly opened hotel promises a fine dining experience.

**LITTLE ITALY.** go vegetarian at this new restaurant, and that helps her find her roots and that indirectly she identifies herself somewhere around the world. But photography allowed her to get out of yourself to penetrate into the places they wrote about to tell those stories in pictures, ”she explains.

**TAMARIND.** a multi-cuisine restaurant, it offers an exquisite range of drinks and food.

**KARLA’S CAFE.** enjoy a delightful breakfast or lunch with some of the best coffee in the capital. Dilligar.

**BASANTAPUR (ALONG KATHMANDU).** Dwarika’s Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort, overnight package with accommodation, dinner, and breakfast. Shukhle, (01)4705310.

**MACAU.** an old-school casino just outside the village resort and spa, with great views of Phewa Lake. Lakeside, Hallanchok, Pokhara, (061)4520014/463163.

**DINING.** LUNCH TIME AT THE DWARAKA’S HOTEL. It is a pity to leave the hotel without enjoying some of the dishes that make the hotel proud of its menu. Shukhle, (01)4705310.

**YIN YANG RESTAURANT.** east meets west as you choose from a variety of Thai and continental dishes. Add a little spice to your life with the pad thai or green curry. If you can’t handle the heat, fall into the safety net of its Nepali meal.

**GRAND NORLING HOTEL.** countryside weekend package offering suite rooms, swimming, gym, massage, and discounts on other facilities. Gokarna, (01)4910193.

**vature Japanese dishes that cater to your needs and taste buds. Lazimat.**

**SHRIKARPUR VILLAGE.** eco-tourism close to the Shivapuri National Park replete with a charm of bygone days. Pashupatinath National Park, (01)4417725, 9851034141, info@shriarpur.com

**GETAWAYS.**

**KOTETSU.**

**DARBAR MARG.** the heat, fall into the safety net of its Nepali meal.

**SATTYA ROOFTOP SALE.** donate clothes, appliances, books or decorations to Satya rooftop sale, 8am to 4pm, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, November 10 to 24 November, Mathieu Crette, video director and light designer to 24 November, 10am to 5pm, Satya Arts Collectiv, Jwalakhel, apply by 18 November, shreyas@satya.org

**TIMELIFE TREE RESORT AND SPA.** a peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour and sauna, it’s hard to leave the premises once you enter. Gaunhath, Lakeside, (01)4656919.

**SHIVAPURI VILLAGE RESORT AND SPA.** A selection of 14 photographs by Maureen Bisilliat that were taken in Brazil and share the similarities between Brazil and Nepal. The pictures about the similarities say she was amazed while selecting the places they wrote about to tell those stories in pictures, ”she explains.

**MAUREEN BISILLIAT.** This time she is in Nepal exhibiting her works at the Dwarika’s Hotel, Balthupat, (01)4447648.

**EVEREST STEAK HOUSE.** an old-school joint for everything steak, indeed a sanctuary for meat lovers. Thamel, Chinepati Chok, (01)4260471.

**GETAWAYS.**

**KOTETSU.**

**DARBAR MARG.** the heat, fall into the safety net of its Nepali meal.

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**Festival of the arts**

Modelled after major art events like the Venice Biennale and the Sao Paulo biennial, the Kathmandu International Art Festival is a month-long festival that begins on 25 November. Artists from 31 countries collaborate on this year’s theme: ‘Earth/Body/Mind’ during the city-wide showcase.

There will be installations that fill entire rooms, exhibits in stunning traditional spaces such as Mul Chok at Patan Darbar Square, and even a multimedia piece projected onto the Boudhanath Stupa.

25 November to 21 December, 10 am to 5 pm Siddhartha Art Gallery, Patan Museum, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre, KCAC, Summit Hotel, British Council, Bodhna Nath, Nepal Art Council, Image Ark Gallery; Nepal Investment Bank, Nag Bahal, Central Zoo

www.artmandu.org
(01)4438979/4218048
www.artmandu.org
(01)4438979/4218048

**Hariyo folks**

Opening soon is Hariyo Chowk, a space created for artists, community members, and everyone else who is interested in sharing their work and learning from others. Its founders at Satya Media Arts Collective have billed it as a platform to experiment, demonstrate, and educate about topics like organic gardening, composting, recycling, building with natural materials, and adopting simple low-impact technologies. Drinks, snacks, oven-fired pizzas, music, and visuals by VJ Nye Blen await you at its opening ceremony.

24 November; 3pm onwards, Hariyo Chowk, Patan; www.satya.org/projects
(01)500044, 9851139957

**Backyard**

Honour of inventing the platter of appetisers served with alcohol, tapas culture is native to Nepal as well, as many Nepalis indulge in snags and alcohol after office hours and then head home for their main meal. And Backyard provides an array of appetisers, ranging from the usual memes and fried meat to the intriguing ‘what is alu’, ‘What is alu’ (Rs 130) is a plate of potato wedges fried with whole cumin and green chilies that goes down well with Backyard’s hot rum punch. We also had the Wonton Soup (Rs 180), a warm broth with strong garlicky flavour that is nourishing and perfect for the season. The shahpalays and momos are a big hit with Backyard’s regulars, but we picked the Chicken a La Kiev (Rs 350) instead. The outside was a tad too enthusiastically fried and tasted charred in parts, but once we carved into the meat, the butter gushed out onto the mashed potatoes. The flesh was fresh and moist, but it could have been more flavourful with the addition of some pepper and a dash of herbs.

The food, like the place is modest and simple, which is not a complaint and the price incredibly reasonable. The owners made a conscious decision to stick with dishes that their cook knows how to prepare well and their decision has definitely paid off. Don’t go expecting a fine dining experience and you won’t be disappointed.

Ruby Tuesday

How to get there: take the fire-brigade road in Pulchok, pass St Mary’s back gate. Backyard is the second house on your left. 015548868
There are a few nail biting scenes of betrayal that are grim and engrossing at the same time. Somewhat, even though laughably extreme in principle, the act of betraying a loved one out of pique seems to make for extremely good cinema.

I would watch this version of Dangerous Liaisons for its elegant, restrained filmmaking that brings to life the abjectness that can accompany falling in love, the destructive power of jealousy, and the hunger for power that can eventually, if not sooner, lead to a death of the self. Our leading characters should not have to be strongly considered.

In all this confusion, it is almost tempting to take a fatalistic stance and not perform any cancer tests at all. But that would be counterproductive because there are many well-established and useful tests for appropriate age groups such as PAP smears, colonoscopy, dermoscopic check for melanoma, and ultrasound screening for aortic aneurysms to name just a few. If you have the financial resources (as there is no universal insurance), these tests are indeed useful and highly recommended.

The ultrasound revealed benign ovarian cysts which could not be distinguished from malignant cancer without surgery. Furthermore, the blood markers which were supposed to detect cancer were sometimes elevated for reasons other than cancer, not an uncommon finding with screening tests. But habits die hard and many doctors continue to screen for ovarian cancer, regardless of these findings or recommendations.

Unfortunately, these controversial screening tests are not limited to ovarian cancer alone. Controversy, for example, rages on about prostate cancer screening for elderly men. Studies have shown prostate cancer tests to be beneficial and many others have not. Despite minor benefits, potential harm from biopsies, over diagnosis (finding cancer that would never become clinically detectable), and treatment complications have to be strongly considered.

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Paranoid politics

India’s secularism did not kill Bal Thackeray, death did

As Mumbai poured out on the streets to catch a glimpse of the cortege of Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray this week, many TV anchors thought his critics had been suitably mocked into silence. They claimed the outpouring of grief for the death of Thackeray vividly illustrated the echo his politics had among people. Their conclusion was truly misplaced, for the popularity of Thackeray was never in doubt; what had always been was the sanity of his politics.

Usually, death unites people, at least momentarily. It helps them to paper over sharp differences, and even ignore injustices the departed perpetrated. This possibly explains the mammoth crowds at Thackeray’s cremation. Yet what should not be forgotten was what we did not or could not witness - the emotions among those whom the Shiv Sena leader reviled and ranted against.

They included South Indians, communists, Muslims, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Sikhs, Hindus, Hindus with the name Modi and Singh amongst them, Marathi-speaking people, Indians and Gujaratis in the subcontinent and Indians in the diaspora. His followers attacked South Indians in Pakistan, Bangladesh, the UK, the US, Canada, and other countries.

Thackeray was never in doubt; his politics aimed to have people live in constant anxiety. His cure for it was to have them turn their wrath on. His politics was based on fear and violence. His politics was predicated on fear and violence. Thackeray roared on. His politics was based on fear and violence.

Paranoid politics

security did not kill Bal Thackeray, death did. TheEDI...INTELLIGENCE INVERTER AIR CONDITIONER

Panasonic

PRESENTING

INTELLIGENCE INVERTER AIR CONDITIONER

Panasonic

Preserving security did not kill Bal Thackeray, death did. Thackeray roared on. His politics was based on fear and violence. His politics was predicated on fear and violence. Thackeray roared on. His politics was based on fear and violence.
Faced with Kathmandu’s reluctance to devolve political power to the grassroots, Nepal’s rural communities have started quite literally taking power into their own hands.

The remote village of Chhisti in Baglung district has no roads, and a footbridge across the Kali Gandaki is its lifeline to rest of the world. But it has electricity because the villagers knew better than to wait for the government.

It took locals three years to carry 627 logs across the river and set up the transmission lines and in 2008, following a request to Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, Army helicopters dropped transformers. Now, Chhisti is one of the few remote villages in Nepal that is connected to the national electricity grid, and what makes it even more unique is that power distribution is efficiently and honestly managed by the local community.

One of the advantages of community management and distribution of power is that there is minimum pilferage, and voluntary monitoring of the leakages. Up to 60 per cent of the power in Tarai districts and Bhaktapur are stolen by hooking up illegally to transmission lines.

Each household pays a minimum charge for 20 units at Rs 4 per unit, and this is less than what households pay in urban areas. The money is used by the community to maintain the distribution system.

Although the village falls under the rotational power cuts of the grid, the electricity is of higher quality than power from microhydro projects.

“Electricity has opened our eyes to rest of the world and made us more aware of things around us. It will prove instrumental in transforming the lives of people in this village,” Yam Bahadur Chhetri of Chhisti Electricity User Group says proudly.

Community managed rural electrification started in the late 1990s when the people of south Lalitpur district came together to connect their isolated villages to the national grid. One of the pioneers was Dilli Ghimire, who felt that access to quality electricity is a basic right and the state had the responsibility to provide the service.

“After all, the rivers originate and flow through our villages so the people here have as much right to its electricity as the cities,” Ghimire said, walking up to Chhisti recently along the banks of the Kali Gandaki.

However, rural electrification is not cost effective when sparsely populated villages are spread out over difficult and often inaccessible terrain.

Women have benefited the
most from having electricity, saving valuable hours grinding and husking grain in electric mills. Children helping out with domestic chores during the day don’t have to study under flickering kerosene lamps at night. Farmers learn about seeds and fertilisers and market prices of their produce on television.

“We have lived most of our life in darkness, but we wanted our children to grow up in light,” says Nirmala Poudel, another member of Chhisti’s electricity user group. Her daughters Anjana, 7, and Asmita, 11, both love watching health related programs on TV and say they want to become doctors and treat fellow villagers.

The government has realised that the long term benefits of rural electrification cannot be outweighed by simple arithmetic of profit and loss. Bylaws passed in 2005 require the government’s Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) to foot 90 per cent of the cost of providing electricity to villages. But people like Ghimire in the National Association of Community Electricity Users Network say the bylaws do not offer enough, and in fact rural electrification needs to be unbundled from the NEA, which is a profit making body because rural electrification initially doesn’t make business sense.

Even though Chhisti has grid power, 600 households here still depend on a nearby microhydro plant for electricity. A small policy change is all that is needed to ensure that electricity from thousands of microhydro plants all over the country is fed into the national grid. This could add up to 10MW of power if it can connect small hydroelectric stations all over Nepal and help reduce NEA’s technical losses by improving transmission in rural areas.

Today, there are over 239,000 households accessing power through 227 electricity user groups across 47 districts in the country and their numbers are growing. Nepal’s community led rural electrification movement is turning into yet another success story, not because of the government, but in spite of it.

POLES APART

The wooden electricity poles supplied by the NEA in Chhisti have become useless in less than five years. The poles were supposed to be chemically treated to last for at least 10 years. The adjoining village of Jaidi in Parbat district faces similar problems.

NEA is the responsible body for procurement and supply of materials including electric poles. But the communities complain that the supplied materials are substandard and have been urging the government to transfer the responsibility to the user groups instead.
Koirala, chief assistant secretary of the Law and Order Division, Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) announced that it will unveil administration worried about VIP security. On Sunday the three parties have now been slapped Dahal. Last Friday's Kutneta, Baglung eventually attacked him. Having awaited anybody could have easily Dahal did not even keep and he had to attend to each person if only out of formality. wishers, and ordinary Nepalis had all arrived to get a glimpse of Dahal was greeting guests enthusiastically at the party's tea and VIPs were equally unaware,” said an of security preparation will help. “The leaders need to follow do them any good. And some friends gave completely inaccurate statements to the media. As a result, my wife Girjana left me. Bina also experienced something similar. These events bought us together. Where are you right now and what have you been doing? I am in India, and I spend time studying and reading up on current affairs. I have internet connection in my room, and this has made it easier for me to access news and interact on social networks. That is how I spend my days. What about future plans? I can never go away from politics. You grew up with politics, so how does this sudden separation feel? I may be away from politics these days, but politics is in my mind 24 hours a day. I even worked for a while and collected valuable experience. I read a lot of books on politics, so I haven’t cut myself off. When will you return to Nepal? There is a time for everything, and currently I am busy gaining knowledge about great many things. I might come soon, who knows. Who do you love the most? And who do you respect the most? I love my party and its chairman the most since I am a member of the party. And I love my parents because I am their son. The chairman of our party Komde Prachanda is someone I respect the most. Are you in contact with your family? I am in touch with my mother. No matter how many mistakes you make, a mother will always forgive you. The only son leaves the family, the father’s party splits, and he gets slapped in public. What has happened to the Prachanda family? My father tried a lot to save the party from breaking apart. I feel very sad when I read the false accusations made against my father by those who left the party. Even though it may seem like I have left the party, I will give up my job for Komde Prachanda any day. And I was very upset when I found out that he was assaulted in public. I wanted to break down and cry. Having been together during the war, I am sad that I have not been able to be by his side and fight against these conspirators. You must be proud to be Prachanda’s son, but surely you must have your share of misery for carrying the family name. I feel more pride than anything else. There are some forces, deeply rooted throughout the course of history, that are intent on derailing the country’s progress, and have nothing better to do than defame our chairman. What do you have to say to people who keep a keen interest in you? I feel that I have let a lot of people down with my past behaviour. I couldn’t support the chairman when he needed me the most, and that pains me. I have learnt my lessons, and I promise to you all that I will never repeat my mistakes.

Interview with Prakash Dahal by Babita Basnet, Ghatana ra Bichar, 21 November

“Never again”

Before he was assaulted, UCPN(M) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal was greeting guests enthusiastically at the party’s tea reception last Friday. Party cadres, well-wishers, and ordinary Nepalis had all arrived to get a glimpse of their leaders. Dozens of hands were seeking Dahal’s attention, and he had to attend to each person if only out of formality. From a security point of view, this was incredibly unsafe. Dahal did not even keep a foot’s distance between himself and the guests, and anybody could have easily attacked him. Having avoided his turn, Uttam Kunwar of Kuhlata, Baglung eventually slapped Dahal. Last Friday, he blew completed the stagette circle, top leader of the three parties have been attacked by their own cadres. But on a more serious note, this episode got the home administration worried about VIP security. On Sunday the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) announced that it will unveil a new VIP security procedure within three weeks. Shankar Koirala, chief assistant secretary of the Law and Order Division, will be heading the taskforce. “Our goal is to find out how to improve and strengthen the security provided to VIPs and VIPVA,” said Koirala, who did not want to reveal the ministry’s official line on these matters. The new security program comes at a time when the ministry was already planning to brief all Personal Security Officers (PSO). Currently, personnel from Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, National Investigation Department, and the Nepal Army are deployed in various capacity. The Koirala-led taskforce will investigate ways to upgrade security arrangements for the residence, offices, roads taken, and the destinations travelled by VIPs. The taskforce will also focus on improving the command and control of the personnel. A security code of conduct for VIPs will be made, which will require them to undergo self-defence training. It is international practice for government officials to be familiar with security procedures and even the president of the United States takes self-defence classes. However, MoHA officials admitted that as long as VIPs do not cooperate, no amount of security preparation will help. “The leaders need to follow instructions because security forces alone can’t stop such premeditated attacks,” said an official. At the UCPN(M)’s tea reception on Friday, there were hundreds of police personnel under the command of SSP Jay Bahadur Chand, and the event was notable for its heavy security. But ultimately Kunwar’s hands reached Dahal because he strayed beyond the protection line. “The PM wasn’t vigilant, and VIPs were equally unaware,” said an officer investigating the incident.

A slap in the face of security

Sundar Dahal, Kanpur, 19 November

Today

#631

What prompted the dash Maoists to page 2?

To explain.

Why is the PM addressing the nation today?

To update the nation on the current crisis.

What about future plans?

I may be away from politics these days.

What about future plans?

I can never go away from politics.

What about future plans?

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What about future plans?

I can never go away from politics.
In all the talk about the high Himalaya, the Mahabharat Range and the Tarai, the Chure Hills always fall between the cracks. These first wrinkles of the mighty Himalaya stretch from Mechi to Mahakali, they are a treasure trove of biodiversity, and have an environmental importance that few are aware of.

The Chure Hills are made of soft material, sand, sediment, and boulders, uplifted relatively recently in geological time as part of the formation of the Himalayan mountains. Because of their composition, the hills are much more sensitive to the loss of vegetation and other human activity, the impact of which can be felt downstream in the Nepal Tarai and down to India. This is why President Ram Baran Yadav has made saving the Chure Hills one of his priorities.

The biodiversity of the Chure forests is much greater than other parts of Nepal, and it is under severe threat. During the Rana era, the majestic hardwood timber from the sal forests of the Chure were exported to India to be turned into railway ties. Today, the Chure is being indiscriminately mined for sand, stones, and aggregates for the construction of India’s highways, irrigation canals, and cities. The tragedy of it is that this is making the plains of India and Nepal prone to disastrous floods.

When the Chure loses its forests and huge gashes are opened up on its slopes by quarries, the monsoon rains can wash down the whole mountain. In Jhapa, the Ratuwa Khola used to flow under a bridge, now the sediment washed down from the Chure has buried the bridge itself.

The Chure is being desertified, and the forests have lost their indigenous King Cobra, and the world’s largest flying bird, the stork. The pythons here are also threatened because of habitat loss, as is the pygmy hog. Naturalist Karna Shakya did his research on the pygmy hog decades ago. Shakya is still around, but the pygmy hog can’t be found anywhere anymore.

What protected the forests of the Chure and the inner Tarai for centuries was malaria. But after the advent of DDT and the eradication of the malaria mosquito, the area became habitable.

There was encroachment of the Chure from both the south and the north, entire villages were translocated from the mountains and these fragile hills didn’t stand a chance.

King Mahendra’s plan was to settle people south of the East-West Highway and preserve the jungles to the north of the road. But that policy was never properly implemented, and the forests on the slopes of the Chure started balding. Now that the trees are gone, the next to go are the boulders, sand, and stones.

Nepal’s soil, sand, stones, and boulders are being taken out of the country without revenue, without permission, in a wanton destruction of our natural heritage. They say Nepal is ‘landlocked’, it looks these days more like a country without ‘locks’. But the politicians in Kathmandu with their power-addled brains have no time to think about this frightening destruction that will have far-reaching impact on the economy, livelihood, and future existence of our nation.

The politicians have slogans for state restructuring, but the Chure range that stretches from east to west doesn’t register in anyone’s consciousness. We are not worried about the indigenous inhabitants of the Chure like the Tharu, Chepang, Danuwar, Muhasar, and others. Neither are we worried about what the environmental destruction of the Chure will do to downstream plains with long-term consequences to Nepal’s Pashupatinath and Bihar.

Enough words, let’s act now to save the Chure Hills.

Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha, PhD, is a noted Nepali botanist, who has extensively studied Nepal’s endemic plantlife.

They say Nepal is ‘landlocked’, but it looks these days more like a country without ‘locks’
The nation is still reverberating from The Slap that Comrade Ferocious got on his cheek while shaking hands with karyakartas at the Baddie Tea Party the other day. The YCLs beat the living daylights out of Padam Kunwar, who has become an overnight cyber celebrity. Now that all three leaders of the three main parties have been slapped, Madhesi leaders must be wondering who among them is next. Here are some tips to avoid injury:

- Resign from the post of Party President
- Employ robotic arms to shake hands at tea parties
- Get a look-alike as decoy
- Don’t shake hands with suspicious-looking chaps, blow kisses
- Meet cadre only through Facebook, not face-to-face
- If slapped, turn the other cheek
- All guests at tea parties to be handcuffed first
- Leaders to mandatorily wear protective headgear at all times
- Challenge attacker to a wrestling duel

Something happened on Tuesday that upset the apple cart. Comrade Awesome, the most calculating neta ever to appear in the Nepali political firmament (and I’m saying that with genuine admiration) had agreed with the politicos that Prime Minister Red Flag would start the process of reconstituting the government by stepping down. PKD thought he had killed two stones with one bird by removing his nemesis from office and projecting himself as kingmaker.

It was on that assurance that the president, who was also looking for a face-saving way out, signed the budget ordinance. Although all sides tried to paint themselves as the winners in this deal, it was BRB who pulled a fast one and bought himself more time by leap-frogging the 22 November election date and announcing yet another election for next year without saying when. The primordial minister in an unguarded moment (before his address to the nation on Thursday evening) had said he was going to be PM “for the next ten years”. Looks like that wasn’t just a slip of the tongue, he is going to make turning himself into a Jyoti Basu a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The other candidate who seems mesmerised by the thought of ascending to Balu Water is Demon Nath who is PKD’s candidate for a ‘technocratic’ pradhan monkey.

There is a reason why this Plutocracy of the Red Elite is feeling so cosy staying on in power. There was a time when corruption in Nepal was a 10% here and a 10% there. People talked about ‘lakhs’ changing hands below the table, and ‘tea money’ at the traffic office. What a Great Leap Forward this government has made. No one talks nowadays about anything less than corromdes and arabs in kickbacks. Road-widening is leading to the widening of the midriffs of a lot of YCL comrades and their commanders who monopolise the all-Nepal rentals of bulldozers. Apparently they are even giving themselves contracts for the ‘re-construction’ of bridges destroyed during the conflict which don’t even exist. Gutch’s sidekick who has been caught several times in the police dragnet of mafia bosses, is also a major beneficiary of road-widening. I finally get it: that is why Farang Minister Kaji Naran Kamred is telling donors not to bother about funding human rights and inclusion in Nepal, and to channel their monies instead into ‘infrastructure’.

Alert Ass fans have written in to say that the Nepali word ‘paji’ doesn’t just mean ‘armpit hair’ but also ‘adolescent donkey’. This donkey stands corrected and regrets the error.