Khil Raj Regmi glances at his watch after arriving for his first day at work in Singh 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.

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.

HIGH ROAD page 10-11

“All New Subaru Forester 2.0 LITRE AUTOMATIC TRANSMISSION”. Simply Sensational.

You’ve always been on top of your game, a sensational leader whose confidence has always stood against all odds, so why not let your confidence sway your motion on roads as well. Presenting the Subaru Forester, born with passion, power and style. Its captivating elegance, top class persona and contemporary styling make Subaru, a Subaru.
LET’S FACE IT

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

Nepal’s Gender Apartheid

Thank you Deepali Gurung for an excellent article (‘Nepal’s gender apartheid’, #486). It’s very sad to see how the attitude of the state has changed so little. The right to citizenship through the mother is assigned as a fundamental right in most countries and does not even need to be debated. The fact that the bureaucrats are 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 father’s or mothers citizenship.

MS

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

Kalpana Lamichhane

I fully support Deepali Gurung’s cause. However, I was sad to read the last paragraph where she argues that the state should allow Nepalis who pass on their citizenship to their children under certain circumstances. Why not? I understand a law seeped deeply in patriarchy is not easy to change, 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 their children, no ifs or buts, no strings attached.

Renu Shrestha

I hope Deepali Gurung’s powerful article is an eye opener to public 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 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 Tikuri Wick

My maid is stateless even though both her parents were Nepali. 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 Chhoti Kot. 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 Korala pulled it off. Deepali should write to Sujata and ask for some pointers since she so deftly overcame the citizenship law to make her daughter and grandson Nepali citizens. This clearly shows, there is a way (presumably a legal one) to get Nepali citizenship through a mother.

C Thapa

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.

Chatper

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, #486). 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 too many contradictory info on travel websites.

Jessica Chen

Foreign Domestic Policy

You are a patriotic state if you deny rightful entry to an internationally regarded spiritual leader like the Dalai Lama to a land that we claim to be the birthplace of Buddha. Just to please a state that has no respect for any global rules and values (‘Foreign domestic policy’, Anurag Acharya, #486). When your own people against them, you stand by them, not turn your back against them in the pretense of some made up ‘balancing act’ propaganda invented by the Shah kings who had to come to terms with their own day and age prejudices with its kins down south.

Krishna S

Countries have national interests, some not sandinistion notion of elevating international image. And if Nepal had fallen 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 political connections and dealings with Tibet) see Tibet through the rose-tinted glasses that is 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 Maiti Kuna who deserve recognition (‘The Russia returns’, Surendra Pandey, #486). Here are some names: Haril Man Shrestha (propaganda of 84,000MW capacity hydropower in Nepal), former ministers Hari Babur Banerj and Nirmal Acharya, former vice-cancellors of Tribhuwan University Madhav Sharma and Govind Sharma.

Bijaya

HOP on

NT seems fed up with Nepal politics and its new interest in sex and toys is surprising. Why not supply some to our leaders (Gadget review, #487)?

Josh Prakash Chandra

Did the election decision remove the leaders from the race? (Gadget review, #487)?

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

Marc

FRESH FACES

Good editorial (‘Fresh Faces’, #486). I agree and tragedy of cruelty 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 required government, 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 first five days I spent in Lumbini during last year’s autumn (‘Whose Lumbini is it anyway?’, Trishna Rana, #486). 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?

Easterner

The holiday for... the holiday in Nepal... ‘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?

Easterner

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 mixed 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 election 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 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

http://web.nepalitimes.com

PULL OUT

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Weekly Internet Poll #647

Total votes: 874

Tibet votes: 51

RESULT: "I support the Tibetan government in exile’s decision to not recognize the New Delhi’s government."

Tibet votes: 363

RESULT: "I don’t support the Tibetan government in exile’s decision to not recognize the New Delhi’s government."

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"I support the Tibetan government in exile’s decision to not recognize the New Delhi’s government."

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**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 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 political parties and candidates on offer. If they play their cards right, they could win this election. But that is a big ‘if’.”

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.

Although all political parties have a negative image, the NC lifts the worries among those who had a preference for a particular party. This could be an anti-incumbency advantage and also because people believe the NC should lead the government because it is its ‘turn’. Respondents seem to prefer the dour Sushil Koirala not because of his personality, but because his candidacy may have untangled the political deadlock.

The other factor at play seems to be the continued unpopularity of ethnicity-based 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, Mamroh Nath Bhattarai.

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Politics came way down on their list, even though only through their links to the economy.
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.

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.

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.
MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS

Himalmedia has been tracking the people’s main preoccupations for the past 15 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 Bhattacharya-led government.

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.

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.

WHAT KIND OF CONSTITUTION?

As in the previous three years, respondents overwhelmingly blame politicians for the inability of the GA 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 that ethnicity-based federalism is a bad idea. Until last year, they preferred geographical demarcation based on Himal-Pahad-Tarai, this year the majorit seem to have gone back to turning existing anchals into provincial boundaries.

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.

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 Baburam 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 reected 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 by end March.

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

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If you think foreign interference, which power is meddling?

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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.

WHAT’S THE FAMILY GET TOGETHER PLAN THIS SATURDAY??

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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?

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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 too,” Thakur told me with tears streaming down his wizened cheeks, “how long do we have to live in Nepal before my descendants 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.
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 effluence 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.

KATHMANDU

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.

It is this message the team hopes to 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 Face, and Panchakanya Group. The team is heading next to Mt Aconcagua after they find more support. Says Shailee: “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.”

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Himalayan rush, run, swim, or cycle around Begnas Tal and promote healthy, community-based tourism around the lake.
30 March, Pokhara
9843028502/9872330046

Backyard screenings, watch great cinema while enjoying delicious food.
Rs 100, 2 to 28 March, every Thursday, 6.30pm, Backyard
www.backyardkathmandu.com

Thai film festival 2013, watch award-winning films that observe and explore Thai culture and society.
6.30pm, Backyard
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Himalayan Pizza, serves Nepali, Indian, Chinese, Continental, and Thai dishes.
Jawalakhel
Little Italy
BAICHU, serves Nepali, Indian, Chinese, Continental, and Thai dishes.
Jawalakhel
YAK RESTAURANT, serves authentic Chinese food, try the mala tofu, chicken with fungus and spicy pork spare ribs.
Boudha, Kathmandu

Himalayan rush, run, swim, or cycle around Begnas Tal and promote healthy, community-based tourism around the lake.
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BONJOUR!

I come celebrate French language and culture this week at Alliance Francaise. 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.

FRIDAY

PUNK ROCK

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 Tsering'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 OFX cinemas from 25 March onwards
GETAWAYS

LAST RESORT, canyoning, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking, bungee jumping – test your limits at the Last Resort.

Bhotekosi, Sindhupalchok, (01)4700525/4700525, info@thelastresort.com.np

TEMPLE TREE RESORT AND SPA, a peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour and sauna, it’ll be hard to leave once you get here.

Gaurighat, Lakeside, (061)465819

Hotel Heritage, enjoy the exquisite architecture and traditional ambience, but make sure to book your rooms online with NepalSutra.

Bhaktapur, (01)6611628, info@nepalsutra.com

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, (061)460210

Charikot Panorama Resort, enjoy mountain views and local culture in the historic town of Charikot.

Charikot Panorama Resort, en,joy mountai,n views and local culture in the historic town of Charikot. Special packages on offer. Charikot, Dolakha; 01-5529635, 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, Sabani Moktan, Albarros, Confusion, Triplicity, EnVivo, The Boys Next Door, Dj Rabbi, 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 to17 March, The Last Resort
Tickets at the Last Resort Office, Thamel, and Moksh, Pulchok (01)6701247/6700525, info@thelastresort.com.np

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 200, 200, 500, 15 to 16 March, 1pm and 6pm
DAV School, Jawalakhel, 398-259627
Tickets at Cafe Soma, Top of the World Cafe, Backyard Pub, and Summit Hotel in Lalitpur, and Nepal Music in Thamel
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 tetering 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.
There is no path and leave a trail - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Nature’s bounty

Traveling 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. Padamchel, 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

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’).
Making 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 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 better. Mysteriously, his first album hardly sold, the second better. Rodriguez’s music reached Cape Town, South Africa, not long after. Rodriguez’s music reached Cape Town, South Africa, not long after.

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 and to elaborate further would be to give away the mystery. The filmmaker is stuck 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 better. Rodriguez’s music reached Cape Town, South Africa, not long after. Rodriguez’s music reached Cape Town, South Africa, not long after.

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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. Enraptured oppression forced generations of Nepalis to migrate to the Madhesh or Moglan, now they also go to Malaysia and Indonesia.

The story is set somewhere in the multi-ethnic hills of eastern Nepal. Dhanes 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, Nepais 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 familys 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 444 Hardcover
Travelling TB

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. 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.

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.

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.
The protest the Bangladeshis have mounted at Shahbag Square in Dhaka raises several disturbing 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 disapponted 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 a dictator. They argued that the perpetrators of violence, 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 expiditions 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 consacrate the progressive idea of a non-violent movement, historically, doesn’t seek vengeance. In fact, it aims to break the cycle of violence-vengeance, persuade the perpetrators of violence to mow down their rivals.

The Shahbag protesters neither want radical means/methods to achieve a violent goal, however cherished. They argued that the perpetrators of violence, 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 expiditions 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 consacrate the progressive idea of a non-violent movement, historically, doesn’t seek vengeance. In fact, it aims to break the cycle of violence-vengeance, persuade the perpetrators of violence to mow down their rivals.

As the gathering at Shahbag swelled to mammoth proportions, death became the leitmotif of the protest. It surprised no one to see them erupt into thunderous applause at the news that another Jamaat leader, Delwar Hossain Sayeedee, had been sentenced to death. It would seem the protesters 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 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 the leitmotif of the protest. It 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 nullify and debate. 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 likewise.

A non-violent movement, historically, doesn’t seek vengeance. In fact, it aims to break the cycle of violence-vengeance, persuade the perpetrators of violence to mow down their rivals.

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The protests in Dhaka’s Shahbag Square use non-violence as a strategy to achieve a violent goal.
Bhutan’s Prime Minister Lyonchen 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 $5 million 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 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 medium 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 1989, 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 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 Drugska, 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 bajar that is the Bhutanese advertising market’. It has recently upgraded its online edition with dynamic, multimedia content.

In 2009, 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 Nyetshing, Druk Yoedzer, 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 Tshongpa 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.

Overall, Bhutan’s media 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.
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.

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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, 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.
A
KRR to the rescue

Editorial, Rajdhani, 14 March

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 replace amidst opposing parties but what does this discontent mean for elections?

The 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 a consensus and it will be formed on the basis of political contribution. We hope that the parties have handed Regmi the responsibility to convince the CPN-M and other parties.

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 answerable to the same. It will lose meaning the day parties lose.
Debate about the efficacy of 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. The problem, however, is that coordination among line ministries is too weak and donor financing is done in an ad hoc manner. But aid 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.

Aid 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 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.
A lot of people are a bit confused about how to address Hizzoner Bhattarai 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 watchers 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. Now we know why BRB was in such a tearing hurry to step down. He just couldn’t wait to get rid of that damn Mustang Max. No sooner had he resigned, he drove out of Shit All Niwas to Sanepa in a Scorpio and tweeted en route: “I’m a free citizen!” Which begs the question: he wasn’t free as PM? Who took away his freedom? A miniature stuffed donkey to the first 10 correct answers.

Those who say elections are not possible in June haven’t factored in the effect of climate change on the monsoon. Meteorological records show the monsoon has been retreating every year, and now starts in early July. The Mao-Baddies don’t want elections in June, which is why they insisted on KRR’s term being valid till December so they have time to wash off all the dirt collected during their tenure in govt. The only reason parties are hesitant 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.