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BIKRAM RAI

## SO MUCH TO DO, SO LITTLE TIME

Khil Raj Regmi glances at his watch after arriving for his first day at work in Singha Darbar on Thursday after being sworn in as the Chairman of the Interim Election Council of Ministers. His first order of business is to set up an 11-member cabinet, appoint an Election Commissioner, and carry out day-to-day governance. In its first meeting, Regmi and two technocrat ministers decided to enforce fiscal discipline, ensure petroleum supply and work towards holding "fear-free" elections later this year.

# Pre-poll poll



Now that the political parties have handed over power to a government led by Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi, the focus shifts to voters. What do they think? Who will they vote for? Which parties do they prefer? What do they think of ethnicity-based federalism and a presidential system? What are their main concerns? Find the answers in the results of the annual Himalmedia Public Opinion Poll 2013 inside.

page 3-5



## HIGH ROAD

### Let's face it

Our opinion poll result shows that half the 3,508 respondents interviewed nationwide last month either couldn't care less about elections, or didn't want any of the current parties or candidates.

Editorial page 2

Rabi Thapa avoids the new highway on the Annapurna Circuit by hiking on more scenic alternative trekking trails.

buzz page 10-11



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

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LET’S FACE IT

The only take home message for party leaders is: reinvent yourselves, try to regain the public’s trust before elections



DIVAKAR CHETTRI

Nation states come with user manuals, they are called constitutions. It is a trouble-shooting guide to tell us what to do when things go awry. Nepal came with a fairly complete user manual in 1990, but since the politicians never read it, they deemed it necessary to write a new one. We held elections to set up an assembly to draft a new constitution in 2008, but after several extensions the CA was allowed to lapse because we couldn’t agree on new rules in the rule book. We were still using a dog-eared interim constitution to run the country, but we threw it out on Wednesday night. From here on, it is uncharted territory. The powers that be inside and outside Nepal devised a clever plan: in order to get the truck to start they put the conductor in the driving seat. Not only is this against the rules, it is also fraught with all kinds of dangers, the foremost being that the conductor isn’t trained to drive. The deed is done and Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi has been sworn in as head of polls later this year. We violated the constitution to write a new constitution. The justification for choosing the chief justice is that there was no other option. You hear this from lifelong freedom fighters in the democratic parties, from the diplomats representing democratic countries, from civil society stalwarts who used to believe in democracy. Actually, there was no other option because the political parties never tried hard enough to find a solution, mired as they were in their petty power games. We never expected anything better from the Maoists who were the architects of this plan because democracy, pluralism, and non-violence were never a part of their

credo. But for the reactive NC and UML to agree to such an unconstitutional and anti-democratic course of action sets the wrong precedent. The main message from the Himalmedia Public Opinion Poll 2013 (summarised in this edition on pages 3,4,5) is that the public standing of the political parties has plunged drastically. The NC and UML, especially, knew no was going to come out into the streets against the Maoist plan. So they did the next best thing: agree to the CJ to get the PM to step down in the hope that tomorrow will be brighter than today. Elections for the sake of elections is not the answer. Polls are important, but not enough to safeguard democracy. There is the danger that the new CA will be mired in the same row over federalism and state structure. Our opinion polls results show that more than half the population either couldn’t care less about elections or doesn’t want any of the current parties or candidates. Respondents have also clearly said they are not going to decide on whom to vote for based on slogans, platforms, or ideology, but will use performance criteria. So the only thing left for us to do is to repeat what we wrote in this space last week. We need a complete Election Commission to lay down the rules and empower the state apparatus to enforce them so that the elections in June or November are clean and violence-free. As for the political parties, the only take home message from their voters is: “Re-invent yourselves, try to regain our trust, and show us that you can deliver.”

ON THE WEB  
www.nepalitimes.com

NEPAL’S GENDER APARTHEID

Thank you Deepti Gurung for an excellent article (‘Nepal’s gender apartheid’, #646). It’s very sad to see how the attitude of the state has changed so little. The right to citizenship through the mother is accepted as a fundamental right in most countries and does not even need to be debated. The fact that the bureaucracy is still afraid of some kind of mass settlement of Indians in Nepal and continues to use that as an excuse to deny citizenship simply defies belief. Even if the father is an Indian (or other) citizen, it is the right of the children alone to decide whether they take their fathers’ or mothers’ citizenship.

MS

Children born in Nepal to either Nepali mothers or Nepali fathers, who live in Nepal should immediately be eligible for Nepali citizenship, as simple as that. I don’t see why things have to be so difficult.

Kalpana Lamichhane

I fully support Deepti Gurung’s cause. However, I was sad to read the last paragraph where she argues that the state should allow Nepali women to pass on their citizenship to their children under certain circumstances. Why this clause? I understand changing a law seeped deeply in patriarchy is mighty difficult, but if we are demanding change why not demand complete change and not some token half-hearted gesture from the government? Both Nepali mothers and fathers should be allowed to pass on their citizenship to children, no ifs or buts, no strings attached.

Renu Shrestha

I hope Deepti Gurung’s powerful article is an eye opener to policy makers. Much more has to be done to eliminate discrimination against women.

Radhika

What makes me really angry is the new rule that requires students to show their birth certificates to register for SLC. Imagine all the stateless children who will never get to sit for the exam and not get to go to college as a result.

Nicole Thkuri Wick

My maid is stateless even though both her parents were Nepalis. The parents died a long time ago, nobody knows where their papers are, and at the time she was born there was no birth registration process especially in remote areas like Charikot. Her children all have citizenship through their father, but she on the other hand is a non-Nepali.

Sangeeta R

I am extremely curious to know how Sujata Koirala pulled it off. Deepti should write to Sujata and ask for some pointers since she so deftly overcame the citizenship law to make her daughter and grandchildren Nepali citizens. This clearly shows, there is a way (presumably a legal one) to get Nepali citizenship through a mother.

C Thapa

Good editorial (‘Fresh Faces’, #646), but the tragedy of our country is that no one in power listens to public opinion polls.

John

Thank you Kunda Dixit for providing an excellent summary of a realistic time frame and a vision of requirements including good governance, integrity,

and governing leadership skills, which almost all politicians speak of during elections, but seem to forget as soon as they are in power.

Werner Meyer

WHOSE LUMBINI IS IT ANYWAY?

I loved the few days I spent in Lumbini during last year’s autumn (‘Whose Lumbini is it anyway?’, Trishna Rana, #646). I was left with limited choices in choosing souvenirs: ‘made in China’ plastic miniature Buddha statues or ‘made in India’ om, marijuana, and Buddha pendants. There is so much potential here for local businesses and local people. How about local home-stay programs?

Easterngurl



I think Lumbini Development Trust officials have been doing a good job in recent times despite the compromises they have to make with the party in power and a local community unsympathetic to Buddhist cause and concern.

Chatgoer

Great job *Nepali Times*. I’ve been in Kathmandu for one week and trying to decide whether to go to Lumbini or not (‘Destination peace’, Trishna Rana,

#646). Luckily I found your paper lying around in a coffee shop and after going over this piece, I knew I just had to make a trip. Thank you for information on buses, I didn’t know where to look because there are just too many contradictory info on travel websites.

Jessica Chen

FOREIGN DOMESTIC POLICY

You are a pariah state if you deny rightful entry to an internationally regarded spiritual leader like the Dalai Lama to a land that we claim is the birthplace of Buddha, just to please a state that has no respect for any global rules and values (‘Foreign domestic policy’, Anurag Acharya, #646). When your old friends are in trouble, you stand by them, not turn your back against them in the pretext of some made up ‘balancing act’ propaganda invented by the Shah kings who had to come to terms with their own egos and prejudices with their kins down south.

Krishna S

Countries have national interests, not some sanctimonious notion of elevating international image. And if Nepal had failed in diplomacy for six long decades, then it would have ceased to be a state long ago. Very often western educated Nepali commentators (who are largely oblivious of Nepal’s own historical connections and dealings with Tibet) see Tibet through the rose-tinted

glasses that a section of the West does, and label Nepal as pariah nation.

NBS

THE RUSSIA RETURNS

There are other notable figures among the members of Mitra Kunj who deserve recognition (‘The Russia returns’, Sunir Pandey, #646). Here are some names: Hari Man Shrestha (propagator of 84,000MW capacity hydropower in Nepal), former ministers Hari Bahadur Basnet and Nilambar Acharya, former vice-chancellors of Tribhuvan University Madhav Sharma and Govind Sharma.

Bijaya

HOP ON

NT seems fed up with Nepali politics and its new interest in sex and sex toys is interesting. Why not supply some to our leaders (Gadget review, #646)?

Joshi Prakash Chandra

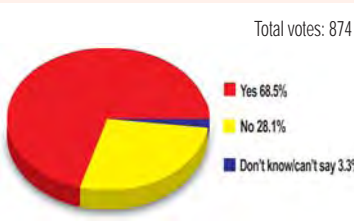
NT please focus on news, issues people can connect with and don’t use this topic as an excuse to sleaze your way around sex shops.

Marc



nepalnews.com  
Weekly Internet Poll #647

Q. Should there be local elections in June even if general elections can't take place?



Weekly Internet Poll # 648. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you think making Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi prime minister has set the wrong precedent for Nepal's judiciary?







# Up for grabs

The field is wide open in the next election for any party that can prove it can perform

KUNDA DIXIT

Now that Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi has been sworn in to head a new election government, everyone's focus will shift to voters.

But electorate is seriously disillusioned, apathetic, and couldn't care less about the parties and candidates on offer.

The results of the Himalmedia Public Opinion Poll 2013 were expected and followed the trends of polls for the past 12 years, where Nepalis have been exhibiting increasing impatience with the behaviour of the political leadership. What is different this time is that the level of disenchantment is much greater and widespread than ever before.

In answer to a question asking them to name the political party that they would vote for in elections, nearly 55% of the respondents said they didn't know, wouldn't say, hadn't made up their minds, or ticked 'none of the above'. (See page 4-5) Most Nepalis seem to either not care about upcoming elections, or want fresh faces. The field is wide open for anyone with new ideas, integrity, and a performance guarantee.

"The results show that the outcome of the next election will be unpredictable," says analyst and former Maoist Mumaram Khanal, "those who won't vote or say they want to vote for an independent candidate may change their minds by election day if the parties can reinvent themselves."

But that is a big 'if'. The parties may want to examine the response to another question about the criteria voters will use to cast their ballots. Nearly half the respondents said they would base their decision on

the performance of the parties or candidates and not so much on the ideology, platform, or slogans of the political parties.

Which is probably why when asked which political leader they would want as prime minister, the highest number of respondents (21%) answered 'There is no such person'. All the other leaders are in the single digits and the most remarkable rise is of Kamal Thapa, leader of the monarchist RPP. Thapa has got more votes than veteran politicians like Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Sher Bahadur Deuba, or KP Oli. The NC's Gagan Thapa, on the other hand, gets more votes than his boss Ramchandra Poudel.

Says civil society activist and former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kul Chandra Gautam: "The survey is a clear message to the NC and UML to shape up and stand up for fundamental principles rather than accepting second best compromises. If they play their cards right, they have a fighting chance."

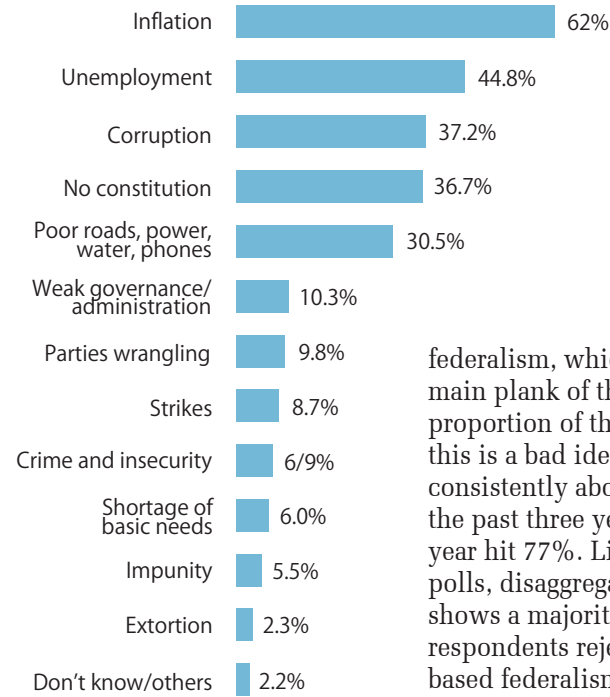
The most dramatic result has been the fall from grace of the Maoists. Baburam Bhattarai, who commanded 32% of votes in the 2012 poll this year fell to 6.2%. Despite high-profile populism, blatant corruption of his coalition partners and close family, appears to have tainted him. But analysts say the longer he is out of power the better his chances to recoup support.

Another reason for the prime minister's slide could be his perceived pro-India tilt. An overwhelming 85% of respondents among those who felt there was foreign interference, named India as the one meddling. In answer to another question, 56% of respondents felt that the state of the country is getting worse with the blame going to

incumbents.

The fall from grace of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who was the most trusted and popular political personality till the 2011 poll, has continued with his ratings now down to 3.4%. His party has taken a hit from its split last

## What are the three main problems the country faces at the moment?



federalism, which was the main plank of the Maoists. The proportion of those who think this is a bad idea has stayed consistently above 70% for the past three years and this year hit 77%. Like previous polls, disaggregated data shows a majority of indigenous respondents reject identity-based federalism.

On the other hand, the proportion of respondents who favoured the Maoist-backed idea of a directly-elected presidential system grew from 31% last year to 37% this year. "This is proof that the people are sick of political instability and want a leader that they can elect directly," explains political analyst, Manmohan Bhattarai.

The result that most highlights the mismatch between the media's obsession with politics and the people's concerns was when respondents were asked to name three main worries. They were: inflation, corruption, and unemployment. Politics came way down on their list, even though only through stability can the other problems be solved.

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# A WIDE OPEN FIELD

The results of the Himalmedia Public Opinion Poll 2013 give the clearest indication yet of the widespread public disillusionment with the main political parties and their leaders. The euphoria of the ceasefire and the peace agreement seven years ago have all but evaporated. Although the polls in previous years also showed disenchantment with politics, it has never been as quantitatively stark as it is now.

The last Himalmedia Public Opinion Poll was

carried out in April 2012, just before the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. Last year, too, there was scepticism about the commitment of the political leadership about writing the constitution. But it was when the CA’s term was allowed to lapse that the public’s trust collapsed. At no time since the 1990 People’s Movement has the public’s faith in the political parties been as low as it is now.

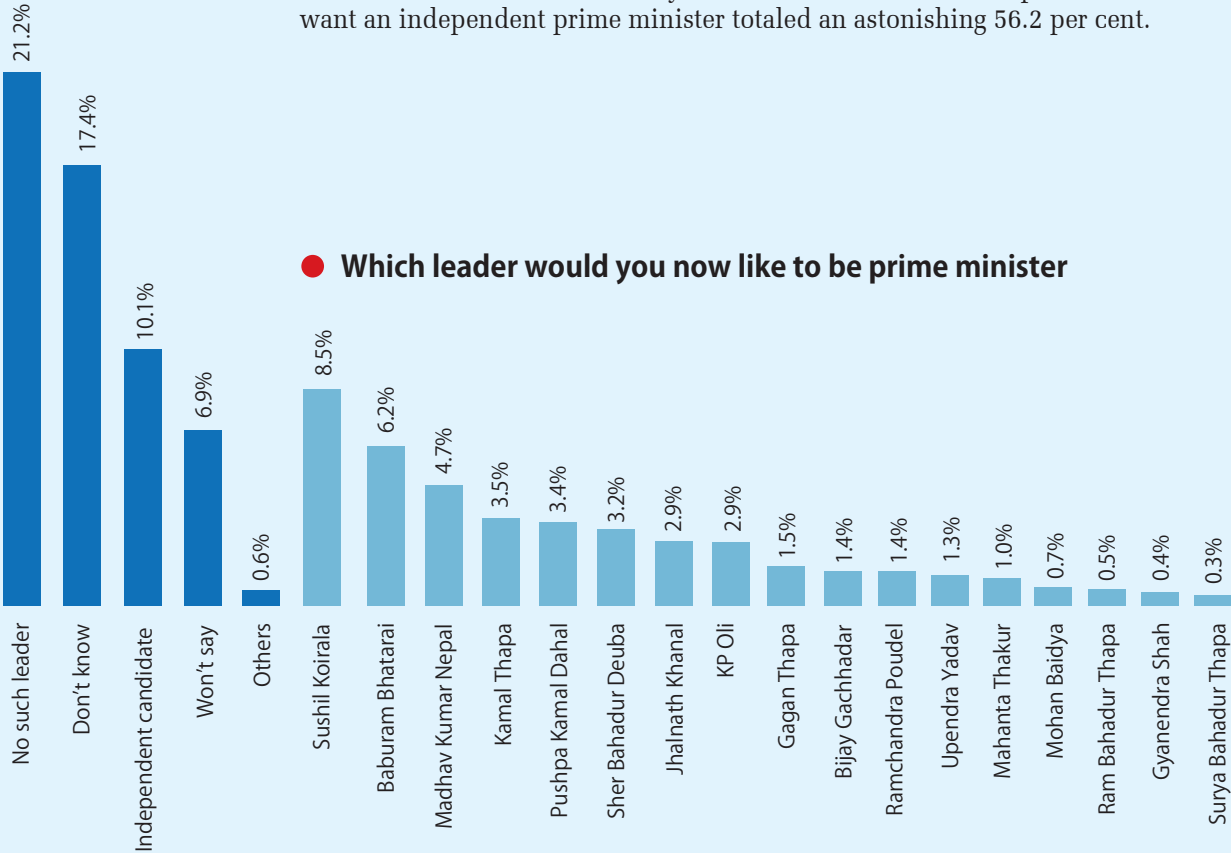
The people either don’t care, don’t know, or won’t say who they will vote for. This apathy is dangerous

because it leaves the field wide open for a demagogue. The political parties represent an essential function of a healthy democracy, they are the political entities that ensure representation, accountability, and delivery. At election time the people have a choice, based on the political platforms and the ideologies of the various parties. But this year’s poll shows that the people believe democracy in Nepal is under threat from the behaviour of the political parties themselves.

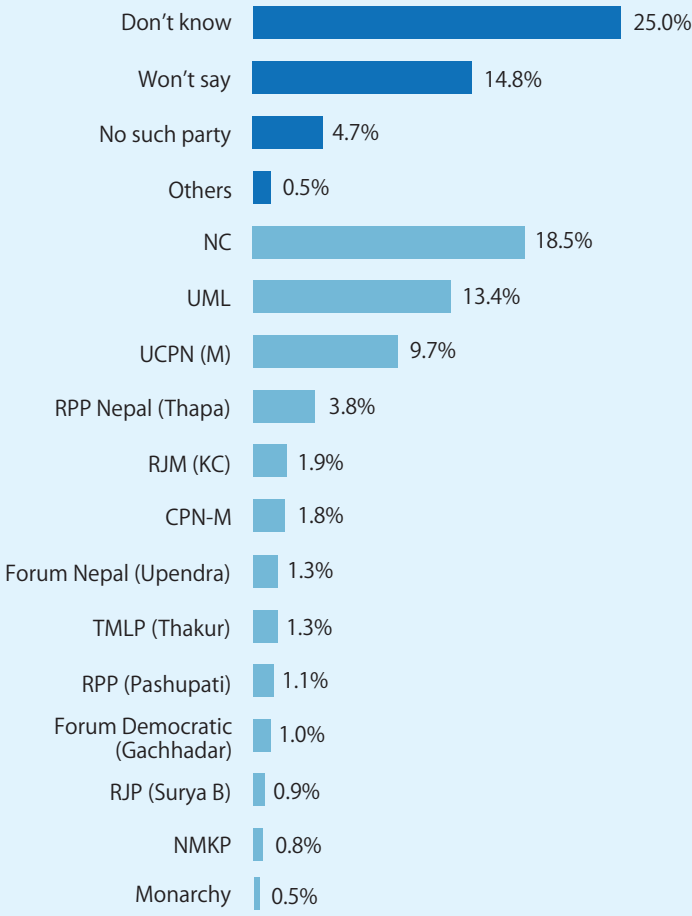
## THE LONG TAIL

Three questions in the 2013 Poll tried to gauge the relative popularity ratings of the political parties and their leaders. The questions were designed in such a way that they cross-checked each other. The results were consistent in proving that the level of apathy, indifference, disenchantment, and cynicism has grown in the past year.

More than half the respondents don’t trust the present crop of political leaders, whose ratings are all negligible and in the single digits. Combining all those who don’t know, won’t say, feel there is no such leader, prefer others, or want an independent prime minister totaled an astonishing 56.2 per cent.

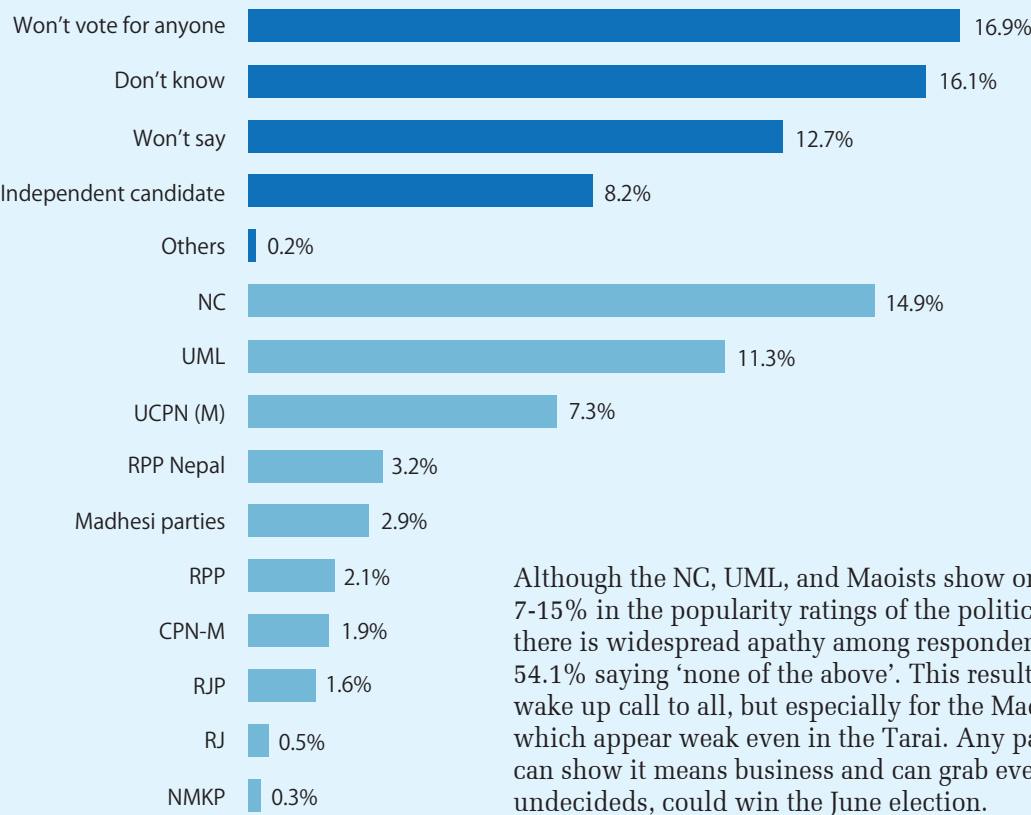


### Which party would you most trust to establish a peaceful, prosperous, and democratic Nepal?



The split in the Maoists appears to have cost both splinter parties dearly. The relatively high approval rating of the NC could be a combination of an anti-incumbency factor to a desire among many to see an end to the political deadlock since it was seen to be the NC’s ‘turn’ to lead an election government. Despite this, a full 45% of the respondents were noncommittal and didn’t express their preference.

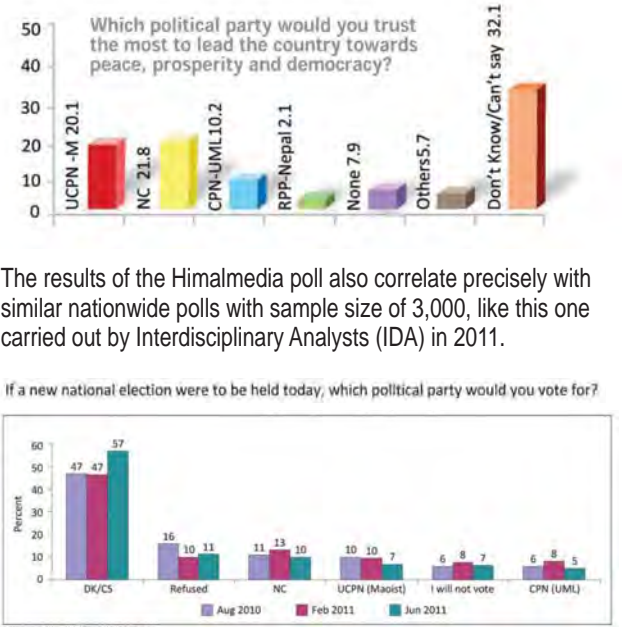
### In the coming election, the representative of which party will you vote for?



Although the NC, UML, and Maoists show only between 7-15% in the popularity ratings of the political parties, there is widespread apathy among respondents with 54.1% saying ‘none of the above’. This result should be a wake up call to all, but especially for the Madhesi parties which appear weak even in the Tarai. Any party that can show it means business and can grab even half the undecideds, could win the June election.

## OTHER POLLS

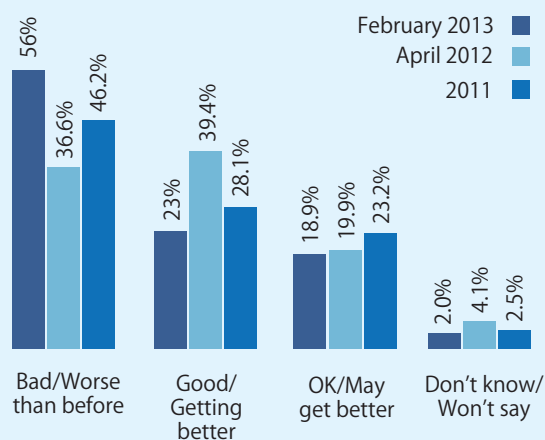
Paradoxically, even though the parties and their leaders have lost their standing among voters, most respondents still haven’t given up completely on them. Previous polls also showed people expect the most from the three big parties, like this Himalmedia Poll in 2011.



## MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS

Himalmedia has been tracking the people's main preoccupations for the past 10 years and the polls have consistently shown that most people are concerned about inflation, corruption, and unemployment. The common perception is that compared to a few years ago things have got worse and more than 60% are not satisfied with the performance of the Bhattarai-led government.

### ● Compared to a few years ago, what is the situation in the country?

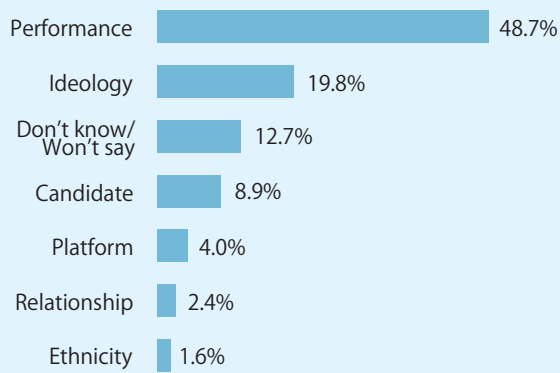


## BASIS FOR VOTING

Contrary to popular belief, most respondents did not think ideology, party platform, or ethnicity was very important in deciding whom they vote for. The most important criteria for nearly half the respondents was performance.

Says analyst Mumaram Khanal: "The outcome of the next election will be unpredictable. The undecideds may change their minds by election day, so the parties have time to reinvent themselves."

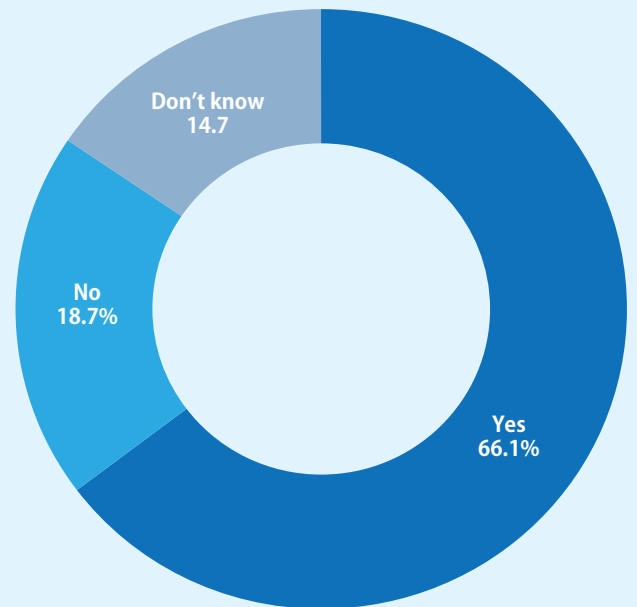
### ● On what basis will you vote for a party or candidate in the elections?



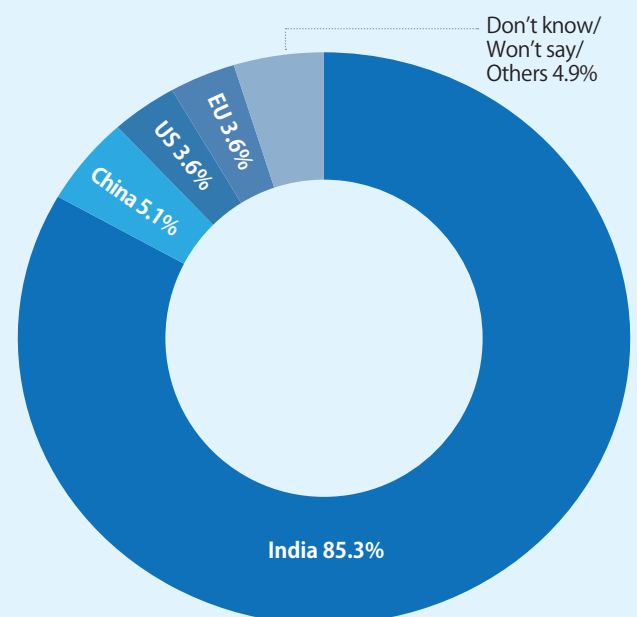
## THE FOREIGN HAND

The perception that foreign intervention is common in Nepal is growing. And for the first time, most respondents pointed their fingers at India's role over all else.

### ● They say there is foreign intervention in Nepal, do you agree?



### ● If you think there is foreign interference, which power is meddling?

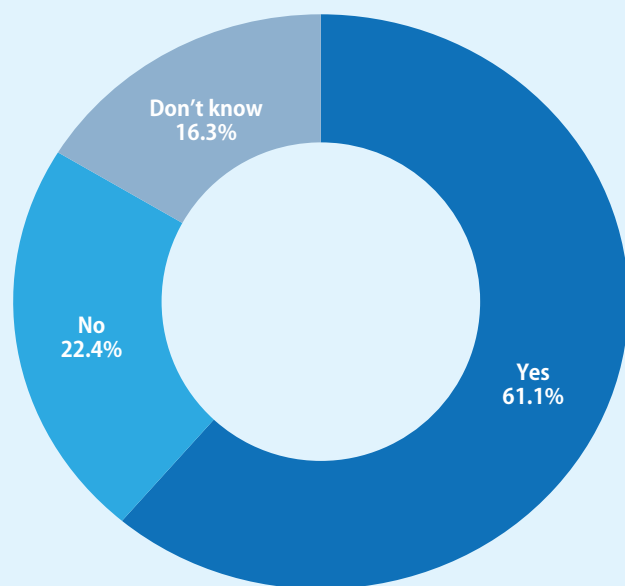


## DEMOCRACY IN PERIL

After 2006, Himalmedia Public Opinion Polls showed that the people's faith in democracy had been restored and fewer thought that it was under threat. But the proportion of respondents who think that democracy is once more threatened has grown steadily to exceed 60% in the 2013 poll.

Earlier, it used to be the absolute monarchy or the Maoists who were seen to be the main threats to democracy. Now the blame goes to all political parties for their inability to work together.

### ● Is Nepal's democracy under threat?



### ● If you think democracy is threatened, by whom?

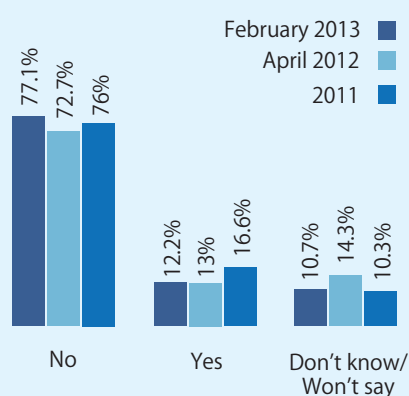


## WHAT KIND OF CONSTITUTION?

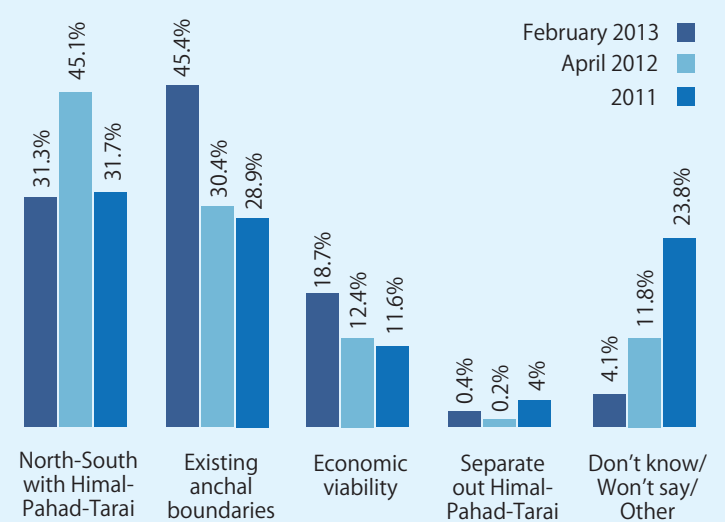
As in the previous three years, respondents overwhelmingly blame politicians for the inability of the CA to write a new constitution, they feel disagreement over federalism was the main reason for its dissolution. Like earlier years, the majority of respondents think an ethnicity-based federalism is a bad idea. Until last year, they preferred geographical demarcation based on Himal-Pahad-Tarai, this year the majority seem to have gone back to turning existing anchals into provincial boundaries.

Cross-tabulated data show that 78% of Madhesi caste groups and 58% of Madhesi ethnic groups were against ethnic federalism. The proportion of respondents from the Newar community who think ethnicity-based federalism is wrong is over 80%. The more educated the respondents, the more likely they are to disapprove of federalism based on identity. The highest proportion of support for ethnicity-based federalism is seen in the far-west, where double the number than elsewhere feel it is desirable.

### ● Should future provinces be demarcated along ethnic lines?



### ● On what basis should the provinces be demarcated?



### THE METHOD

The annual Himalmedia Public Opinion Polls are conducted by a team of professional psephologists, statisticians, enumerators, and analysts led by Hiranya Baral and Balkrishna Khadka. The 2013 Poll was carried out over a period of one week in mid-February in 38 districts and a total of 3,508 respondents reflecting the proportionality of Nepal's ethnic, geographic, gender, age, and literacy were interviewed. The demographic breakdown of districts and VDCs reflected the results of the latest 2011 census. Leaders of the main political parties and political analysts were briefed and consulted before the poll. The complete disaggregated results will be available online on [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com) by end March.





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No country of their own

Every citizen has a right to vote in the next election, but what of the stateless citizens of Nepal?



BY THE WAY  
Anurag Acharya

The interim constitution of this land, or what remains of it, provides that no citizen will be discriminated upon based on socio-economic identity and that legal inadequacies will not hinder their protection, development, and empowerment.

But what if an individual has been denied these fundamental rights due to the unwillingness or sheer negligence of those in power to issue a citizenship certificate? Last week in this paper, single mother Deepti Gurung highlighted her own futile personal saga of trying to get her children citizenship papers of a Nepal steeped in patriarchy.

There are hundreds of thousands of others in the Tarai who have also been denied citizenship just because of the absence of the state or because they don't have their own documents. Three generations of a poor Madhesi family have been denied citizenship - this is not just a political issue, it is also a humanitarian one.

Disowned and abandoned by their own nation and ignored by local officials, 21 Madhesis from five Tarai districts are in Kathmandu to highlight their plight in the political power centres of the capital. On Tuesday, the men and women, mostly students and workers in their 20s and 30s submitted a memorandum at the prime minister's office and offices of major political parties including Madhesi Morcha. It was either good timing or the timing couldn't be worse. Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai was getting ready to step down and the Madhesi parties in the coalition were all distracted.



Kari Thakur (pic, front row first from left), 36, was born in India but has been working as a wage labourer in Matihani VDC of Mahottari district for the last 25 years. Thakur worked hard at menial jobs, but couldn't make enough money to educate his children. But now, with some savings, he wishes to educate his young grandson so that the family can finally get out of the vicious cycle of poverty and hardship. But Thakur can't get his grandson citizenship.

"My son's birth could not be registered because I did not have citizenship and his marriage was not registered for the same reason. Now, my grandson is being punished," Thakur told me with tears streaming down his wizened cheeks, "how long do we have to live in Nepal before my decedents are recognised as citizens?"

The Madhes movement may have subsided, but the citizenship issue could re-ignite it at any time because of the sheer scale of the problem. Silent acquiescence is turning to seething anger and could erupt in the coming months as families like Thakur are denied the right to vote in elections.

Sangeeta Chaurasia, 22, from Kapilvastu had to give up her dream of enrolling into a nursing college because she does not have citizenship papers. "My father is a citizen, but I am stateless," she says, "don't you think that's odd?" Ram Bechan Mali (pic, centre holding placard), also 22, from Sarlahi has the same problem. Their fathers were among thousands who acquired citizenship in 2007 after the Madhes uprising, but writ petitions filed in the Supreme Court didn't just stall the process, but prevented children of those who had acquired citizenship by birth from obtaining their own citizenship.

"I cried, begged, and dropped at their feet, but in vain. I had to drop out of college and herd cattle now," says Mali, her voice quivering with bitterness.

Sceptics within and outside the Madhes contest such claims and are convinced that there were massive anomalies in the distribution of citizenship after 2007. They also argue that many who have acquired citizenship may be taking undue advantage of legal loopholes.

On Wednesday night, the four main political forces agreed to form a CJ-led government to hold elections and allowed voting even without citizenship papers. Among others, they have agreed on constitutional changes to make citizenship distribution more transparent and accessible. But until many like Thakur, Mali, and Chaurasia don't get that laminated card that makes them citizens of Nepal, even this accord will have been in vain.



WHAT'S THE FAMILY GET TOGETHER PLAN THIS SATURDAY??  
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The minimum temperature is now climbing into double digits, and the maximum has stayed above 25 Celsius. Windblown dust from the Thar desert combined with affluence smog from the Indian plains has filtered sunlight, and this will continue into the weekend. Some partly cloudy days in store in central Nepal with afternoon build-up and possible brief isolated showers in the higher valleys.



**TEAM WORK:** The Seven Summits Women team with South African actress Hlubi Mboya (*fourth from right*) and three other Tanzanian climbers.

## Four down, three to go for seven Nepali women climbers



After climbing Mt Everest in 2008, seven Nepali women have been trying to scale the seven highest peaks in seven continents and last week they summited Mt Kilimanjaro, the highest point in Africa.

The seven Nepalis, accompanied by three Tanzanian women climbers and South African TV actress Hlubi Mboya, reached the snow-covered peak on 5 March.

"Anything is possible," Nimdoma Sherpa, the youngest member of the Seven Summits Women team, is quoted as having exclaimed after she made it to the top of Kilimanjaro. Team leader Shailee Basnet told *Nepali Times* by email after coming down: "As we neared the summit at Stella Point, all of us broke down, and started crying, hugging each other, and remembering our challenges."

The team has already scaled Mt Kosciuszko in Australia and Mt Elbrus in Europe in 2010. They still have to climb Mt Aconcagua in South America, Mt Denali in Alaska, and Mt Vinson Massif in Antarctica.

Nimdoma, who became the youngest woman to climb Everest in 2008 and held the record till last year, is a former recipient of a World Food Program (WFP) school meals project in Nepal. "I want to tell kids that if I can climb Everest, anybody can," she says.




COURTESY: SHAILEE BASNET



spread through school visits in Tanzania as it travels from one school to another in remote villages of Karatu and in South Africa. "The response has been great. The students are very curious to know about Mt Everest and Nepal and when asked,


who wants to be like Nim, dozens of hands go up in the air," admits Shailee.



The challenge has brought the seven members in a sisterhood of climbing and social activism. Team member Asha Singh says there is a strong bond between the members: “With strong-headed and helpful girls around, we barely have time to think about the difficulties.”

The Africa climb is being supported by WFP, Nepal Tourism Board, Nepal Mountaineering Association, Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal, The North

**WAVIN FLAG (l-r):** Chunu Shrestha, Nimdoma Sherpa, Pujan Acharya, Shailee Basnet, Asha Kumari Singh, Pema Diki Sherpa, and Maya Gurung gather for a picture after summiting Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

Face, and Panchakanya Group. The team is heading next to Mt Aconcagua after they find more support. Says Shaile: “Look at us, we have everything we need to complete the seven summits challenges: a strong team, proven track record and capabilities, the only thing we are short of is funds.” 

*Tsering Dolker Gurung*



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EVENTS

**HUMAN RIGHTS FILM SERIES**, screening powerful documentary throughout the month to create awareness on human rights and gender issues.  
7 to 31 March, 7pm, Attic Bar, Uttara Dhoka, [www.hrffn.org](http://www.hrffn.org)



- Himalayan rush**, run, swim, or cycle around Begnas Tal and promote healthy, community-based tourism around the lake.  
30 March, Pokhara, 9851021852/9851102046

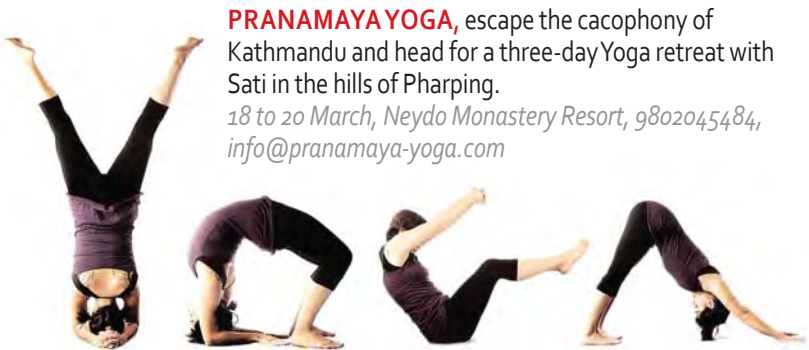
**Backyard screenings**, watch great cinema while enjoying delicious food.  
Rs 100, 2 to 28 March, every Thursday, 6.30pm, Backyard Café, Jhamsikhel

**Thai film festival 2013**, watch award-winning films that observe and explore Thai culture and society.
- 21 to 22 March, Nepal Tourism Board, 10am to 5pm, free tickets available at the Royal Thai Embassy

**Chintan chautari**, calling people from all walks of life to gather and follow the argument wherever it leads.  
15 March, 5pm, Sattya Collective, Jhamsikhel, 9843241490/9851053064

**Garage sale**, funky clothes, good food, lucky draw, and a kids' corner.  
16 March, 2 to 5pm, Home Guesthouse, Jhamsikhel, (01)5000044, [animalnepal@gmail.com](mailto:animalnepal@gmail.com)

**PRANAMAYA YOGA**, escape the cacophony of Kathmandu and head for a three-day Yoga retreat with Sati in the hills of Pharping.  
18 to 20 March, Neydo Monastery Resort, 9802045484, [info@pranamaya-yoga.com](mailto:info@pranamaya-yoga.com)



DINING



**YAK RESTAURANT**, serves authentic Chinese food, try the mala tofu, chicken with fungus and spicy pork spare ribs.  
Boudha, Kathmandu

**The Village Cafe**, authentic Newari food that comes straight from the heart.  
Pulchok



**BAGAICHA**, serves Nepali, Indian, Chinese, Continental, and Thai dishes.  
Jawalakhel

**Little Italy**, turn vegetarian at this Italian food chain and don't forget to end your meal with the chef's special chocolate bomb.  
Darbar Marg

**Bombay Masala**, transcend the limits of geography with a wide variety of cuisine.  
Pulchok

**Mulchowk**, the blend of culinary expertise and charms of a bygone era.  
Babarmahal



**DRAGON CHINESE RESTAURANT**, try the Kung Pao Pork if alone and the Mai Cao if with company.  
Lakeside, Pokhara



**SAIGON PHO**, spacious interior with authentic Vietnamese dishes.  
Lajimpat

**Kasi**, spread out over a large terrace overlooking Phora Darbar, Kasi offers a delectable plate of Newari delicacies.  
Darbar Marg

**Himalayan Pizza**, this Italian restaurant has enough options to keep both adults and children coming back for more.  
Thamel

MUSIC



**ALICE**, the Swiss duo jams with Kiran Nepali, Hari Maharjan, and Rizu Tuladhar.  
21 March, 6.30pm, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

**Sundance music festival**, celebrate the arrival of the summer with great musicians from around the world and dance the night away.  
Rs 4000, 16 to 17 March, The Last Resort, Sindhupalchok

**Live at Cafe 32**, live music and delicious food every Friday. 6pm onwards, Cafe 32, Battisputali, (01)4244231

**PUNK ROCK FRIDAY**, have a good time with the bands Rai ko Ris, The Doltish, and Squirt Guns, whose albums will also be on sale.  
Rs 100, 15 March, 7.30 to 10pm, House of Music, Thamel



BONJOUR!

Come celebrate French language and culture this week at Alliance Française. Francophone Week will see concerts, parties, karaoke, flash mobs, exhibition, and many festivities taking place in Kathmandu. This unique event will be a way to discover or re-discover your love of all things French.

- 15 March, 6.30pm, Chez Caroline, Kantipur TV
- 18 March, 6.30pm, Palet Breton, Alliance Française, Teku
- 19 March, 6pm, Soiree Karaoke, Alliance Française, Teku
- 20 March, 2.30pm, Flash Mob, Civil Mall, Sundhara
- 21 March, 6.30pm, Alice and guests live, Moksh, Jhamsikhel
- 17 to 23 March, an exhibition of Francophone comics, Alliance Française, Teku



In the steps of their fathers

Every year 10,000 young Nepali men vie for the 200 or so openings in the British Army which has been recruiting soldiers from Nepal for 200 years, ever since the end of the Anglo-Nepal Wars of 1814-16.

Kesang Tseten's documentary *Who will be a Gurkha* looks at the selection process where the boys, attracted by the myth and glamour of Gurkhas, seek to go for glory in spite of the dangers of death in the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq.

The film won the top award at Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival 2012 and also featured at the International Film Festival of Amsterdam. It will hit theatres next week making it the first Nepali documentary to be screened in cinemas.

*Who will be a Gurkha* showing at QFX cinemas from 15 March onwards



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Gaurighat, Lakeside, (061)465819

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**POKHARA GRANDE**, a swimming pool to escape from the sweltering heat, a massage parlour and spa to loosen up, and a gym to release stress, all in all a great place to unwind.

Lakeside, Pokhara, (61)460210

**Charikot Panorama Resort**, enjoy mountain views and local culture in the historic town of Charikot. Special packages on offer. Charikot, Dolakha, 01-5529463, thapamaag@gmail.com

DANCE  
DANCE  
DANCE

The eighth annual Sundance Music festival is upon us and will once again bring together music lovers and musicians to the lush green setting of the Last Resort near the Tibetan border.

Established eight years ago, the Sundance Festival is still the only overnight open-air live music event in Nepal. The festival has been extremely popular with both tourists and locals alike, and gives Nepali bands a chance to jive with international groups.

This year's edition will feature Joint Family international, What The Funk- We are Soul'D out, Drummer's Circle, Subani Moktan, Albatross, Confusion, Triplicity, EnVivo, The Boys Next Door, Dj Rabbit, and Dj BPM, all of who will make sure you won't get a minute's sleep.

It will be an early morning departure on 16 March and guests are requested to bring their own sleeping bags.

Rs 4,000, 16 to 17 March, The Last Resort  
Tickets at the Last Resort Office, Thamel, and Moksh, Pulchok  
(01)4701247/4700525, info@thelastresort.com.np



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## Swagatam

The Circus Kathmandu group welcomes you to yet another performance of high-flying acrobatics. Following the popularity and critical acclaim of 'contemporary circus' throughout the world, Nepal's talented acrobats, aerialists, and physical performers will work together on a contemporary circus of their own to regale you.

Some of the performers were victims of child-trafficking and as they will astound you with their originality, energy, and skills and tell the stories of their past and present.

Some artwork and jewellery will be available for purchase at the shows and part of the proceeds will go to the anti child-trafficking charity Freedom Matters.



Rs 500/1,000/1,500, 15 to 16 March, 1pm and 6pm  
DAV School, Jawalakhel, 9841549811

Tickets at Cafe Soma, Top of the World Cafe, Backyard Pub, and Summit Hotel in Lalitpur, and Nepal Music in Thamel

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1 Naiche at harvest time, blessed relief after a fruitless slog up from Taal.

PICS: RABI THAPA



2 Twin towers loom above our picnic spot on the way to Namkhe Bhanjyang.



3 Lamjung Himal (6932m) flanked by the Annapurnas from Namkhe Bhanjyang.

KANCHI TAMANG



4 The free-flowing Duna Lake, below Manaslu. Locals downriver, nervous and misinformed following the Seti floods, wondered if a glacial lake outburst was imminent.

# OFF THE

Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where the

RABI THAPA

The army man ran full pelt, flailing his arms, shouting. Seconds later he reappeared on the far side of the field, in the wake of a galloping white horse. Travellers gathered behind us, impatient to be on their way. When the man returned, panting, he had to restrain a dog from trotting into the blast zone. “Hyaaa let that good-for-nothing die!” muttered an older man, just before two sharp explosions plumed up from the forested ridge obscuring the new road. A hundred metres away an excavator brushed rocks away in a constant clatter. It was just another day on the Annapurna Circuit.

The 18-day classic around the Annapurna massif is fading into history. Trekkers still lug their packs over the 5400m Thorung-La, but their numbers are much diminished. Tourism entrepreneurs are no longer able to ignore the impact of the ragged scratch of a road the Nepal Army has blasted up on either side of the horseshoe circuit. With other trails opening up across the country (notably, the Manaslu Circuit next door), there’s no doubt the region’s crown jewel of a trek has lost its lustre.

Manang district’s first pilot, Tripple P Gurung (*see box*), has spent years talking to the villagers about the need to adapt to the new ground realities. Last June, with some support from the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, he led a survey of potential routes in the eastern reaches of the Annapurna Circuit.

“It’s like this, buwa,” he tells the elders of the settlements we pass through. “The road is here, whether you like it or not. There will be less people doing the 18-day circuit. But there are different kinds of tourists, so you have to be open to the idea of promoting different kinds of treks. Some of these will even be made possible by the road.”

From Taal, the first village in Manang district, our amateur survey was to follow a ‘hunter’s trail’ to Naiche (*see map*). The route was meant to be difficult but passable and was described to us as a viable alternative with a great many approving nods by a



council of villagers. But two days of teetering up and down grassy cliffs behind our local guide, many a nettling scratch and tingling nerve later, we could still espy the rusty tin roofs of Taal along the Marsyangdi River.

It was a disappointing payback for our efforts. Water was scarce, the paths were ill defined, and there was nothing to see that you couldn’t see from the riverine route (and future road) to Naiche – which would have taken five hours instead of the fifteen for our detour.

Naiche’s charm and chicken curry soothed our tired limbs as, once more, we gathered the villagers round. This time, we were to veer right off the Annapurna Circuit, visit Duna Lake, then cross a pass down to Guo to join the last leg of the Manaslu Circuit. The villagers delighted in having us laboriously copy out Gurung place names in lieu of the Nepali-language variants forced upon their landmarks and the next morning we split into two groups.

The ‘easier’ route was a long slog up to Krom (Alubari) and down again; the lower route cut through thick subtropical jungle, with a few very rickety ladders and steep scrambles thrown into the mix. Reunited late in the day, we overnighted in a cave and pushed on through pine forests and late summer blooms to turquoise Duna Lake.



5 Slippin’ and slidin’ to the pass into Namkhe Bhanjyang.

KANCHI TAMANG



# THE ROAD

There is no path and leave a trail - Ralph Waldo Emerson



Then we backtracked towards camp below Kyampu Danda. My first sight of an impeyan pheasant - a splash of a rainbow against the forbidding alpine terrain - made up for the exhausting trudge in the evening drizzle.

Surveying the monsoon-smudged panorama from the top of the 4400m pass the next morning, we felt, palpably, the potential of linking up the Annapurna and Manaslu circuits. All we had to do was heave ourselves down to Guo, down by the Dudh Khola. The only problem was no one had crossed from Naiche to Guo in at least 150 years.

Despite the best efforts of our guide, we got hopelessly lost. Stumbling from ravine to gnat-infested jungle to ice-frosted trails and back again, it took us nearly 10 hours to descend two kilometres. When we finally got to Guo and gasped out where we'd come from, a hotel owner cracked a gold-toothed smile and accused us of pulling her leg: "Dhaateko?"

The final leg of our survey, from the wonderfully picturesque village of Taiche, was a three-day hike through the badlands below Kangaru Himal (6981m), to the east of two villages recently incorporated into the tourist trail, Nar and Phu. We pushed vertically up from Taiche, through forests running with streams and dappled with

wild strawberries, and into the shadows of gigantic grey monoliths. Past yaks and horses seemingly abandoned for the duration of the grazing season, we then moved up through misty mountains to a 4900m pass, skittering over rock and ice to finally behold the burnt sienna of Namkye Bhanjyang, frequented exclusively by yarsagumba pickers.

Orange and blue tarps dotted the lower reaches of the plateau and soon we encountered yarsa pickers scouring the earth for the caterpillar fungus so beloved of Chinese medicine. We braved another pass - where two members of our party slid off the trail onto the snow before coming to rest short of an abyss - and eventually arrived at a mist-drenched temporary settlement where scores of pickers huddled around fireplaces dispensing burnt yak meat and raksi. It was the perfect setting for the next morning's crystal clear vista reaching from Lamjung Himal (6932m) to Annapurna III (7555m). Our survey concluded with a long descent to Meta, where we joined the Annapurna Circuit at Koto.

It was a quick walk back to Chyamche and a jeep, stopping only to observe the damage wrought by a landslide close to Taal. The road was here, but it wouldn't be fully functional for a good many years, even if it was already affecting the entire region.

"If you really want to know if locals want the road, you'll have to interview everyone in the village," young Dudh Jung Gurung declared to us en route.

Whatever one's opinion, it seemed clear at least that the demise of the Annapurna Circuit wasn't synonymous with the demise of trekking tourism. Rather, it could be seen as launching pad for a more variegated tourist industry. As we dusted down our weary limbs and packed away our GPS units, we hoped that the paths we'd trodden would one day graduate into trails of discovery for those seeking more than a 'reboot' of the beaten track. Wild Nepal lives on, just not where we've grown accustomed to finding it. 🇳🇵

## Nature's bounty

Travelling as we did with knowledgeable local guides, the survey team had an excellent opportunity to identify a plethora of medicinal herbs in the jungles and high plateaus between the Annapurna and Manaslu Circuits: Padamchal, Banlasun, Nirmasi, and Satuwa, to name a few. Passing through yarsagumba territory below Kangaru Himal it was evident how crucial these herbs are to the livelihoods of the mountain peoples, especially those who do not benefit from the tourist dollar and how overharvesting may jeopardise the future of the entire region. For our part, we indulged in a little wild harvesting for the dinner pot - Lasunsaag, a garlic-scented green, was a favourite. Not so much a chewy fungus whose Gurung name, we belatedly discovered, translated to 'skin mushroom'.



## Blazing trails



RABI THAPA

Tripple Gurung (pic, above at Guo Pass) is adamant that words be followed by action on the part of locals as far as tourist routes are concerned - action to build, mark and maintain trails, set up water sources, teahouses and camping spots, and market new routes - underpinned by government funding. For this to happen, though, all stakeholders have to be convinced of the feasibility of a new route.

The fact that locals walk from A to B doesn't mean the world can follow. Our survey team deployed GPS (Global Positioning System) units to map out the routes walked, noted where trail improvement would be needed, and used its collective experience to gauge the suitability of the routes for future hikers in terms of difficulty, camping spots, and water sources as well as natural and cultural highlights.

The good news is Gurung has secured funding from the Trekking Agencies' Association of Nepal for a professional survey of the route this April. The expedition will confirm the viability of trails to Duna Lake (the 'rhododendron trail') and through Namkye Bhanjyang (the 'yarsagumba trail').



KANCHA TAMANG



Enroute to Duna Lake from Naiche.

Lamjung Himal (6932m) through a long lens.



# SEARCHING for SUGAR MAN



**MUST SEE**  
**Sophia Pande**

**M**aking a documentary after most of the major events have already taken place far in the past is a difficult matter. Usually, the filmmaker is stuck with trying to reconstruct the story around interviews, but using people as 'talking heads' to tell a story is never very successful. It is not cinematic, occasionally very boring, and, most people do not come across well on film.

*Searching for Sugar Man*, this year's winner in the 'Best Documentary' category at the 85th Academy Awards faced this very problem. The film reconstructs the search for an elusive musician called 'Rodriguez' who was discovered in the early 1970s singing in a smoky Detroit bar. The producers who found him were convinced they had found the next Bob Dylan, only better. Mysteriously, his first album hardly sold, the second one suffered a similar fate and

his record label dropped him as a consequence. Sixto Rodriguez, a wildly talented musician with epic song-writing skills, disappeared off the face of the North American music scene.

Strangely, however, Rodriguez's music reached Cape Town, South Africa, not long after. There, his first two records *Cold Fact* and *Coming from Reality* spread across the young white community like wild fire, speaking with its youthful lyrics about change and anti establishment-ism to a community censored by apartheid politics and yearning for something that would catalyse their growing dissatisfaction with the status quo.

As his popularity spread, so too did the mystery surrounding him. Rumours claimed that Rodriguez has self-immolated on stage, another claimed he had shot himself in the head after a disastrous performance. All of these stories had something in common: no one seemed to really know anything about this hallowed musician.

Malik Bendjelloul's documentary is thus a kind of film version of a classic detective story

as he sets out to interview two Cape Town fans who decided to track down their idol in the late 1990s.

What follows is an extraordinary story about a singularly original musician and the power of his music.

As I mentioned, the film is a detective story at heart and to elaborate further would be to give away the mystery. However, there is much to say about the documentary regardless.

Filmed with stunning scenery traversing Cape Town, California, and Detroit, this documentary makes full use of all the tricks of the trade when faced with trying to reconstruct a story. Bendjelloul does not hesitate to use animation, and his reconstructed scenes are shot on grainy 8-millimetre film to evoke a certain era.

Sometimes *Searching for Sugar Man* is a bit slow, conclusions coming together much later in the film than in the viewer's mind, but we are willing to sit through the film for the beauty of Rodriguez's songs that are cleverly woven into the narrative thread and of course the desire to know what really happened.



Most of the time documentaries are difficult to make. It is easy to fall into the trap of sensationalising events, manipulating your key characters to simulate drama, and getting the essential bits from hours long interviews. Most of what we see today which is labelled documentary are often facile pieces of work, put together in a hodgepodge manner for maximum effect.

*Searching for Sugar Man* is an exception. Watch it for its amazing content and the integrity of its subject matter. It will change your notion of fame, whatever it is. Watch it too for its creativity. Rarely has a filmmaker made so much from being given so little to work with. 🍷

**GIZMO by YANTRICK**



## The killer mouse

If you're a professional or even an occasional gamer you probably own at least one Razer device. Best known for its high-performance mice, the 'for-gamers, by-gamers' company has just added DeathAdder 2013 to its arsenal.

Unlike other mice, Razer DeathAdder is ergonomically designed for a right-hand grip. Apologies to left-handed gamers, but most games, especially first person shooters, are designed with the right-handed player in mind with the left-hand being used to control movement and secondary commands. The curves of the mouse allow your hand and fingers to grip it naturally and comfortably, which is a huge bonus for those all-night marathon sessions when other mice would cause your hand to cramp up. Thanks to the design, my reflexes remained as quick as ever even after hours of use.

The other main feature of DeathAdder is its lethal accuracy and lightning fast tracking speed. Boasting a 6400 dpi optical sensor which enables speeds of up to 200 inches per second and 50g acceleration, the mouse obeys every command almost instantly and gives you instantaneous reaction times.

I took the DeathAdder for a spin by playing *Team Fortress 2*, the massively popular first-person shooter from *Valve Games*. The speed and responsiveness of the mouse was a welcome advantage, as it enabled me to track the movement of my enemies and line up shots with great accuracy. In a game where every second is crucial, DeathAdder certainly made its mark.

For slower paced games like the real-time strategy *Command and Conquer 4*, DeathAdder once again scored high points thanks to its programmable side buttons easily accessible by thumb. You can program up to five separate commands on the side buttons, lessening your dependence on the keyboard and a decided advantage during large-scale battles where quickly issuing commands is the key to victory.

In addition to its sleek looks, including improved rubber grips at the side for enhanced control, DeathAdder also features something called the Razer Synapse 2.0, which automatically syncs your mouse to a cloud server every time you log on to a game. This means you don't have to waste time keying in your preferred settings and user options each time you log on, the mouse does it for you.

DeathAdder is fully compatible with both PC and Mac computers as long as you have a USB port. It works on Windows XP and higher systems, while for the Mac it functions on OS X 10.6 and above. You'll need a working Internet connection to activate your Razer Synapse service, but other than that you can plug and play straight away.

In Kathmandu, Razer DeathAdder is available from Shizuku Tech, an electronics store beside Madan Smarak Higher Secondary School in Pulchok. At Rs 7,499 a piece after taxes, it will empty many wallets but it's definitely a worthwhile investment for us hardcore gamers.

**Yantrick's verdict: Razer DeathAdder is one of the best, if not the best gaming mouse available in the market today. Its ergonomic design and nimble optical sensor are a welcome addition to every virtual warrior's armoury.**

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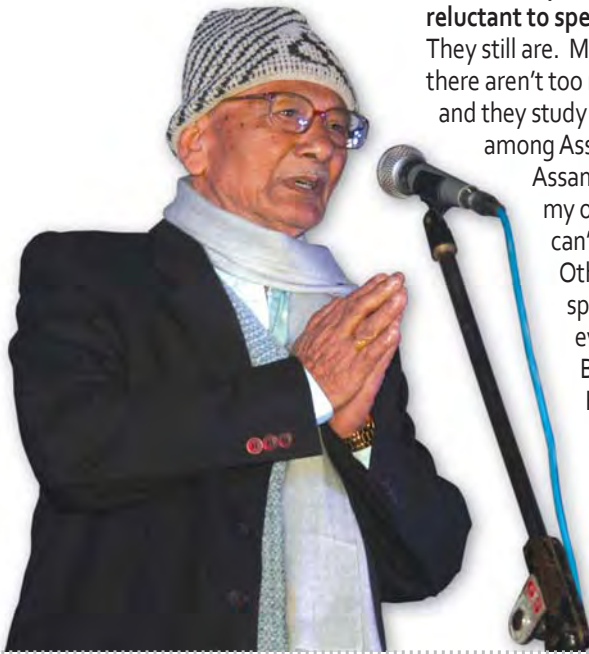


# "I feel like I've come home"

Lil Bahadur Chettri is 80 and hardly knows the country of his ancestors, even though he has written with emotion and accuracy the pain of migration in his famous novel, *Basain*. He visited Dharan recently for a literature conference where *Nepali Times*' Sita Mademba interviewed him.

**Nepali Times:** What is the situation of the Nepali language in India and Assam?

**Lil Bahadur Chettri:** There is a language movement going on to try to pressure the Assam state government to make Nepali a subject in schools and colleges. The government has in principle agreed and if this happens it will strengthen the role and position of the Nepali language in India. People of Nepali origin yearn to learn the language and literature of their mother country, we are trying to publish more books.



**This isn't new, Nepali settlers in India have been trying to keep their mother tongue alive. Now, there are even more Nepalis and there are more language related activities.** If nothing else, Nepalis in India are writing books in Nepali. There are also other activities to conserve folk songs, dances, and culture. Nepali was included in the 8th Schedule and accepted as an official language. It is possible to get a degree in Nepali through distance learning and there is interest in doing masters in Nepali.

**Is it true Nepalis used to be reluctant to speak Nepali in Assam?** They still are. Mostly in areas where there aren't too many Nepalis, and they study in Assamese, live among Assamese, and marry Assamese. The children of my own younger sisters can't speak Nepali. Others are ashamed to speak Nepali in public even if they know it. But since Bhupen Hazarika wore the Nepali cap we are more accepted. We even started calling the Nepali cap, the 'Bhupen Cap'.

**Are there Nepali books being published in Assam?**

If you count from the beginning, there must have been about 40 books published so far and up to 250 books of Nepali poetry. The quantity is going up, but we have to preserve the quality of writing. The state of newspapers and periodicals is not good. They are hard to sustain because of the lack of readership and advertising.

**How does it feel to be back in Nepal?**

My ancestral home is in Sudap of Terathum district and my father went to India when he was a boy. I was born in Guwahati in Assam and I based the plot and characters in my book *Basain* on my father and grandfather's personal experiences that forced them to migrate. I don't come to Nepal that often and there aren't many links with the larger family. But when I meet Nepalis, or come to Nepal, I feel like I've come home. It feels like I am cured of the stress of exile. Whenever Nepalis come to Assam, I take them around myself in my scooter. Meetings like this one in Dharan will build bridges between Nepalis in Nepal and Nepalis in India.

## The return of the native

When Lil Bahadur Chettri published his slim novel, *Basain*, in 1958 it evoked a powerful response among Nepalis in Nepal and abroad. Chettri, a descendant of Nepali immigrants, wrote the book in Assam where he still lives basing his portrayal of rural Nepal on interviews with more recent Nepali migrants to India.

*Basain* went on to become a best-seller because its heart-wrenching plot was familiar to almost every family in Nepal who has a relative working abroad. It also became a prescribed text book in high schools, and every literate Nepali has read it. In 2005, *Basain* was made into a Nepali feature film and five years ago it was published in translation by Michael J Hutt, professor of Nepali at the School of African and Oriental Studies in London with the English title *Mountains Painted with Turmeric*. The caste and gender discrimination, poverty, and injustice that spurred Chettri to write the book 55 years ago still exist and some would say are even more entrenched. But so is the fortitude and generosity of the Nepali spirit portrayed in the 70-page novel. Entrenched oppression forced generations of Nepalis to migrate to the Madhes or Muglan, now they also go to Muscat and Malaysia.

The story is set somewhere in the multi-ethnic hills of eastern Nepal. Dhane's family lives a precarious, but contented existence. A family tragedy and the weight of subjugation by powerful village loan sharks force him to migrate. This misery and mystery is the story of millions of Nepali families through history.

Today, Nepal's rural youth are selling off ancestral land to pay middlemen to take them abroad, but the wrenching dislocation is the same. That is also the reason Hutt says he chose to translate *Basain*: "The way a family's dispossession and flight from Nepal are represented [in



the novel] tells us something about the historical fact of migration from the Nepalese hills, as well as reveals the author's attitudes to the fact."

Kunda Dixit  
*Mountains Painted with Turmeric (Basain)*  
Lil Bahadur Chettri  
Translated by Michael J Hutt  
Columbia University Press, 2008, Pages 144  
Hardcover

## Golden Dragon



BHRIKUTI RAI

we were given fortune cookies to warn us of the impending bad food, we would have left the red sea with minimal damage to our eyes and tummies.

We began lunch with a bowl of vegetable hot and sour soup (Rs 175) that looked appetising on the photo on the menu. In reality, it could be mistaken for a simple egg soup. With no vegetables and the overpowering hotness of chillies, the soup was just a taste of what awaited us. We dug into our second order of Peking fish fritt (Rs 225), fried pieces of fish sautéed with spring onions, carrots and garnished with red chilli flakes, with much enthusiasm, only to be disappointed again. More spring onions than actual pieces of fish decorated the plate and the dish was nothing to write home about.

Spicy Chinese style pork (Rs 225) was another let down because rather than pork meat, we were served a few thin slices of pork skin stir fried in sesame oil with garlic and coriander. Although oily, the gravy pleased our taste buds and we saved some for later to be

eaten with rice.

For mains we ordered pak choy with black mushroom (Rs 255), sesame chicken (Rs 280), and bowls of steam rice (Rs 80). Golden Dragon even manages to spoil good old simple steamed rice. I still can't decide if the rice was

stale or under-cooked, but it came to us lukewarm, definitely not what we wanted on a rainy day. With cubes of deep fried chicken, that hadn't been seasoned well and flavours seeping only to the outer skin, the sesame chicken was another bad choice.

The only dish that didn't have us, a trio of hungry women, complaining was the cabbage and black mushroom stir fry, which surprisingly was served in a bigger platter and prepared well.

Golden Dragon migrated from its base in Thamel to Jhamsikhel three months ago, but there were only two other customers besides us during rush hour lunch-time. If the restaurant served more generous portions and focused on its cuisine rather than unnecessary 'Chinese' details, it could attract a larger share of the food-loving Jhamel crowd.  Tsering Dolker

*How to get there: Golden Dragon is opposite Roadhouse Cafe in Jhamsikhel in the alley that leads towards Alpha's High School.*



SOMEPLACE ELSE

With every inch decked out in red wallpaper, and red paper lanterns, and red carpet, Golden Dragon ticks all the boxes for the ultimate Chinese restaurant stereotype. It even has a fish tank, a giant statue, and a seven page long menu offering everything from chicken chilli to Peking fish fritt to the grander hot pot to complete your 'authentic' Chinese experience. Perhaps if







the country. The World Health Organisation was immediately notified and officials in the 13 countries have been trying tirelessly to track down thousands of people the detainee may have come in contact with to see if they were infected with TB. Just reconstructing his exact path must be a daunting task.

# Travelling TB



**DHANVANTARI**  
**Buddha Basnyat, MD**

In November 2012 in the US-Mexico border at Texas, the Border Patrol detained a Nepali man who was trying to get into the country illegally. This would have been just another case of illegal entry if the detainee had not been coughing constantly.


The police made him undergo a health examination which showed he had tuberculosis (TB), not the regular, drug-sensitive TB, but the resistant kind. In fact the organism was super resistant, known as XDR: extensive drug resistance. There

is a multi-drug resistance (MDR) TB, but XDR is deadlier as it is resistant to many more drugs.

During his three month ordeal to reach the US, the man travelled by air, car, boat, and foot across 13 countries. TB can be transmitted from person to person through breathing so every time he coughed he could have possibly spread life-threatening bacteria across the world. This particular strain of XDR TB had been identified once before in the US and the patient was again a Nepali.

XDR is uncommon in the US. In 2011 only six cases were identified. So these two cases of the same strain from Nepal caused a great deal of alarm in

Although TB rates in Nepal have fallen in the past decade in large part due to the DOTS (directly observed treatment) program introduced by the government in the early 1990s, it is still one of the biggest killers of Nepalis. What is more worrisome, however, is the rise in MDR and XDR cases because patients are either misusing or not completing their treatment.

While countries like the US spend millions trying to prevent the spread of TB, we in South Asia have focused largely on treatment. There have been no efforts made to detect the disease within households of TB patients or hospitals. Luckily new detection technology like the WHO-endorsed GeneXpert machine (pic, above), now available in Nepal, will help detect resistant cases so that therapy can be started early to strengthen the DOTS program. 

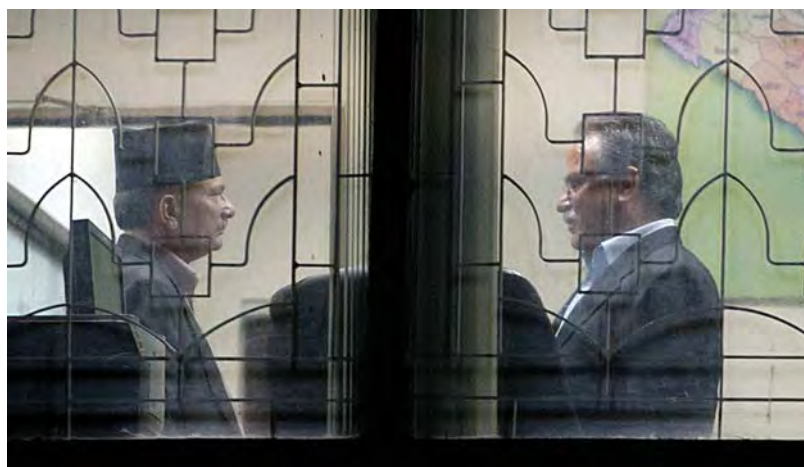
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BIKRAM RAI

**TROUBLE COMRADE:** PM Bhattarai and Pushpa Kamal Dahal chat after the four parties failed to come to an agreement in Baneswor on Saturday.



BIKRAM RAI

**GETTING STRONGER:** A group of women protest in front of Baluwatar on International Women's Day on Friday in solidarity with Occupy Baluwatar movement.



KRISHNA SINJALI

**BOOK WORM:** An elderly man looks over books at the Art and Literary Festival 2069 in Kakarvitta organised by Readers Jhapa.

## READERS' PHOTO



SATHAPORN KAMKONG

**BRICK BY BRICK:** An aerial view of Bhaktapur with the familiar sight of a brick kiln in the centre surrounded by a cluster of houses.



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# Eye for an eye

The protests in Dhaka's Shahbag Square use non-violence as a strategy to achieve a violent goal

The protest the Bangladeshis have mounted at Shahbag Square in Dhaka raises several perturbing questions, which we in our understandable glee over Islamists being cornered, have ignored to ask. The first: can we describe as non-violent a movement which peacefully pursues a goal essentially violent in nature?

The goal of the Shahbag protest demands the hanging of all those arrayed in the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) for killing people during Bangladesh's war of liberation in 1971. It was sparked off at the ICT awarding life imprisonment to Jamaat-e-Islami leader Abdul Quader Mollah, goading a disappointed people to bay for his death. The trial and subsequent protests also have lessons for Nepal, where a Truth and Reconciliation Bill to address war crimes has become a vital bargaining point over the formation of an election government.

As the gathering at Shahbag swelled to mammoth proportions, death became the leitmotif of the protest. It



WWW.SHAHBAGPROTEST.COM

surprised no one to see them erupt into thunderous applause at the news that another Jamaat leader, Delwar Hossain Sayedee, had been sentenced to death. It would seem the protestors at Shahbag won't return home until all the nine accused of war crimes have been sent to the gallows.

Whether or not the Bangladeshis succeed in achieving their goal, they have certainly turned the philosophy of non-violence on its head. Nobody had ever thought that there could come a time or a movement which would have

people protest peacefully, not even lifting a hand or issuing dire threats, yet demand death for their opponents, as those accused of war crimes are for Shahbag. No longer do goons or revolutionaries want to mow down their rivals. Even peaceful protesters, our modern-day Gandhians, desire the death of their opponents. Indeed, Shahbag marks the appropriation of non-violence as a strategy to achieve a violent goal.

Perhaps the celebration of Shahbag without reservation is linked to the nature of debate


till now on what constitutes a non-violent movement. For long, its proponents have concentrated on debating the legitimacy of means/methods to achieve goals universally valued – for instance, independence from the foreign yoke, or ushering in of a democratic rule by overthrowing a dictator. They argued that a goal, however cherished and valued, did not justify all conceivable methods to realise it. Some were deemed outside the pale. Truth and peaceful protest were considered as important as the avowed goal, which an illegitimate method – violence – could sully and debase.

Shahbag seems to have reversed this equation: does a peaceful protest become illegitimate because its goal is violent? This question assumes importance as the Shahbag protesters neither want radical change in the judicial process nor a more skilled battery of prosecutors. Irrespective of the quality of evidence presented – which David Bergman, who manages bangladeshwarcrimes.blogspot.com, believes is questionable on many counts – Shahbag adamantly wants the accused hanged. It's a demand decidedly unreasonable, even murderous, which, in turn, renders the peaceful protest likewise.

A non-violent movement, historically, doesn't seek vengeance. In fact, it aims to break the cycle of violence-vengeance, persuade the oppressors about the illegitimacy of their method, and mount

moral pressure on them to transform themselves and rectify their mistakes. These principles guided Mahatma Gandhi in his endeavour to convince the British about the immorality of enslaving a people. Perhaps the Bangladeshis should recall the fast he undertook to stop the communal rioting in Noakhali and Kolkata, demanding neither imprisonment nor hanging for the perpetrators of violence, quite content at its cessation.

Obviously, it could be argued that in a democracy, which Bangladesh is, the popular will must prevail. Though we can't tell for sure whether Shahbag expresses the majority sentiment, the overwhelming victory of the ruling Awami League in the last election which it fought on the promise of bringing war criminals to expeditious trial, could be cited as an expression of the popular will. What would we say if the Jamaat, acquiring power 10 years from now, were to gather thousands of Islamists at Shahbag to accuse the current crop of leaders of conspiring to send their leaders to the gallows in 2013 and demand they be hanged?

We secularists are delighted because Shahbag appears to us a blow for secularism and moderate Islam. But, really, do the Bangladeshis need to consecrate the progressive idea of secularism in blood? This doesn't mean the wounds of Bangladesh should be allowed to fester. 

ashrafajaz3@gmail.com

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# Bhutan, Inc

Media struggles to survive in the Land of the Thunder Dragon

RON AUGUSTIN in THIMPHU

Bhutan's Prime Minister Lyonchhen Jigmi Thinley could not have been more blunt. He reminded newspaper publishers last week that their poor financial performance was not the government's problem, but their own.

Since Bhutan embarked on a policy of media liberalisation in 2006, ending the era of only one newspaper, the number of newspapers has increased twelve fold. There are now eight weeklies, a daily, and four monthly newsmagazines in a country of less than 700,000 people about half of whom are illiterate. More than 80 per cent of the total \$5million annual advertising in Bhutan is from the government.

"The responsibility of a government in a democracy is to create an enabling environment where the independence and freedom of media are respected," Thinley said, "we have given you that."

He added that the state had done more than it needed to by providing advertisements to publications without relevant circulation and private media should make a greater effort to



**OLD NEW NEWSPAPER:** *The Journalist* satirises the Bhutan government's decision to restrict ads in a front-page cartoon.

stay in business.

None of the new publications have more than 2,000 readers and will not survive without government ads. Bhutan's oldest newspaper, *Kuensel*, was the first modern media when it started in the early 1960s as a small government bulletin issued by the Department of Information.

*Kuensel* has undergone two radical transformations in the last 50 years. In 1986, it got a fresh Columbia graduate, Kinley

Dorji, as its editor-in-chief who succeeded in changing it into a professional weekly newspaper in its present tabloid format. The second has been *Kuensel's* transformation into an autonomous public sector enterprise in 1992 and the paper becoming the country's only daily in April 2009.

Radio came to Bhutan as late as 1973, with an amateur station of the National Youth Association which was eventually upgraded and, in 1986, formalised as the national Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) which was also turned into a public sector corporation in 1992. It started tv broadcasts in 1999, four months before foreign satellite and cable tv were allowed and the advent of the Internet. In the past few years, six private FM stations have gone on air and with more than 100 productions so far, the local film industry seems to be thriving.

In 2006, two privately owned newspapers started publication: the Sunday newspaper *Bhutan Times* and the *Bhutan Observer*, a 14-page *Friday* weekly published from the border town of Phuentsholing.

For three years *Bhutan Times* managed to churn out a

weekly of 32 pages, until it lost so much money the staff quit to start *Sunday* and *The Journalist*, in 2009. *Bhutan Times* is still continuing with the help of media company K4, which also supports *Drukpa*, a monthly news magazine launched in 2009.

*Bhutan Observer* is struggling for its share in what it calls 'the already heated, hostile, and half-sized bazar that is the Bhutanese advertising market'. It has recently upgraded its online edition with dynamic, multimedia content.

In 2008, *Bhutan Today* was launched as a morning eight-page daily but has since gone bi-weekly. *Business Bhutan*, the country's first financial newspaper, started as a weekly in 2009. All periodicals have a main edition in English and a thinner edition in Dzongkha, or have Dzongkha pages. Since 2010 three Dzongkha weeklies were started, *Druk Nyetshul*, *Druk Yodzer*, and *Druk Gyelyong*. And in 2012, a bi-weekly broadsheet, *The Bhutanese*, also hit the stands.

*Kuensel* is still the most professional and effective newspaper and one of the few with a clear vision of its role in Bhutan's social and political transformation. It is financed by subscriptions, advertising, and printing works for third parties, since government funding stopped more than a decade ago. With a total circulation of over 12,000 in English and Dzongkha, it reaches 130,000 readers. Its website has 15,000

registered members and attracts, on average, 1,500 visitors every day.

One of the most visible indications of Bhutan's democratisation has been the opening up of the media, especially after the 2008 election. But with another election due on 23 April, Bhutan's media is using its new freedom to cover the five contesting parties.

Lily Wangchuk of the new Druk Chirwang Tshogpa party is worried that the media space is constricting. She told *The Bhutanese* last month the media was vulnerable because it depended on ads on the government and few corporates. This year Bhutan dropped 12 points to 82 in the global Press Freedom Index.

Most new media seem more interested in revenue than building content or developing a reader base. Based on a circulation audit conducted last year, a Government Advertising Policy has been prepared with guidelines for a more targeted media approach. The Election Commission, however, has revoked its earlier decision to supply election ads only to government media.

For private media, this will bring temporary respite, but it looks like the road to a viable business model is long.

*Ron Augustin is a print media management consultant based in Brussels who worked for printing projects in Bhutan in the 1990s.*

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न्यू पि. पि. बुक्स: कलकौ, ४२८०६७३, ४२८२४५१ | दीपसेवा कम्प्युनिकेशन: कोटेश्वर, ४६०००७० | सुमिता क्लासिफाईड: नयाँ बानेश्वर, ४१०४३३७ | शाई न्यूजिक: बापनाउँ, ४४६१३५५, ४४५३५१२

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# Feminine FM

Women-run community radios promote grassroots democracy and help fight domestic violence in Nepal

ANNIE O'KAIN in UDAYPUR

Radio in Nepal is a medium that transcends literacy, load shedding, poverty, even geography. It provides information, news, and entertainment to the public, but above all else, radio is a success because it is truly a democratic medium.

Women-run community radios embody democracy because they provide access, opportunity, and education. With Nepali society in a state of flux, women-run FM radios play a pivotal role as both models for their communities and mediators of change. Many of these stations provide access and opportunities for women to be knowledge producers and disseminators, giving them freedoms that they have never experienced before.

There are five women-run community radio stations. Three in the Tarai (Biratnagar, Udaypur, and Butwal) and two others in Parbat and Jumla. Radio Purwanchal in Biratnagar and Radio Mukti in Butwal were two of the first women-run stations. While Radio Purwanchal allows men to sit on its management committee, every level of Radio Mukti is completely women-run.

Women-run radio is a vital forum for discussion and information. Since its inception, women-run community radio programming has tackled hot topics such as violence against women. "I have learned a lot from the radio," says Mina, a listener of Radio Udaypur in Udaypur district. "Before my husband would

come home, having wasted his wages on alcohol, he would beat me. From the radio, I learned that his treatment of me was violence. From the radio, I learned of my condition and that I had the right not to be treated this way."

Coverage at these stations is not limited to domestic violence. In Biratnagar, Radio Purwanchal works closely with community groups to draw attention to cases of sex trafficking. "Women understand women's issues. So women-run radio is in a position to understand the plight of women in this country," says Bishnu Sharma, of the group, ABC Nepal. "It gives us a place to be heard, an opportunity for employment, a place where the stories of women and sexual violence are important, headline news." ABC receives three to four cases of sex trafficking or sexual violence a day and reports these daily on Radio Purwanchal.

Throughout Nepal many women experience violence every day, be it through the physical violence of leering stares and sexual assault, or the structural violence of poverty and a lack of education. Like most women in Nepal, the staff at women-run radio stations understand violence and discrimination firsthand.

"Men have had the opportunity to do radio work for a while," says Rupa, a staff member at Radio Didi Bahini in Parbat. "In order to do this work,



**RADIO ACTIVE:** Women gather in Tanki village of Morang for a Radio Purwanchal focus group (top). Radio Udaypur announcer Uma Baniya prepares to interact with listeners live from her studio (left), the radio receives at least one bag of audience feedback letters a week (above).

women must struggle and fight to prove that we are worthy... most people in our community see this and respect us for it." Radio allows women to give voice to their experiences. It serves as a safe space for these issues to be heard, while simultaneously spreading knowledge and awareness.

With elections around the corner, the importance of community radio becomes all the more vital in Nepal. Multiple elections have brought little, if any, substantial change since the monarchy was sidelined in 2006. In a

system where politicians have failed, radio has continued to be a functional outlet of democracy. Over the past 16 years, radio has been a vehicle for access, opportunity, and education in Nepal and women-run community radios have been playing an essential part in building an inclusive and working democratic system. 📻

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Women on air, #449  
Radio active women, #373

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# KRR to the rescue

Editorial, *Rajdhani*, 14 March

राजधानी

As the four parties have almost reached a positive conclusion on a CJ-led government, the 20 fringe-parties led by the CPN-M took no time to announce protests against Khil Raj Regmi's government. Governments may be replaced amidst opposing voices but what does this discontent mean for elections? Since the next polls will elect both the parliament and Constituent Assembly, no party big or small should be left out of discussions on critical matters like state reconstruction. As it stands, there are huge differences within the NC and UML about this electoral government and it will be difficult for them to head to elections in such divided conditions. It is crucial that these parties stem their own leaders' dissatisfaction before polls and also somehow

convince the CPN-M and other parties.

Faced with so many challenges, Regmi's government has to be very sensitive about how it moves ahead. At the same time, it has an

immense opportunity to change the future course of the country. However, this latest agreement to make Regmi lead the electoral government will only be meaningful if he can restore Nepal's derailed democracy by holding polls on time.



DIWAKAR CHETTRI

Editorial, *Annapurna Post*, 14 March

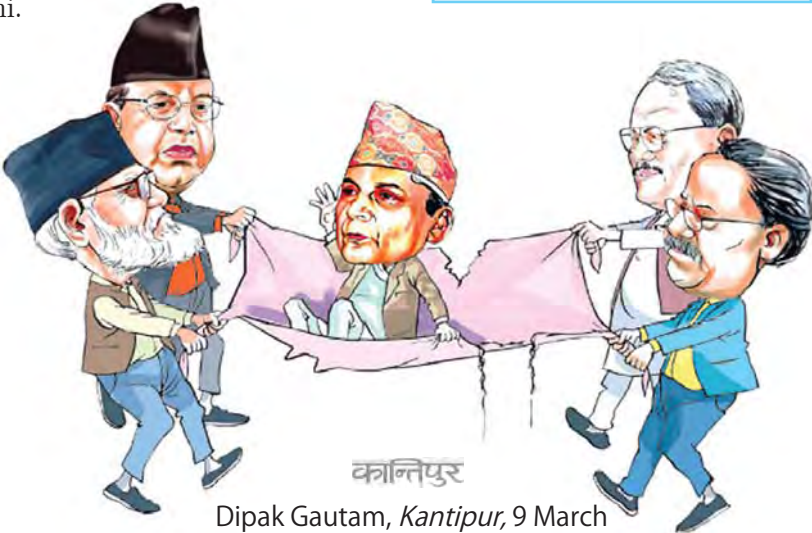
अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

After months of deadlock, it looks like the path to elections has finally cleared up. It would have been better if the parties had settled on a candidate from within. Had the NC and UML agreed to be part of the Baburam Bhattarai-led electoral government, we would have been talking about poll results by now. But there is no point crying over spilt milk. At least the latest political consensus has taken us out of the dark. The same man who did not extend the Constituent Assembly's term now has the keys to the electoral government. And his biggest challenge will be to hold polls on time. He will also have to convince the fringe parties, who have been against him from day one, to participate in the election. The Nepal Bar Association and civil society have expressed serious concerns over the principles of power separation and independent judiciary. It will be crucial for Regmi to establish himself through action amidst widespread criticism. The parties have handed Regmi the responsibility to implement the people's right to vote. If he succeeds, the country will certainly head in a better direction. The parties deserve a pat on their back and good luck to Regmi.

Editorial, *Nagarik*, 14 March

नागरिक

The biggest achievement for the CJ-led government would be to hold free and fair elections. But if it tries to tackle other problems faced by the country, elections will be sidelined. The current government was formed on the basis of political consensus and it will be answerable to the same. It will lose meaning the day parties lose belief in it. If this CJ-led government, which came into being after amendments were made to the constitution, can hold elections, it will have made an important contribution. We hope that Regmi and his team forget all previous biases and lead our politics towards healthy electoral competition in the future.



क्रान्तिपुर

Dipak Gautam, *Kantipur*, 9 March

## QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“The agreements that was reached after misinterpreting Article 158 make a joke out of democracy and party politics.”

Press statement by the Nepal Bar Association, 14 March



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The Department of Education (Ministry of Education, Government of Nepal) with the Rato Bangala Foundation (RBF) is hosting an International Conference on Education. The conference entitled 'Quality in the Classroom' is scheduled to take place between 4 and 7 April, 2013. The Conference is also supported by Development Partners: UNESCO, Unicef, Open Society Foundations and the Royal Norwegian Embassy.

The conference programme consists of an inaugural event on the first day, followed by three full days of presentations, paralleled with teacher training workshops on themes and topics related to quality in the classroom. Education specialists from overseas in the region and from within Nepal will present papers and conduct workshops focusing on issues of Policy, Teacher and Child development, Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation and many more. This conference aims to encompass a range of issues related to quality in the classroom catering to the needs of a variety of education stakeholders.

Being the first education conference of this scale and diversity, it has the potential to make landmark contribution to both the dialogue and implementation of how to achieve quality in the classroom.

Pre-registration is required to participate in the conference. For more information and registration procedure, please visit the conference website.

<http://ratobangalaconferences.edu.np>



## WEEKLY BAZAR POLL #4

Himal Khabarpatrika asks 375 respondents in 14 cities across Nepal every Monday for their opinion on contemporary issues. This week's result:

1. What do you think of the country's current economic condition?

Bad: 59.2%  
Okay: 28.2%  
Don't know: 11%  
Good: 1.6 1.6%

2. What do you think of employment prospects?

Bad: 77.7%  
Okay: 19%  
Good: 1.3%

3. How do you assess your current income?

Okay: 75.6%  
Bad: 12.3%  
Good: 11.5%



# Rules of engagement

Nepal's donors are hesitant to work with the government on local development because of lack of accountability and political will

NARESH NEWAR

**D**ebate about the efficacy of foreign aid in Nepal is as old as foreign aid itself, but often talk about effectiveness of aid doesn't go beyond a blame game between aid agencies and the government.

Lately, this debate has become more complicated because of the assertiveness shown by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Planning Commission (NPC), and the Finance Ministry about where aid should go and a new scrutiny of NGOs and INGOs which operate here.

The government wants aid to focus on infrastructure, health, and education and less on human rights, democracy, inclusion, and constitution writing. Donors have also come under criticism from politicians, civil society, and the media for stoking ethnic tensions by pushing identity-based federalism.

Donors, meanwhile, are increasingly bypassing the government to work directly with non-state actors and local delivery agencies. They say they need to do this because the lack of general and local elections has hurt accountability and oversight.

Then there are the usual problems of aid duplication and mismanagement. After the Paris Declaration of 2005, there was hope that ODA to Nepal would be more efficiently managed, but critics say, not much has changed.

"The National Planning Commission is the last to know when projects have already been signed. We are not consulted from the proposal phase on," complains NPC foreign aid department director, Rabi Sainju.

The NPC's role has now been restricted to coordinating with individual donors on specific issues, rather than as an institution dealing with aid management. Officials want the Ministry of Finance and NPC to phase out project-based implementation and increase the proportion of aid channelled 'in cash' through the national budget.

The problem, however, is that coordination among line ministries is



NARESH NEWAR

weak and donor financing is done in an ad hoc manner. But old habits die hard and aid agencies also do less to enhance national capacity by being project-driven and focusing on delivering basic services themselves.

Krishna Khanal, professor of political science at Tribhuvan University, says aid agencies haven't taken much of an initiative in capacity-building of national institutions. He faults the government with weak coordination and creating unnecessary obstacles in implementation, especially by line ministries. "There is a need to improve on local autonomy, but that doesn't mean donors should be in the business of delivery," Khanal told *Nepali Times*.

DDC and VDC offices are still functional, albeit without elected councils and they use the same community networks as the aid agencies while implementing projects in remote villages. "There are rules of engagement for donor agencies and they should stick to it by not implementing their projects

directly in the villages," says Gopal Yogi, senior vice president of the NGO Federation.

For donors, however, the most visible weakness in delivery is the lack of strong local governance in the absence of local elections. There also is no Parliamentary Accounts Committee and the CIAA and the Auditor General's office have been headless, so there is no oversight at all.

Swiss Ambassador Thomas Gass, who heads the donor group in the Nepal Peace Trust Fund, says: "As long as development cooperation is needed, we also have to assess on a case-by-case basis the implementation capacity of the state agency we plan to work with and how effective it is in the field."

But he added that the state is not the only provider of services in any country and non-governmental organisations can complement the government's work as a partner and watchdog to ensure accountability.

"At the moment, there is a vacuum at the local level in terms of local elected

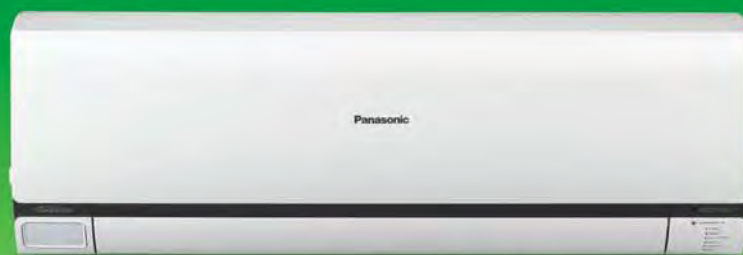
**GREAT EXPECTATIONS:** Both donors and local government end up using the same community networks like this female health volunteer in Humla. DFID is planning to implement its project directly because it says there are no skilled government workers. But since donors choose their own priority, agriculture is now under-funded and the government's budget for agriculture this year was down by 15 per cent.

bodies and there is no clear direction," says Dominic O'Neill, head of DFID Nepal program, which is increasing its aid level to GBP 100 million this year. Donors believe that there should be a more accountable interim body and structure at the village and district council level until local elections are held.

There is a clear hesitation among donors to hand over implementation to the government due to political instability, disinterest of politicians in poverty alleviation issues, and the lack of accountability at the local level. 🇳🇵

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# Chief Justice + Prime Minister = Chief Minister



A lot of people are a bit confused about how to address Hizzoner Regmi now that he is both CJ and PM. The title of Chairman of the Interim Administration (CIA) may give people the wrong idea and so would Antaram Pradhan Punch. Couple of permutations have come up: Chief Minister or Prime Justice to preside over an all-Bahun cabinet.

Last month, Nepal's bird wallahs held an Owl Conference in Chitwan to draw attention to endangered nocturnal avian life. They needn't have worried, we

have a political mechanism works by night and sleeps by day. But it would be an insult to compare our politicians to owls because they are wise. Good thing the Prez had the good sense to let out a big yawn on Wednesday night and tell everyone: "That's it, I'm going to bed."

The reason all big decisions here are taken in the dead of night is that our politicians and bureaucrats have learnt from bitter experience that agreements made in the evening are usually overturned by morning because of calls from unnamed diplomatic sources.

about late-November elections is being out of power means their funding will dry up and they can't finance elections. Where are they going to steal from, who is going to bribe them?

After the signing ceremony Wednesday night top leaders were all sitting around stiffly until photographers shouted out to them to hold hands. That is why the photo-op looks a G-8 summit. Jhusil Da, bit uncomfortable with all the touchy feely stuff, refused at first to hold hands with anyone in public. But he finally relented and reluctantly took JN's right hand. But poor Gutch, no one wanted to hold his hand.

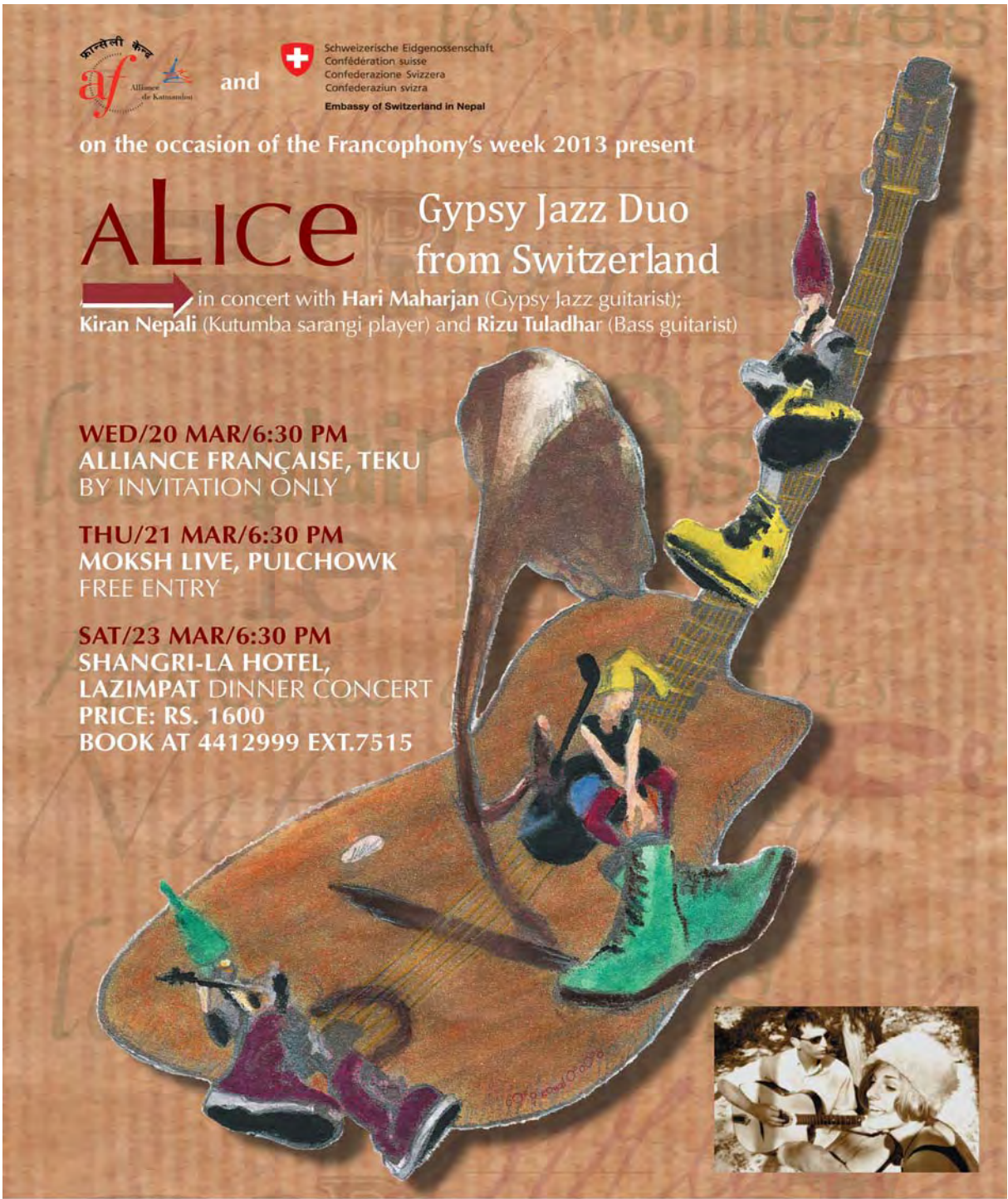
Speaking of whom, the new Chinese ambassador hit the ground running and complained to Comrade Awesome about Gutch not being cooperative in rounding up Tibetans.

We're all waiting to see what Chairman Regmi is going to do about convicted war criminal Bal Krishna Dhungel whom he sentenced to life imprisonment and who followed BRB like the lamb followed Mary while Laldhoj was PM.

By the way, if KRR hasn't stepped down as CJ does it mean that the Ass can be hauled over the coals for contempt of court?

So, it's finally official. Nepal is back to having a partyless system of government after 23 years in the wilderness.





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