The interim supper

By now we have learnt to read between the lips of our politicians: the opposite of what they say is usually true. So when all the main leaders show rare unity by vowing to hold elections by June, we can be pretty sure it is not going to happen.

Logistical, constitutional, and technical hurdles surround the chief election commissioner, who has the unenviable task of holding elections on time and ensuring a fair free voting environment, which was not the case in the last elections.

With the CPN-M and other fringe parties threatening to boycott and disrupt polls, another level of uncertainty is added to the fate of June elections.

And then there are larger questions of what difference elections are going to make this time when there has been no progress in finding a common ground on sensitive issues of federalism and state structure that stymied the CA last time. But we may just have to cross that bridge when we come to it.
You can’t figure out what is really happening in Nepal these days by listening to the politicians. Reading, watching or listening to the media isn’t much help either. You find out what is happening by what a leader doesn’t say, in the opposite of what a politician says is usually true.

When all the main leaders show rare unity by vowing to hold elections by June, you can be pretty sure it is not going to happen. At a meeting this week between the Chairman Khil Raj Regmi of the Interim Election Council and his newly appointed Election Commissioners, it was quite clear that the chances of koshier elections being held in June are becoming more problematic by the day.

In his first week in office, Chief Election Commissioner Niklanka Upreti spent most of his time figuring out how much time he needs to prepare for polls. He faces logistical, constitutional, and technical hurdles that make it highly unlikely that elections, even if held in June, will be the kind that will take us to a CA that can write a constitution and guarantee stability.

The main premise in setting up the Regmi regime was to untangle the political knot by conducting elections. The polls are seen by many as a panacea, but elections are not the solution to the political polarisation if conducted with insufficient preparation. In normal times, the EC needs 120 days to hold elections, but even if the June date is announced, these are not normal times.

The first thing the EC has to work on is to prepare a list and lay out the rules for voting. Although the 11-point agreement between the parties allows for preparations to hold elections after the date is announced, this is unrealistic.

The greatest uncertainty has been created by the CPN-Mao and other smaller parties which say they will not just boycott elections but also disrupt them. Then there are the larger questions of what difference elections are going to make this time when there has been no progress in finding a common ground on sensitive issues of federalism and state structure that stymied the CA last time.

This is a rare opportunity for the country to show how positive attitudes and actions can be used to solve hard problems facing a nation.

When all the main leaders show rare unity by vowing to hold elections by June, you can be pretty sure it is not going to happen.

Nepal because it was stolen again from the National Archives. It’s better to have them in safekeeping at Christies until Nepal becomes a cleaner and better governed country.

Thank you Dinesh Shrestha for your article ‘Prepping for preschool’ in the Times of Nepal this week. I’m not a parent, but I do go on some of these play groups and this article was well written and comprehensive. A great idea to build stairs on a hiking trail? It might be a strange quirk of fate that Khil Raj Regmi, the most non-political man of Nepal, has to be in charge of holding elections, but also believe he and his team are heading for Regmi once he goes back to the Supreme Court as chief justice.

The victims’ wait for justice and truth and above all respect won’t end for a very long time in this country where the perpetrators of both sides of the conflict are now scratching each other’s backs to buy their cast.

The electoral list is the most non-political man of Nepal, has to be chosen in order to act as the most relevant political figure to conclude the elections by the main political parties. And by watching his first moves, he believes he and his team are heading in the right direction. He is not only in charge of holding elections, but also here to make people believe again in politics and politicians who take politics as a tool to serve people and not to be served. Let’s see what he has in store for Regmi once he goes back to the Supreme Court as chief justice.

This transitional government could get moral and other support from the people and Nepal’s friends if it walks on the right path even if the party leaders go against it. This is a rare opportunity for the country to show how positive attitudes and actions can be used to solve hard problems facing a nation.

Thirsting for a political solution through elections has never ignited such a cacophonous debate. Dinesh Shrestha was to untangle the political knot by conducting elections, even if they are held in June, will be an uphill task. So it looks like IMF has also capitulated to the Indian-European track, rescued the macro-economic situation by negotiating a loan from the IMF, cleaned up the bureaucracy, conducted fresh and proper elections, and handed the reins of power back to a democratically elected government. And guess what the democratically elected politicians did? They ruined the country.

This is an indication of how powerful and useful journalism can be when used in the right way to find and reveal the truth to the public and concerned authorities.

Collectors in Europe should not return the antique book covers to Nepal it is in.

The smell of incense at Thamel is stupendous, now I want to go and take some awesome pictures.
The Holi land

Anger over corruption and neglect after 2008 rankles the Tarai psyche, but people still favour immediate polls

BIRATNAGAR - Nowhere in Nepal is Holi celebrated with such intensity and passion as it is in Nepal’s southern plains. On Wednesday, I found Salim Seikh, Rahul Seikh, Dilip Ba, and Prince Rai celebrating Holi together in Tinpaini of Biratnagar. “Eid, Tihar or Holi, we are always together,” Dilip said, patting Prince’s back.

The Seikh brothers have been celebrating Holi for as long as they can remember while for Prince, Holi has a whole new meaning after his family migrated down to Biratnagar from the eastern hills. Last year’s census report reveals that more than half the country’s population now lives in the Tarai. This migration has made the already colourful Holi mosaic of the Tarai even more vibrant.

The four friends represent three sections of Nepali society: Muslim, Madhesi, and Pahadi. That they were celebrating Holi together, enjoying themselves, and cementing their bonds of friendship represents hope for the nation’s future. It shows that if the politicians and their radical rhetoric don’t poison the atmosphere, Nepalis from all ethnicities, religions, and regions will get along just fine.

However, the social aspect can be highly political, especially at a time when every section of the population is demanding its fair share of the national pie. Unless Madhesi aspirations are well-represented, this Holi’s revelry could once more turn to violence on the streets.

Until two months ago, the Madhes was engulfed in frustration and anger. The dissolution of the CA with the lingering debate on federalism had dashed the hopes of many in the Tarai that historical wrongs would be righted by an inclusive constitution. But with the country on track for elections either in June or November and the agreement among the four main parties to ensure citizenship and voting rights in the Madhes, people here in the eastern plains have something to look forward to.

However, serious challenges remain. Many were suspicious about the Regmi-led government holding polls, but it is clear that only a technocratic government can ensure free, fair, and peaceful elections if all major players are willing to participate. But the top parties are about to repeat the mistake they made back in 2007 when the Girija Prasad Koirala-led government tried to force the country into elections without homework, triggering the Madhes Uprising.

Although popular sentiment this time seems to be in favour of immediate polls, the refusal of the Baidya-led CPN-Maoists, the Upendra Yadav-led Madhesi bloc, and the Limbuwans to support polls is already affecting preparations for elections. There are disturbing early signs of voter registration being disrupted.

On Tuesday, former Morcha leader JP Gupta who was recently released from jail after serving his corruption sentence, threatened to lead the Madhes into another revolt if his demands were not immediately met. Gupta pleaded his case in Saptari, the epicentre of the Madhes Uprising, arguing that he was politically victimised for standing firm on the Single Madhes demand. Not once did he show remorse for corruption or betrayal of the people’s trust. His claim that he was charged while the ‘big fish’ were let off the hook, although convincing, does not take away his own culpability.

So when Gupta threatens to upset polls, one really wonders if it is for the common Madhesi that his heart bleeds or was he plotting this vendetta during long days in his jail cell. Political analyst CK Lal may well be right, when he told me: “What JP does now will be more about his own political destiny than about Madhes.”

Anger over corruption and neglect by successive governments after 2008 is still raw in the Tarai psyche, but elections can offer a platform for healthy debate and ensure that demands of the Madhes are satisfied at the earliest.
No alternative to alternative energy

BHRIKUTI RAJ

I
t all the electricity generated by private solar cells in Nepal’s urban areas is added up, it would total 200MW of electricity: more than Kali Gandaki IA, Nepal’s biggest hydropower plant. But officials at the main power utility in the country, Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), still don’t believe solar power is feasible even when most of its customers have switched to solar because of the shortage of hydro. One NEA executive told a conference last week: “Solar is just ornamental.”

After being badgered, NEA finally agreed last year to test a solar system to feed surplus daytime power into the grid. The head of NEA’s Power Development Services (RIDS) at the Kathmandu-based Centre for Energy Studies collaborated with the Swiss university SUPSI and the Rural Integrated Development Services (RIDS) Nepal and 3kW system at NEA’s office in Baneswor. Solar activists were also happy when NEA added sun power from the Sundarighat project (pic, above) to the national grid in January. The 680KW Japanese-built plant generates solar power for water treatment by the Kathmandu Valley Drinking Water Limited and feeds the surplus into the grid. The head of NEA’s Power Trade Division, Sher Singh Bhat, is still not convinced.

“Solar energy is not commercially feasible and reverse metering is not viable because the lack of stable electricity supply means surplus solar power from households cannot be fed into the national grid. Besides not everyone can afford to install large systems above 1kW.”

Promoters of solar like Professor Jagan Nath Shrestha from Pulchok Engineering Campus which successfully demonstrated reverse metering, refute these arguments. He says there have been other alternatives like solar while Nepali consumers wait another five years for sufficient hydro-electricity.

“People are energy starved now and are paying up to Rs 30 per unit for diesel generated electricity, why wouldn’t they pay half of that for solar? It’s not about being green, it is a necessity,” he says. He estimates that 72 gigawatt hours of power could be generated from just 10 per cent of Kathmandu’s total area. If power generated by individual rooftop panels in urban areas of Nepal is added up, it would amount to 200MW of electricity. NEA’s excuse that there are technical hurdles also doesn’t hold water, experts say.

“NEA can easily buy surplus solar energy through reverse metering wherever they have dedicated feeders and encourage people to install solar panels,” explains Ram Prasad Dhital, assistant director at the Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPIC), which has been advocating subsidies for alternative energy. Dhital says that although the initial investment for solar power is high, so are the long-term returns.

NEA’s Sher Singh Bhat, however, sticks to his argument that hydro energy is the only way ahead. He says power cuts will be history once Upper Tama Kosi (456MW) is completed in four years and hydropower will be much cheaper than solar. “We are also working with India to construct cross border high capacity line to import electricity, but until these larger projects are completed,” says Bhat. This is the kind of argument that drives solar promoters up the wall.

“Yes, Tama Kosi is great, but by the time it is built demand will have risen by another 600MW. And what are we going to do till then?” asks Raj Kumar Thapa of Solar Solutions. He says the global price for photovoltaic cells has crashed and the cost per watt of solar power is going to go below $1.

“The technology is getting cheaper by the day and we have the expertise. NEA could easily formulate policies to encourage people to become independent electricity producers and buy power from them,” Thapa adds.

NEA insiders say the true reason for reluctance to install reverse metering is the pilferage, meter tampering, and corruption which the utility’s powerful unions don’t want to change. Former water resource minister Dipak Gyawali, who tried and failed 10 years ago to introduce time-of-day metering to reduce peak demand and also net metering, says: “There are institutional barriers to change and unless we unbundle generation, distribution, and transmission, there will be no answers.”

The power shortage has increased demand for diesel and Nepal now imports Rs 93 billion worth of petroleum products a year from India: more than its total commodity exports of Rs 74 billion. An estimated 500MW of captive power is generated from diesel plants run by industries, hotels, and factories. Jagan Nath Shrestha can’t hide his frustration: “I was 10 when I first heard about how Nepal would sell electricity to India and become rich. I am now 63 and we have 14-hour power cuts daily. How much longer are we going to wait?”
Cairn may give up on Nepal

MARK WILLIAMSON IN EDINBURGH

The Scottish exploration firm that found a billion barrels of oil in India has indicated it may give up on Nepal after an improvement in the situation in the country. Nine years after Cairn was awarded licences covering a swathe of southern Nepal, the company appears to be running out of patience with a country where it has been unable to start drilling amid continuing political instability.

“It’s just unfortunate, we haven’t been able to make progress,” Chief Executive Simon Thomson told the Times in Edinburgh on Tuesday. He made it clear that long-running talks between Cairn and successive governments in Kathmandu have done nothing to persuade the company that it will be safe to risk millions of dollars that it would cost to drill wells in Nepal.

“Despite having established a big plan and presented our credentials, it’s been impossible to move forward,” Thomson said, “the reason we were there in Nepal in the first place still remains. Whether we will be able to make progress is a different matter.”

The comments reflect frustration among insiders at Cairn about the obstacles the company has faced in a country where it had high hopes of making a big oil and gas find. Nepal contains the kind of under-explored territory on which Cairn believes it has an edge over giants like Shell.

The company made a series of bumper finds in Rajasthan state in India from 2004, while under the leadership of former Scottish rugby international Sir Bill Gammell. These propelled Cairn into the big time. But since selling a controlling stake in five licences in Nepal’s Tarai region in August 2004 on attractive terms.

In August 2005, six months after former king Gyanendra seized political control, the company declared contractual force majeure, suspending its work commitments. Production from the field began in August 2009.

The company was awarded 100 per cent stake in five licences in Nepal’s Tarai region in August 2004 on attractive terms.

In August 2005, six months after former king Gyanendra seized political control, the company declared contractual force majeure, suspending its work commitments in view of the security situation.

Mark Williamson is a Business Correspondent for The Herald, Scotland.

Hydro Solutions in US JV

Chicago-based renewable energy company, New Generation Power, this week signed an MoU with Nepal’s Hydro Solutions to cooperate in exploiting up to 400MW of hydroelectric projects in Nepal. New Generation Power is represented in Nepal by New York-based Nepal Infrastructure Consut (NIC) and will commission renewable energy projects in the country. It already has 3,000MW of projects in solar, biomass, wind, hydro, waste to energy, and geo-thermal in various parts of the world.

Hydro Solutions is a rapidly expanding hydropower company that works in identification and development including project engineering for energy infrastructure in Nepal. The company is involved in the development of projects with a cumulative capacity of over 500MW in Nepal.

The MoU was signed (pic, above) by Chenjeev Kathuria, Chairman, and Nisha Joshi, Senior Vice-President (International) of NSP. Gyandendra Lai Pradhan, Executive Chairman of Hydro Solutions and Suman Neupane, President of NIC.
India’s Supreme Court delivered a blow against terrorism through its verdict last week on those accused of masterminding the devastating series of blasts in Bombay, which hadn’t yet been renamed Mumbai, on 12 March 1993. It upheld in one instance the death penalty the trial court had earlier awarded to 12 and commuted to life in prison for the remaining 10 (one had died), which was also the quantum of punishment given to another 23. For some, though, the judgement underscored the Indian state’s inclination to crush terrorism and yet, ironically, condone communalism. It is ironical because both terrorism and communalism, despite definitions distinguishing the two, are predicated on harnessing violence in the pursuit of political goals.

The contradictory response of the Indian state is seen in its attitude to the serial bomb blasts and the Bombay riots of 1992-1993, which was sparked off by Muslims taking to the streets after the demolition of the Babri Masjid and backlash from Shiv Sena activists. Considering the ominous implications of allowing disaffection to roil the Muslims, you would have expected the Indian state to be even-handed in pursuing and punishing those responsible for the riots and blasts. The government set out in earnest to unravel the network behind the serial blasts, compelling the fugitive don Dawood into hiding and arraigning many of his foot-soldiers in the trial court. Subsequently, nearly a 100 were pronounced guilty in the Bombay blasts.

The state did not display similar zeal towards those who fomented the riots. Unlike Dawood and his lieutenants, they weren’t residing in another country, beyond the reach of the Indian state, but constituted the city’s political class, including Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray. An estimated 60 per cent of Bombay riot cases were closed forthwith, conviction was secured in three cases, all Muslims, which the Supreme Court subsequently set aside. The Srikrishna commission recommended the re-opening of cases against Shiv Sena leaders and police officials. Thus, in 2009, Sena leader Madhukar Sarpotdar was sentenced to a year in prison, but he was immediately granted bail and lodged an appeal against the verdict. He died in 2010 and didn’t spend a day in jail. Former police commissioner RD Tyagi, accused of killing eight Muslims, was acquitted and the Congress government did not appeal against the verdict. Another officer, Nikhil Kapse, was convicted but the government secured a stay on the order from the Supreme Court.

Communalism rarely ever seeks to radically transform the state, wishing neither to diminish the powers vested in it nor the territory under its control nor its propensity to favour the class of those who control its levers. Indeed, the only demand Hindu communalists make on the state is that it should favour them over the minorities or remain passive during rioting, hoping to derive advantage from its numerical superiority. This is why the Hindu communalists don’t rhetorically attack the state. Terrorism, whether by secessionists or the ultra Left, seeks to challenge the nature of the state, its ideology, and power. For instance, secessionism employs terror to wrest from the state’s control a slice of territory, effectively undermining its supremacy. The ultra Left wants to alter the structure of the state as it exists, in the hope of ensuring it doesn’t work for the benefit of a few.

In comparison, the Bombay blast masterminds had a limited agenda of punishing the Hindu communalists in their attacks against Muslims. The state retaliated because its monopoly over coercive power was challenged. Yet the violence of Bal Thackeray’s men was condoned because their ire was directed not against the Indian state, but the Muslims of Bombay. Obviously, the Indian state's dichotomous response breeds alienation among Muslims, provoking some of them to employ terror, often at the behest of the ISI, to wreak vengeance against the Indian state. It is a vicious cycle of retribution from which it becomes difficult for the society to emerge, as India quite clearly hasn’t, from the never-ending bombings in its cities. 

ashrafajaz17@gmail.com

Communalism and terrorism

An Indian Supreme Court ruling this week underscored the state’s inclination to crush terrorism but condone communalism.
Tweet away!

Is it a Facebook clone? Is it a blog? What should or should you not blurt out? Seven years after its birth we are still struggling to figure out how to interact with the little blue bird.

The 140 character limit is the easy bit, but what about etiquette? What separates the good from the mannerless? We present you the definitive Twitter bible, study it religiously.

**Donts**

- Don’t know who the current prime minister of Nepal is.
- Don’t care about others’ works too (alongside your own). We all love free publicity, but just not all the time.
- Be polite and remember the good manners your parents taught you applies on Twitter.
- Drunk or high: why lose your job/friends/lover/reputation in under 140 characters?
- Tweet about your daily schedule. We don’t need to know what time you go to the gym or take your morningloo-break.
- Ask people to RT. It makes you sound desperate. If they don’t, they’ll do it themselves.
- Overdo hashtags. Using too many makes it difficult to read, limit to three at most.
- Follow others just because you want them to follow you back.
- Turn Twitter into a battleground. Instead meet for coffee and engage in a few rounds arm wrestling.
- Don’t think are not smart or witty enough.
- Don’t do hashtags when there is no need.
- Don’t be the end of the world, for you it’s just another workday for the rest of us.
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**Dos**

- Make it personal. Unless you want people thinking you have zero personality, develop a character for your profile. Add a profile pic, a cover pic, and a short bio.
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**Stay away if:**

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Human rights film series, screening powerful documentaries throughout the month to create awareness on human rights and gender issues.

7 to 31 March, 7pm, Attic Bar, Uttar Dhok www.hrff.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 Cafe, Jhamsikhel

Bikers Day Out, get on your bikes and ride! 200 Enfielders will be riding from Kathmandu to Pokhara.

13 to 15 April, www.enfieldpokerrun.com

Toni’s Nepal, on the 10th anniversary of Toni Hagen’s death, Heritage Gallery has revived his classic photo-exhibition on Nepal, one that was held 20 years ago and inaugurated by Late King Birendra.

Runs till 31 March, Heritage Gallery, Toni Hagen House, Gachhen, Bhaktapur, (01)6613197

Expressions of devotion, an exhibition of etching, unique print, and video installations by Uma Shanker Shah and Seema Sharma Shah.

24 March to 27 April, 10am to 5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal

Inked for life, compete with tattoo artists from home and abroad at the 3rd International Tattoo Convention, 16 to 28 April, Yak and Yeti Hotel, 9841471448/9841849786

PRANAMAYA YOGA, immerse yourself in an extensive three-day yoga retreat with Yogatara.

Rs 24,000, 2 to 3 April, Neydo Monastery Resort, Pharping, 9822045484, info@pranamaya-yoga.com

Photoshop, get out of the comfortable confines of digital image manipulation and learn the art of photo-collage as done in the good old days.

Rs 2,000, 17 to 21 April, Sattya Arts, Jawalakhel, shreyans@sattya.org

Ettkai, doodles, drawings, art for sale, live drawing, and good food all evening.

29 March, 5-30pm, Thapathali

Australia day, glimpse the Australian way of life with music, food, and beverages from the land down under.

6 April, 2pm, Mitkik, Jhamsikhel

Cross-cultural documentary workshop, learn from award-winning filmmaker Natasa Muntean how to develop informed, intelligent, and creative films that contribute directly to critical cultural practice.

Rs 2,000, 10 to 14 April, 10am to 5pm, Sattya Arts, Jawalakhel

Basantapur festival, celebrate the coming of Nepal New Year 2070. 12 to 13 April, Kathmandu Durbar Square

WITH LOVE FROM FRANCE, Image Ark Gallery invites you to a dual exhibition of French artists Nicholas Henry and Floriane de Lassee.

Runs till 28 March, 10am to 5pm, Image Ark Gallery, Patan, (01)5551118

Capit Grill, this American style diner offers a large assortment of appetisers and entrees to suit everyone’s tastes. Bhatkotani

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11-13 July 2013 | Bhrikutimandap, Kathmandu
IDES OF MARCH, celebrate the underground scene in Kathmandu with more than a hint of nostalgia. Rs 200, 30 March, 1pm, Purple Haze, Thamel

Paleti: Srawan Mukarung’s poetry meets Aavas’s music at the next installment of the monthly music series. Booking open, 29 March, 5.30pm, Nepa-laya, Kalikasthan, (01)4412469/395, paleti@nepalaya.com.np

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

Inter college band competition, rock the living daylights out of your competitors and win the chance to cut an album of your own. Rs 5,000, Bhrikuti Mandap, 1 May, 9813422986

Return of the native

Nepal International Indigenous Film Festival (NIIFF) is ready to kick off its seventh annual festival and filmmakers from all backgrounds who have an interest in indigenous issues, knowledge, and culture are invited to apply. Each year, NIIFF explores indigenous themes and this year’s program will focus on Equal Access and Participation of Indigenous Peoples in Media. The selected films will be screened by Taiwan Indigenous Television and receive royalty from the station. 25 to 28 April, City Hall, Nepal Tourism Board, Exhibition Road (01)4102577 ifa_festivals@yahoo.com www.ifanepal.org.np

The city of fine arts, Lalitpur, invites you to an international celebration of the best arts, crafts, culture, tradition, and businesses of the SAARC region. Besides trade and commerce, there will guided tours in the Darbar Square area, recreational activities for kids, and live music.

28 to 3 April, Lalitpur

MUSIC

GETAWAYS

THE LAST RESORT

A three hour ride from the capital, perched atop a gorge above the raging Bhotekoshi, lies The Last Resort. A perfect sanctuary to escape from the chaos of city life, this beautiful resort, set amidst sprawling terraced slopes, surrounded by pristine forest has been attracting adventure junkies and travellers since 1999. Pioneer of adventure sports in Nepal, The Last Resort, offers an amazing adrenaline rush. Bungy jumping, canyoning, canyon swinging, abseiling, rafting, high ropes, and hiking are some of the activities on offer when you come to this side of the country. The annual Sundance Music Festival which has been bringing local and foreign musicians and music lovers to Last Resort is a huge crowd puller. Its eighth edition took place two weeks ago.

If you choose to spend a night here, you will be accommodated in one of the luxurious safari tents that are spread over the well landscaped premises, equipped with comfortable beds, giving you the sense of camping minus the eerie feeling of being in the actual woods. The adventure begins right at the entrance of the resort, as you are required to cross a 160 metre high suspension bridge which connects the main resort and the village to the main road.

THE LAST RESORT

Yala love

The city of fine arts, Lalitpur, invites you to an international celebration of the best arts, crafts, culture, tradition, and businesses of the SAARC region. Besides trade and commerce, there will guided tours in the Darbar Square area, recreational activities for kids, and live music.

28 to 3 April, Lalitpur
CAUTION AHEAD

Here are some red flags you need to look out for that might indicate your child is autistic. ASD can sometimes be diagnosed as early as 14 months. If your baby shows two or more of these symptoms, visit your paediatrician as soon as possible. Early diagnosis and intervention is crucial in promoting your child’s development.

Impairment in social interaction:
- Lack of appropriate eye gaze
- Lack of warm, joyful expressions
- Lack of sharing interest or enjoyment
- Lack of response to name

Impairment in communication:
- Lack of showing gestures
- Lack of coordination of nonverbal communication
- Unusual prosody (little variation in pitch, odd intonation, irregular rhythm, unusual voice quality)

Repetitive behaviours and restricted interests:
- Repetitive movements with objects
- Repetitive movements or posturing of body, arms, hands, or fingers

A for autism

Nepali parents don’t have the knowledge or resources to take care of children with disorders like autism, but support is on its way

SULAIMAN DAUD and CINDREY LIU

When Sunita Shrestha and Kapendra Amatya’s six-year-old son was diagnosed with autism in 2008, the couple who are doctors by profession had no clue how to move ahead. Like Sunita and Kapendra, many parents in Nepal don’t have the knowledge or resources to take care of children with developmental disorders. “Can you imagine being a parent, having heard of autism, but with no access to any kind of help or service? We felt helpless,” recalls Sunita, an anesthetist at Bhaktapur Cancer Hospital.

While physical disabilities can be seen and easily identified, autism is invisible. The government does not even recognise autism when issuing disability identity cards, rendering autistic people ineligible for state sponsored monthly allowance. And when children act aggressively, have trouble communicating or interacting with others, and engage in repetitive behaviour, parents wrongly blame bad temper or poor discipline for these symptoms. As a result, hundreds remain undiagnosed or are lumped in the ‘mentally retarded’ category and stigmatised for the rest of their lives. Since there is very little support for families, mothers in particular are often forced to quit their jobs to take care of their autistic children full-time.

Fortunately Sunita and her husband found a solution abroad. After undergoing a three month training course in Delhi, they started a parents’ support group called Autism Care Nepal (ACN) in 2008 in Gairidhara. Run by parents with autistic children, ACN provides counselling and training in disability care for families as well as diagnostic assessment tests. There are currently 15 students at the school and daycare centre, where they are taught art and music therapy and the older ones are given vocational training classes.

Among the parents working at ACN is Sijan Shakya who is the first autism education specialist in Nepal. “I had to go to India for three months for training. It was very difficult to leave my son for that long and not everyone can afford it,” explains Sijan. “But there was no support system for families with autistic children, so I decided to do something about it.”

Patan Community Based Rehabilitation Organisation (CBR) is another institution that serves children with autism and other neurological development disabilities. Established in 1995, classes are designed with the aim of eventually integrating students into mainstream schools. At CBR, children develop physical and cognitive skills, build self-esteem, and learn to make candles, artificial flowers, incense, and decorative items during their vocational training classes.

According to Autism Speaks, a science and advocacy organisation in the US, around 67 million people worldwide fall under the autism spectrum (ASD). There is no data on Nepal, but ACN estimates there are anywhere between 10,000 to 50,000 autistic children and adults in Nepal. Although the country is a member of the South Asian Autism Network, it has yet to fulfil its obligations.

However, there are hopeful signs. Recently, the Ministry of Education granted Rs 90,000 to ACN for teacher support. The organisation is also working with the ministry to conduct training workshops for teachers both in and out of Kathmandu. “The training helped build a bridge between me and my child,” says Keepra Shrestha, program leader at ACN. “Although it is a slow process, my son can now express himself better. I can tell he is happier.”

As the world gears up to celebrate Autism Awareness Day on 2 April, Nepal should look to provide opportunities and services tailored to autistic children so they can become fully productive members of society. Introducing mandatory autism screening for children aged 18-24 months like in the US is the first step in helping families and health care providers. A comprehensive health and education policy that calls for special schools and outlines ways to help integrate and support children with developmental disorders into mainstream schools and community should follow next.

www.autisminnepal.org
www.patancbcr.org

A care in time, #557
A new revolution is brewing in rural Nepal as farmers find a new cash crop

SUNIR PANDEY in KAVRE

A coffee plant bears fruit two years after planting, but it takes up to five to ten years for the plants to be commercially viable. Raw coffee cherries are picked in early March and are first wet-processed, then washed and left to dry. After their husks are removed, the green beans are roasted for 30 minutes (Nirmala, pic left) and then ground into fine, fresh coffee powder that sells at Rs 1,000 per kg.

The Timalsinhas have not only won admirers but have also hit on a novel but simple business recipe: serve coffee during the cold seasons and lassi (milkshake) during the summer. Because of the home-made do-it-yourself production and packaging methods, Timalsina’s coffee harvest is not yet standardised for export. But Yatiraj, who is now a certified coffee trainer and pulping operator, says he wants to change the attitudes of Nepalis who still favour tea over coffee so that coffee farmers get encouraged by high domestic demand. Says Yatiraj: “The real test for small-scale farmers like us will come if my children, when they grow up, feel they are too important to serve coffee to customers.” But for now, everyone from grandfather to grandchild in the Timalsina household is hooked to the bean that has made them prosperous.

A coffee plant bears fruit two years after planting, but it takes up to five to ten years for the plants to be commercially viable. Raw coffee cherries are picked in early March and are first wet-processed, then washed and left to dry. After their husks are removed, the green beans are roasted for 30 minutes (Nirmala, pic left) and then ground into fine, fresh coffee powder that sells at Rs 1,000 per kg.

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The Perks of Being a Wallflower

Stephen Chbosky’s first film, released last year and based on a novel by the same name, also written by him in 1999, is one of the more charming coming of age films.

At a time when we are constantly bombarded with high school films and tv series always featuring mean girls terrifyingly perfect featured high school cheerleader alpha females who rip apart the innocent bespectacled literary nerd girl, a wall of football jocks versus the females who rip apart the innocent, terrified young male science nerd, one shrimpy (sometimes gay) and the star quarterback of the football team, the tall, handsome, and very masculine seeming Brad.

In another kind of high school film the above combination would have resulted in catfights, blame games, and furious pretty girls, having excellent taste in music. However, with the combination of its carefully chosen nostalgic, evocative music (David Bowie, New Order, The Smiths, Sonic Youth), evocative music (David Bowie, New Order, The Smiths, Sonic Youth), its three dimensional, immensely memorable cast, all of whom are very good, Chbosky has done a brilliant job of adapting his own novel, an epistolary piece, and therefore not the easiest form to translate into screenplay. Episodic in nature, the story follows the high school careers of three friends: Charlie, played by Logan Lerman, Sam (Emma Watson), and her stepbrother Patrick (Ezra Miller).

Charlie has just started his freshman year at high school. Nervous and very shy, it is purely by accidental good fortune that he is picked up and nurtured by Sam and Patrick, high school seniors who are undeniably on the ‘cool’ scene. While ‘cool’ in Gossip Girl means incredibly well dressed and terribly snotty, ‘cool’ in The Perks of being a Wallflower means being intelligent, kind, brave, and having excellent taste in music. In this way, Wallflower is a throwback to the Enid Blyton novels, perpetuated later, of course, by JK Rowling in the Harry Potter novels where decency reigns above all else and striving for knowledge does not necessarily make you a ‘nerd’. For a first time director, Chbosky has a knack for the visual and while the film is not a cinematic masterpiece, it has many memorable scenes made alive by the timing of the young cast, all of whom are very good, Lerman in particular excels as the young and loyal Charlie. As the school year progresses, Charlie inevitably falls in love with the vivacious Sam and becomes confidante to Patrick who reveals that not only is he gay, he is dating the star quarterback of the football team, the tall, handsome, and very masculine seeming Brad.

While there is a fist fight, the problems of these young teenagers are resolved with quiet drama but no particular histrionics. This in itself would have elevated The Perks of Being a Wallflower to another level. However, with the combination of its carefully chosen nostalgic, evocative music (David Bowie, New Order, The Smiths, Sonic Youth), its three dimensional, immensely likeable characters, and its ability to take one right back to one’s teenage years (whether you like it or not) the film becomes a special, memorable experience that not only of most of us want to forget, yet still cherish in perverse ways in our unreliable memories.

MUST SEE
Sophia Panue

A green sun

After reading reviews of the new BlackBerry Z10, a Made in Thailand vibrator, and a killer mouse, Yantick this week turns readers’ attention to a gadget that is handy, affordable, and highly relevant for energy-starved Nepal.

It is called simply, Light, because that is what it is: a simple solar-powered light for those long, dark load shedding hours. Designed by Nepali engineer Sujit Acharya and Made in China, the Light is a sturdy contraption that is made to withstand rugged use in rural Nepal. But after trying it out for a few days in Kathmandu, Yantick finds it the best system for urban Nepal as well – especially because the cities suffer more hours of power cuts at night than rural areas which have local microhydro.

Acharya has added other features besides the light that he thinks are useful for us powerless Nepali’s: a FM radio with scanner, a speaker for your MP3 player, a digital clock with alarm, a mobile charger with multiple adapters, and even a siren. The LED light consumes very little power and has five settings for optimum brightness: normal, medium, high beam, bright, and blaze.

We had to point the panel to the sun and the 6V lead acid battery was fully charged within three hours. The manual says you have to charge the battery fully every 15 days even if you are not using it to extend the battery life, which is about four days if used properly. The unit is dust and water-proof, and can give 24 hours of illumination on a full charge.

At Rs 3,300 and with a one year warranty, the Light is a good buy that lets you say goodbye to darkness. On the downside, the radio is kind of primitive and could easily have been integrated with the clock to allow the user to see the frequency of the FM band when tuned into. As it is, you are forced to scan blindly, choosing stations perhaps you recognise the melodious voice of your favourite RJ on Hits FM. The size and shape is a bit unwieldy, although the handle seems to have been ergonomically designed. Would have made a lot more sense if the light switch was on top of the handle so it could be turned on and off with the thumb while (let’s say) we were trying to find our way to the outside while on a reporting assignment in rural Nepal.

“Ironly per cent of Nepalis don’t have access to electricity and the ones that do have to deal with increasing load shedding, so the solar lamp is ideal for both rural and urban Nepal,” Acharya told Yantick. “Also, if you calculate how much you would spend on kerosene and candles, you will find that the light pays for itself in a year’s time.”

One way to slash the cost further may be to lose the siren, which isn’t much use and Acharya says the new model won’t have it. However, he is working on a solar light-radio that has an inbuilt electricity alarm that gives users up to 30 second warning before the big shock arrives.

Acharya’s team got its Chinese patent for the solar lamp and will be adding more units into the Nepal market where 3,000 have already been sold.

YANTICKS VERDICT: Great light backup for the house, for trips outside the city, camping trips, and as a convenient way to save the energy-starved Nepal.

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YANTICKS VERDICT: Great light backup for the house, for trips outside the city, camping trips, and as a convenient way to save the cost of batteries. Can’t wait for the one with an earthquake alarm. And come to think of it, the Light will be handy in a post-earthquake scenario as well. 
When Prajwal Parajuly's The Gurkha's Daughter rapidly flew off the shelves (it's already in its first reprint) and garnered rave reviews everywhere, readers were left with one burning question: is it really that good? Basically, yes, yet it is.

The Gurkha's Daughter is a collection of short stories that depicts the life of average Nepalis and those of Nepali-origin spread from Kathmandu to Kalimpong and Gangtok to New York. Summaries of the stories may not compel you to buy the book—a young cleft-lipped housemaid considering running away in her quest for the Bollywood dream, the daughter of a wealthy family stealing, a disintegrating father-daughter relationship—

W

Although a tad salty provided the cucumber, carrot, and fries which pulao served during pujas), the range of cocktails. Though sex on Fire (Rs 355) which means free Cuba Libre (Rs 355) which means free Cuba in Spanish. The coca, lime, and white-rum mix, called rum and coke in everyday parlance, was as good at Reggae as one would imagine it may have tasted when first made in Cuba. What makes this watering hole so well-loved is its chilled ambiance and music. Reggae's house band, Plan B, plays on Thursdays and if you can coax the boys, they might just let you do your ‘happy’ rendition of Sex on Fire. If you’re looking for a good time and want to avoid underage brats who ambush Thamel every Friday, head to Reggae on Thursdays.

Sex on Fire

At

REFGGAEE BAR

Well

incredibly well.

And if you prefer your chicken a little sweeter, you can drizzle the honey on the side.

In between stuffing ourselves, we dabbled in Reggae’s eclectic range of cocktails. Though sex on the pub (Rs 385) was too fruity and cough-syrupy for our liking, what followed was spectacular. True to its name, the shots of multiple organisms (Rs 330) made us woozy instantly and the strong, but good burn of Baileys and almond liquor warmed us in all the right places. We kept the night alive with Cuba Libre (Rs 355) which means free Cuba in Spanish. The coca, lime, and white-rum mix, called rum and coke in everyday parlance, was as good at Reggae as one would imagine it may have tasted when first made in Cuba. What makes this watering hole so well-loved is its chilled ambiance and music. Reggae’s house band, Plan B, plays on Thursdays and if you can coax the boys, they might just let you do your ‘happy’ rendition of Sex on Fire. If you’re looking for a good time and want to avoid underage brats who ambush Thamel every Friday, head to Reggae on Thursdays.

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Washing hands with soap after every checkup is one of the simplest hygiene habits health workers need to follow to prevent the spread of diseases. But hundreds of Nepali doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers who work in cities and villages face acute water shortage. At other places they may be using dirty towels to dry their hands which defeats the whole purpose or soaps may be missing.

Even in developed countries where there is no shortage of water (or soaps), many healthcare practitioners fail to wash their hands as regularly as they should because they don’t want their hands to ‘dry up’. A 50ml pocket-sized bottle of alcohol is the answer to boosting this appallingly low compliance rate.

Alcohol’s antiseptic properties have been known for thousands of years. The Egyptians used wine as a preservative for their mummies. Although surgeons began using alcohol from the early 1900s as hand disinfectant, it was replaced by antimicrobial soap in the 1950s. However, alcohol has managed to make an impressive comeback in the last five years.

Common hand sanitisers like Purell (one of the first American companies to produce alcohol-based hand antisepsis) contain about 60 to 70 per cent alcohol, which is countervintuatively more effective than pure alcohol. This concentration rapidly kills many kinds of bacteria and inactivates influenza and other viruses. These alcohol based hand rubs also have high moisture content which helps prevent dryness and irritation.

In 2002, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the USA, after reviewing accumulating scientific evidence, rewrote its Hand Hygiene in Healthcare Settings guideline. The report stated that alcohol based products were better for standard hand washing than soap. Several years later, the World Health Organisation also reaffirmed this fact.

Small enough to carry in handbags or pockets, easy to use, and reasonably priced at Rs 350 for a large 500ml bottle, this revolutionary disinfectant is finally catching up after years of awareness campaigns, hand sanitisers will be useful and complement the use of soap and water.
In 2010, Kamal Thapa, chairman of Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal (RPP-N) won the all-India veterans’ tennis tournament under the 45+ age group in Delhi, beating third seed M Suresh of Andhra Pradesh 6-2, 6-3. But it isn’t just the tennis court where Kamal Thapa is serving aces. Andhra Pradesh 6-2, 6-3. But it isn’t just the tennis court where Kamal Thapa is serving aces. Thapa’s consistent stance and fiery oratory have given him unparalleled crowd-pulling qualities in the post-monarchy era. Thapa traces his ancestry 11 generations back to generals pre-Prithvi Narayan Shah. He is the first in his family who didn’t go into the army. In the last six years, he has emerged from a royal-tainted past seemingly unscathed. If the next election is held in June and he plays his cards right, Thapa may even have the potential to grab a chunk of the votes from half the respondents in the polls who were undecided. Thapa admits privately that he may do even better if he etches his support for the monarchy and stakes his Hindu revivalist agenda, but adds that as a matter of principle he won’t. But even by wooing voters disgruntled with the current crop of leaders, he could amass quite a big following if he can also lay hands on part of the block vote of three-quarters of Nepalis who seem to think ethnicity-based federalism is a bad idea, then Thapa has a good chance to make it to the top ranks. However, if mainstream parties, especially the NC and UML can re-invent themselves, go beyond the state-centric rhetoric of ‘defending democracy from the Maoists’, and put up fresh young faces, it will spoil NC and UML can re-invent themselves, go beyond the state-centric rhetoric of ‘defending democracy from the Maoists’, and put up fresh young faces, it will spoil Thapa’s chances. The support for Kamal Thapa and his RPP-N is a reaction to the fecklessness of the mainstream centre-right, not an inherent pull of his Hindu-monarchy agenda. Thapa for a game of tennis and an interview last week. Thapa beat Dixit 6-0.

Nepali Times: Where do you see your party in the current political set-up? Kamal Thapa: We want to establish ourselves on the national level as a conservative party with a centre-right leaning. But for that we are making radical changes in our central committee, which will replace those with ‘outdated’ ideologies with people like former secretary Khagendra Basnet and retired army general Bharat Rayamajhi among others. What about women? Yes we have very few female members at the moment. We are worried there might be a conflict between the old guard and the young so we haven’t been able to fully integrate the new members yet. In the next three months we aim to have 33 per cent women in the party.

How was your rath yatra? It was much better than we had expected, but we were disappointed by the scant media coverage. It seems like RPP-N is slowly renouncing its nationalistic ideology? Hinduism and monarchy are both closely linked to nationalism. For now our focus is on Hinduism not as religion, but as an identity. Today’s youth are aware about their identities. Are you trying to mix religion and politics? Mixing religion and politics won’t work in the 21st century. However, since politics of the past few years has tried to completely erase Nepal’s Hindu identity, our demands are legitimate in this context. We are not asking for religious laws or for the state to be run by Hindus or for Hindus to be given special privileges. All we are saying is that people should not be forced to convert. But won’t harping on religion disturb communal harmony in the country? If our demands aren’t addressed on time then there might be conflict. You can’t have peace by ignoring the faith and identity of 94 per cent of Nepalis. Won’t demanding a Hindu state put Nepal in danger through interference of the Hindu right in India? Hindutva does not belong only to India. Nepal is the birthplace of Hindus, Buddhists, and Jain. It’s natural for the more than one billion Hindus across the world to want to make Nepal the centre of their faith. Are there any links between India’s Hindu right and your party? No, not at all. In fact I have refused to meet many religious leaders from India even when people encouraged me. I don’t believe you need the blessings of foreigners to be politically active in Nepal. If others want to meet Indian leaders it’s their choice, I am trying to move ahead in my way. But support for Hindutva makes your movement a religious one, right? All we are saying is Nepal should be reinstated as a Hindu state. But we are not turning into religious leaders or saints.

What political changes are you making? We want to establish ourselves on the national level as a conservative party with a centre-right leaning. But for that we are making radical changes in our central committee, which will replace those with ‘outdated’ ideologies with people like former secretary Khagendra Basnet and retired army general Bharat Rayamajhi among others. What about women? Yes we have very few female members at the moment. We are worried there might be a conflict between the old guard and the young so we haven’t been able to fully integrate the new members yet. In the next three months we aim to have 33 per cent women in the party.

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The 10-day mountain bike race around the Annapurna Circuit is the highest and hardest in the world. I am a very fit cyclist and experienced rider, but when I took part in the race last year it was the most challenging thing I had ever done. Which is why I came back in 2013 to participate in the seventh edition of the North Face Yak Attack.

This year’s race saw some of the hottest days on the first four stages in race history and the most snow on the higher stages. After the first four days from Kathmandu to Besisahar, the fifth stage was turned into a group ride because of unscheduled blasting by Army engineers on the new Besisahar to Taal road.

Stage six, Taal to Chame (2570m), was quicker this year because the road extended the whole way and the hike-a-bike component was removed. The newly-constructed, steep and rocky-road was longer and allowed mountain biking in its purest form: bikers navigated it better than motorbikes and jeeps.

From Chame to Manang (3540m) there was significantly more snow and mud than previous years, making the race more fun for many and slower for all. UK rider Neil Cottam crashed out of the race with a dislocated shoulder, yet after...
The real story of Yak Attack 2013 was the continued dominance of Nepali riders. Narayan Gopal Maharjan became the 5th Nepali to win Yak Attack, while defending 3-time champion, Ajay Pandit Chhetri, finished in 2nd. Young Aayman Tamang, only 19-years-old, rounded out the podium.

Every year the competition gets stronger with more international professionals and amateurs taking part, yet every year the Nepali riders illustrate their strength at all altitudes, any terrain, and at any temperature. These riders have immense potential to shine on the world stage and perhaps with proper training could compete in the 2016 Olympics in Rio.

"This is my seventh time racing the Yak Attack," Chhetri told Nepali Times, "everything has improved over time, the track, the race, the riders. I couldn’t win this year because of injury while racing in Europe, but I am happy I came second. My friend Narayan Gopal winning also makes me happy. Next year promises to be an even harder race. Let’s see what happens."

2013 Nepali riders once again excel in the highest, hardest, and most extreme mountain bike race in the world

poppping his shoulder back in continued to trek the rest of the race.

Reaching Phedi (4,450m), riders were greeted by a blizzard that dumped 15cm of snow. There was tense anticipation of whether Thorung La would be passable at all. We woke up at 4 AM to clear skies and no additional snow. The snow was waist deep on the pass at Thorung and it resembled a mountaineering expedition with the wrong equipment rather than a bicycle race. Two riders suffering from snow blindness and had to drop out.

The final stage from Kagbeni to Tatopani was cut short and turned into a group ride due to an international competitor colliding with a vehicle and others had to wait for the medical team to arrive. He was ok.

The new and variable challenges each year are what make Yak Attack unique. Mountain Bike UK has acknowledged this as the fifth hardest race in the world, not because of the distance or technicality, but because of the altitude, snow, hike-a-bike, temperature extremes, and other unforeseeable challenges.

But most of all, it has allowed Nepali riders to showcase their endurance and technical skills and be recognised on the international stage.

"The mountain bike community here are my best friends. We train together, we work together and we support each other. This is the best race in the world," said Narayan Gopal Maharjan, who won his 5th Yak Attack title.

"We are so proud of the Nepali riders," said the race director, Ayesha Chhetri. "They are the future of mountain biking and we are lucky to have them in our race."
Interview with human rights lawyer Govinda Bandi and chief advisor to former PM Baburam Bhattarai, Devendra Paudel, BBC Nepal Service, 23 March 2014

Why are you still opposing the TRC ordinance? Govinda Bandi: Because it has provisions to grant amnesty to those who committed grave crimes and human rights abuses during the war. Not only does this betray the Nepali people who demand justice, it doesn’t meet international standards.

Why did you include provisions for amnesty when everyone is opposing it? Devendra Paudel: We are not against punishing criminals, but there are many cases of political nature where is the politics in that?

But Article 23 of the latest ordinance says that the government can recommend names of perpetrators who are ‘suitable’ for amnesty. DP: Even though all those who died during war are victims, there are cases in Europe and Nepal too where high ranking members of the Maoist party must face investigations instead of protecting them.

What is the use of the TRC then? Mr Bandi, people say that the representatives of organisations like UNHCR are biased and are providing inaccurate information by their Nepali counterparts. GB: I don’t know where these accusations come from, but yesterday’s press statement came from the official high commissioner of the UNHCR, which reserves the right to comment on such matters because it cannot extend help to processes that are against previously agreed standards.

What do you say about some parties’ concern that reopening old wounds will derail the peace process? GB: We are not opening old wounds. We all know what happened in Argentina in the 1980s and how the peace process there was derailed. Kidnapping people from their bedrooms and killing them on altars after accusing them of being feudals or executing people in barracks and saying they were killed in combat cannot be called old wounds.

Why did you not consult with lawyers, human rights activists, or civil society while drafting the TRC ordinance and why was it ratified while everyone was asleep? DP: We did talk discussions with everyone and we are open to dialogue. Our concern is that if we investigate every single case, we will be trapped in a never-ending human rights circle and won’t be able to move ahead.

So does that mean you will prosecute those found guilty in the Madi incident? GB: We have discussed that issue many times and even gone to Madi for evaluation. Everybody knows that armymen were inside the bus. It’s not as if we killed everyone because as you can see so many NC and UML cadres are still alive.

Mr Bandi, if you investigate every incident after 1990, everyone from government employees to former prime ministers will have to be punished and no one will be spared? GB: We are not saying that the entire state security along with high ranking members of the Maoist party must be jailed. We just want those who committed wartime atrocities to be punished. Many years ago Pushpa Kamal Dahal said that the Madi incident was a crime. So why can’t he hand the guilty to the police and let them carry out investigations instead of protecting them.

Why does your party not show any willingness to bring perpetrators to justice? DP: During the armed conflict the party always punished all those who died during war are victims, but many didn’t answer their phones and those who did sounded frightened and refused to talk much. All they said was that a large number of Malaysian youth had attacked them and they were hiding in the toilets.

After Chakra Subedi, secretary at the Nepali embassy in Kuala Lumpur arrived the next morning, we found out that two Nepalis had been badly injured in the skirmish and were being treated at Sultan hospital in Johore. At the hospital we met Ramai Sahu of Rautahat and Raj, Barneel Bahrawkuma of Nawalpur who had deep cuts and broken bones. We also met another Nepali worker being treated at the nearby clinic. The police had arrested 12 Nepalis involved in the fight.

We went to the hostel where the brawl began. The place was heavily guarded by policemen and looked like a battlefield with broken window glasses, television sets, and blood smeared all over. The workers there looked frightened and were still in shock. They said four Malaysians had come to attack them and when they retaliated, the four returned with almost 200 others armed with sharp knives and rods and resumed the attack. The police soon arrived, fired several rounds, and brought the situation under control.

After talking to the police and the men in the hostel, we learnt the clash might have started after some Nepalis ate other migrants’ local gifts. There have been incidents in the past when Malaysians and Nepalis have had heated discussions over this issue.

Since this was an organised attack, fear was sparked high. Secretary Subedi therefore has requested the company to shift the Nepali workers to another location. He will also request authorities in Johore Bahr to not press charges against the Nepalis because they were caught in a planned attack.

Bhim Tamang is onlinekhabar’s correspondent in Malaysia.

Back from the battlefield
Bhim Tamang, 25 March, onlinekhabar.com

Rumours about attacks on Nepali migrant workers at Pasir Gudang of Johore Bahru state started to surface on Sunday morning. I tried getting hold of Nepalis there, but many didn’t answer their phones and those who did sounded frightened and refused to talk much. All they said was that a large number of Malaysian youth had attacked them and they were hiding in the toilets.

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2. When do you think general elections will be held?
By April 2014 35.7%
In June 2013 33.9%
Don’t know 15.9%
In July 2013 14.5%
Where next?

Why should we unite the plains in a single Madhesi province, but chop up the hills into little pieces?

T he new constitution is not yet ready and the old constitution is not yet dead. But the 2006 Interim Constitution is being ruthlessly amended by using the obstacle removal provisions in Clause 158. The way it is being invoked to bulldoze through all barriers on the path to elections reminds one of the way Kathmandu’s streets are being widened. Nothing is allowed to stand in the way of this tearing juggernaut as it crashes up a dead-end street. If Khil Raj Regmi can’t hold elections on time, he will have to hand power back to the old government with what remains of a comatose constitution.

We have abandoned a sovereign democratic path to elections and taken an undemocratic one. From among the 118 parties, we couldn’t agree on one leader to take up to elections. Instead, the four main parties put the chief justice in charge, who formed a government of ex-bureaucrats. The political leadership of this country certified itself incompetent.

But this doesn’t mean the parties are completely out of the picture. They are still pulling strings through the four-party committee. Ex-secretaries who wanted ministerial positions were seen to be lobbying door-to-door and the cabinet is made up of ex-bureaucrats nominated by the Big Four in the same old give-and-take that got us into this mess.

The authoritarian streak of the UCPN(M) has put us here. Every one of the slogans they raised during their so-called ‘revolution’, has by now proven to be fake. Their demands during negotiations since 2006 were all a hollow charade, excuses to take them closer to the goal of total state capture.

The party fooled progressive Nepalis and self-admittedly hoodwinked the international community with its rhetoric of liberation, equality, and an end to discrimination. Using violence, threats, intimidation, and extortion the Maoists ruled with lies and hypnotised all stakeholders into believing a cause that they abandoned long ago. Their slogans about uplifting women, Dalits, and Janajatis were empty slogans.

Now, they are talking about a united electoral front with the Janajati and Madhesi parties. This is another trick. The Madhendi demand for the single Madhes province and the Janajati’s one-ethnicity province together represent the greatest threat to the Nepali nation state and to our nationalism. Why are Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai so desperate to back such a proposal?

Cheap populism seems irresistible to both leaders. But in doing so they will destroy what is left of our sovereignty, integrity, and national unity. Otherwise why would they so single-mindedly devote themselves to an agenda which can bring nothing but fragmentation? Why else would they back a proposal to unite the plains under a single Madhesi province, but chop up the hills into little pieces?

Nepal is a multi-ethnic state, but Dahal insists on single-identity provinces. Why? The answers are clear: the Maoists want a united electoral alliance with ethnic and regional parties for votes so that they can divide and rule the country.

Most Nepalis have seen through the Maoist strategy and know that this will lead to national disintegration. They don’t want to be divided by caste, ethnicity, or territoriality. They want to be united because only that will guarantee our dignity and pride as Nepalis.

Our goal is prosperity, equality, and justice. Only that will ensure future peace and the road to those goals lies in multi-ethnic, cross-territorial provinces integrating the Madhes and Pahad and their natural resources within federal provinces.

The reason it is important to think about these issues is because we are now supposedly headed to new elections for a new Constituent Assembly. Let’s not make the same mistakes as last time, let’s put Nepal’s national unity and integrity above all else. Once we ensure that, all other rights will fall into place.

Ushakala Rai is a former UML CA member from Khotang. The original Nepali version of this op-ed appeared in Kantipur, 26 March.
O K, that’s enough. Khil Raj Sir, back to work. No more ribbon-cutting and inspecting industrial fairs, let’s get this show on the road. In fact, the Interim Chairman of the Interim Council under the Interim Constitution of this Interim Republic should instruct his Interim Cabinet to observe a strict moratorium on officiating, wearing billas, and asan grahans until the interim election is completed. And the only garland the ex’s are allowed to wear will be on the day that the polls are completed.

The Europeans have also opened out their wallets and asked the Cabinet to come up with suggestions to fund election-related paraphernalia. If elections are to be held in June, the Election Commission’s wish list would be:

- Umbrellas, millions of them
- Gumboots for voters
- Lifejackets for Tarai booths
- Amphibious jeeps
- Leech repellent for booths up to 3,000m
- Snorkelling equipment
- Water-tight ballot boxes
- Swimsuits for election officials

Time we renamed this country again to move with the times. Henceforth we will be known as the Syndicated Democratic Federal Republic of Nepal. If it wasn’t for the cartels that fix prices for transportation, gas dealerships, petrol stations, banks, this country would grind to a halt. Even the politics is run by a syndicate of the Sri 4 Ko Sarkar who won’t let anyone else sit at the captain’s table.

Throughout the ages, Nepalis have been best known for our propensity to hit the head on the nail. Other countries export horsepower, we export manpower. Nepalis have been walking out on their country in droves even before records started being kept. Greater Nepal now stretches from Malaysia to Lebanon and wherever we go we seem to take our culture of tod-fod, mar-kat, hat-pat, coot-a-coot with us as we saw in Johore Bahru this week. Really living up to our reputation for being a martial race.

Never a people content with resting on our laurels, we are now also excelling in germ warfare by taking our diseases to the far corners of the world. Our national disease, gastro-enteritis, is also called cholera in other parts of the world. And since we are immune to stomach upsets, Nepal’s UN Peacekeepers have become global experts in biological warfare and can challenge the world’s only remaining superpower. Nepal’s most recent germ attack was on the United States with multi-drug resistant tuberculosis. All was going swimmingly, but unfortunately the XDR mole got caught in Texas after crossing over illegally into the US and has now been quarantined. But not to worry, we are all walking arsenals of all kinds of lethal communicable diseases. Like foot-in-mouth, which in Nepal also afflicts humans.