Despite a boycott by the opposition alliance, the Constituent Assembly has given itself more time to finish work on a questionnaire for the CA to decide on federalism, multiculturalism, local governance, inclusion and prior rights of indigenous people. Although the ruling coalition sees this as an extension on the voting process, the real intention, it seems, is to buy time for informal negotiations with the Maoist-Madhesi alliance. Moderate second-echelon leaders within the NC and UML who haven’t yet burned their bridges with the opposition have taken the lead in initiating discussions. The atmosphere is so vitiated between and within the parties, as well as the government and some members of the international community there is a feeling that everyone needs a cooling off period. The people, who didn’t have much faith left in the leaders anyway, are struggling to survive amidst much more immediate concerns of shortages of gas, electricity, water and petrol. There is almost a sense of relief that confrontation over a constitution that will satisfy nobody has once more been put off.
If federalism is a fait accompli let’s try to minimise the damage that it will cause

three in the east were altered by Panchayat-era transmigration from the hills. The personal political ambitions of NC-UML leaders from these areas has got mixed up with Madhav's aspirations for federal provinces along the plains. State demarcation would also be of strategic interest to Nepal’s neighbours, particularly India if many proud dams planned on the Karnali and the Kosi push through in the coming decades. We have to be thankful the last minute compromise being bandied about to partition the five districts VDC by VDC based on their population composition did not go through. This is where ‘give-and-take’ could have been a disastrous ‘lose-lose’ because it was a deal of the same loss in the two extremities of the Tarai.

Most political leaders say it is too late to backtrack from the concept of federalism. But they couldn’t further be removed from what people actually think. Nepalis have serious misgivings about federalism. An authoritative nationwide public opinion poll by Interdisciplinary Analysis (IDA) confirms the figures from last month’s Himalmedia Public Opinion Survey 2015 that only one in four of Nepalis (26%) support federalism, but even they are against naming provinces after ethnic entities. And, a majority of pro-federalism Nepal (53%) say geography must be the basis for creating federal units. IDA has disaggregated this data and found that a majority even in the plains and among Janajatis agree with the general population.

Do we really need federalism to have inclusive grassroots development and devolved democracy? Not necessarily, argues columnist David Seddon in the opposite page, and the veteran Nepal hand puts forward viable ideas on how devolution just needs to build in genuine inclusion in the Local Self-governance Act of 1999.

Let’s face it, federalism is the trophy the Maoist party needs to justify its ruinous conflict. Its leaders, most of them thoroughly discredited, need a new federal constitution to show the people all that blood-cletting and suffering was worth it. But comrades, read the writing on the wall: the people don’t want federalism. The only reason the top leaders of all parties now want federalism is because they see themselves as warlords of those future provinces.

If federalism is a fait accompli let’s try to minimise the damage that it will cause and maximise the benefits in terms of regional autonomy and decentralised decision-making. Let’s use it to harness natural resources equitably, create jobs at home and lift living standards. That is what the people really want, and that is what the negotiations should be all about.
I f a major concern of Nepal’s pro-federalists with regards to a new Constitution is to reduce the power of the central state, the domination of the political process by the old elites, and to increase the representation of those who have been disadvantaged and arguably ‘marginalised’ in the political process, then this could be achieved without the need for federalism per se.

First, the Constitution should be based on popular democracy (loktantra) universal human rights and the explicit protection of the rights of minorities and disadvantaged groups. The definition of citizenship should be broad and generous, indicating a commitment to gender equality with regards to citizenship by birth and recognising residence. Every effort should be made to provide citizenship papers as soon as possible to all who qualify. All citizens should have the right to individual liberties and freedoms and the protection of the state and all adults the right to vote – some consideration might be given to reducing the voting age.

Real devolution of power and resources to elected district and village councils as per the Local Self-Governance Act of 1999 (passed but never really implemented, perhaps with supplementary legislation) would immediately effect a re-structuring of the state. If the number of districts in the Tarai were to be increased from the present 20 to say 45, to allow for greater equality of population as between districts, then a House of directly elected district council representatives would create a powerful basis for the representation of blocs of local and regional interests. There could be two representatives from each district, one man and one woman.

As to the government itself, there are many possibilities, but its constitution must surely aim to balance effectiveness with representativeness. Single party governments have both advantages and disadvantages, as do coalitions. The same is true of a minimalist inner cabinet with a powerful Prime Minister and Prime Minister’s office, and a larger, more inclusive government with a less ‘presidential’ First Minister. #pigreen

The respect you deserve

The Natural Choice

Do not drink alcohol if you can. Choose BIO if you must.
Putting wind in the map

Areas of Nepal have wind profiles ideally suited to meet peak electricity demand

KUSHAL GURUNG

Last year, Denmark supplied nearly 40 per cent of its electricity from wind energy. This is quite unusual because utilities often try to keep its share of wind energy below 20 per cent as it is so intermittent. Denmark proved that wind can be part of an effective grid integration system and predictability.

The Global Wind Energy Council predicts that wind could supply up to 19 per cent of global electricity by 2030. The Indian wind energy sector has an installed capacity of more than 20,000MW of wind energy and China will cross 100,000MW by next year.

Nepal is not the windiest country in the region, but a United Nations Environment Programme report in 2008 shows a potential of more than 3000MW of wind power. The figure may look tiny compared to our hydropower potential but it is more than four times our current installed capacity.

The World Bank has begun Nepal-wide wind mapping as part of its Energy Sector Management Assistance Program and its internal assessment shows that some places in Nepal have wind profiles ideal to meet peak demand in the evening. Another study by the US National Renewable Energy Laboratory suggests that some wind sites in Nepal are near existing transmission lines.

But do we have what it takes to harness our wind energy potential? Wind projects are relatively quick to install, and takes much less space than large solar arrays. If there is road access, equipment and no political obstructions, a 100MW wind farm can be built within six months. Our primary concern would be road access to wind sites since bigger turbines mean cheaper cost of electricity generation.

For a wind project, however, big does mean huge. A modern wind turbine usually has a capacity to generate 3MW with each of its blades as long as 50 m — almost the height of Dharahara. The blades cannot be disassembled and need to be delicately handled. So, road access can be a major obstacle to install large wind turbines. Unless highways are widened and improved, we may be restricted to smaller wind turbines for now.

The cost of wind power has been declining and it is now at par with fossil fuels for new electricity generation, but it is still unlikely to attract private investment into Nepal if the conditions are the same as for hydropower projects. Many countries have come up with various policy instruments to promote the renewable energy: the US has tax credit for renewable projects, India has Accelerated Depreciation Tax of up to 80 per cent for wind projects, while the Philippines has a lucrative feed-in tariff rate. Without such incentives, on-grid wind projects may not take off even if we put proper infrastructure in place.

Nonetheless, there could still be opportunities for captive generation, as many of our industries are paying a hefty price for diesel backup power. Wind projects, like other renewables, are much cheaper than diesel generators. Additionally, wind plants cost less than hydro plants: one megawatt of wind power costs Rs 150 million compared to Rs 170 million for hydropower, and can be completed much faster.

Putting wind in the map

The current electricity shortage is here to stay for some time. Energy demand, including for electricity, will keep rising as Nepal proceeds to become a ‘developing country’ from a ‘least-developed’ one by 2022. We have already seen how time consuming hydropower projects can be, and with the possible impact of climate change on the Himalaya and river systems originating from them we may be putting all our eggs in one basket if we stick to a hydro-only policy.

A flexible energy mix is the way to go, and we need to be open to all options available. It is about time we put wind on our map.

This article is part of a monthly series prepared jointly with the Energy Development Council of which Kushal Gurung is a member.

www.edcnepal.org

COST COMPARISON

Wind : Rs 150m/MW
Hydro: Rs 170m/MW

M/S  9.0  8.0  7.0  3.0  4.0  5.0  6.0

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Hydro: Rs 170m/MW
Plastic Money
Sanima Bank has launched Visa Debit Card usable at ATM locations and Point of Sales across Nepal and India. The bank has also added 27 new ATMs throughout the country.

Chain Store
SmartFlush, a product of One Planet Solution (OPS) is looking for a franchise. The company provides custom designed rainwater harvesting, biosand filtration, water recycling and waste water treatment.

Win-win
Panati Bishwokarma won the Ford EcoSport under the Ford Fantastic Offer. Customers who bought a Ford between September and November were eligible to win a new EcoSport.

Spread the love
Closeup has started this year’s Love Message Fest. Messages can be sent till 10 February. Five lucky winners will get a brand new Samsung Galaxy Tab.

Bottoms up
Shree Mahakali Wine Pvt Ltd has launched two new premium wines Divine Wine White and Divine Wine Honey available in all major outlets across Nepal.

Transit point
Hala Abu Dhabi, the destination management division of Etihad Airways, has signed agreements with President Travel, Zets Holidays and Yeti Travel, to promote Abu Dhabi as a stopover destination.

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Rules and the ruled

In the highways, if you miss a bus you don't know when the next one will come. Some say that's how the political party leadership is living on a different planet from the people. Inflation (64.3%), unemployment (42%) and corruption (36.3%) are the top priorities of the people, just like in the past. After a quick glance at the flood of readers' feedback in Nepali and English language newspapers one can add the poor service delivery and shortages of essentials to the long list of woes.

Nepali Times: What is your assessment of the progress that Nepal has made in infrastructure and development?
Takehiko Nakao: Nepal’s achievements in meeting Millennium Development Goals in health and education have been dramatic. But it is lagging behind in energy and transportation infrastructure. It is very difficult to attract serious foreign investors in this situation. It is unfortunate that a country with such vast hydropower potential hasn’t had reliable energy supply. The NEA needs to improve transmission, generation, and also the regulatory framework. It is good that there is more trust between India and Nepal today, and because of Prime Minister Modi’s visit the PTA has been signed and several projects are moving ahead. The ADB is helping with upgrading airports at Lumbini and Kathmandu, and these are important steps to leave a good impression of the country.

You have repeatedly stressed on investing in human capital. How exactly is the ADB helping Nepal in this regard?
Education is the basis through which Nepal can catch up with other growing Asian countries. Enrollment is up, but the dropout rate is still high and Nepal needs to invest in improving the quality of education, secondary schooling and in technical and vocational training. Because of the instability of the past decades, the country hasn’t been able to benefit from the potential of education investors in this situation.

But large infrastructure projects in Nepal have been delayed even during times when politics was stable, like Melamchi. It seems to be more of a problem of governance?
Yes, governance is important, and in my meetings it seemed that the government is serious about addressing corruption and improving governance. One of the reasons this country can now move forward is that unlike in the 1970s, there is an international consensus on development and there aren’t different ideologies in China, India or Southeast Asia. Some countries tried the more statist approach, but for this comparatively small country it is the choice of the people, but what is important is to have an integrated approach to development. It is important to empower marginalised regions and different groups, but for this comparatively small economy what is more important is to mobilise total resources of the country.

And what if the instability continues despite the promulgation of the constitution?
You have to remember that the per capita income of Nepal is very low, and it is one of the eight remaining low-income countries while other countries have progressed to middle-income status. Development-wise Nepal may be lagging behind but it also means Nepal can move ahead faster to catch up. I have a very strong belief that if the government passes good policies, the achievement is even better than what international observers would expect. That happened to China, and people never thought about China becoming such a big economy in a period of 20-30 years. So I think Nepal can do it if there is more seriousness. But to do that, it is very important to mobilise the power of the people.

In many of the countries that ADB works in, the lack of transparency is a big problem. How does a bank with a zero-tolerance policy deal with this, for example in Nepal?
I got the message that the government is serious about transparency. One of the ways to deal with this, from the ADB side, is through the procurement process which is based on the competitive bidding, whether it is international or domestic. We always check the integrity issues whether there is wrongdoing within the contract by the government and contractors. And also we are supporting capacity building for anti-corruption work, what kind of systems can support transparency and in the government’s procurement system. So, public finance management as a whole should be more streamlined and that is more important than the ADB’s role.

This is a very short visit for you but are you slightly more optimistic after your visit than you were before you arrived?
Yes, we have seen a trend that the per capita income of Nepal is rising again. And that is really encouraging.
The sudden westerly squall was uncharacteristic for winter rain, and brought welcome respite for farmers and cleared up the pollution in Kathmandu Valley. This means the sun is now not filtered by smog, and will start heating up the ground. After staying in the low single-digits, the minimum temperature will begin to rise starting the weekend. The maximum will still remain in the vicinity of 20 Celsius. The lingering water vapour from Tuesday night’s rain will leave residual clouds build-up towards afternoon.

STÉPHANE HUÉT

For nearly three decades, the Siddhartha Art Gallery (SAG) has become Kathmandu’s own art installation: hosting the most prestigious art festivals and exhibitions. Synonymous with Siddhartha is its founder, Sangeeta Thapa who gave herself the goal of showing the very best of Nepali art based on merit.

Most connoisseurs of art in Nepal and abroad would agree that Thapa has achieved her goal. The past five years have been particularly vibrant for Thapa as she involved herself in diverse projects.

Though it hasn’t always been easy in the past 30 years, Thapa has never stopped doing what she likes most. “Inactivity is death,” insists the self-professed workaholic.

Her love affair with art began as a child when her father, who was a UN diplomat, took her to shows and exhibitions around the world. “He instilled his love for the arts very early on,” Thapa said in the balmy courtyard of a restored Rana palace outside her gallery.

Immersed in this environment, Thapa was determined to become an artist since she was five. Later, she went to the West Sussex School of Arts and Design in UK, but stopped after one year feeling guilty about not following the career path of her father.

“The art was just about me,” Thapa says, “but I thought I could serve people as my father did.” She started studying mass communications and anthropology at the George Mason University in Virginia in the USA. But art pulled her back, again.

In 1983, Thapa visited many galleries in Kathmandu and felt there was something missing. “The whole production of exhibitions was crying out to be managed better,” she said.

While creating her network in Kathmandu, she had the idea of showcasing artists in her own way and opened Siddartha Art Gallery with artist Shashikala Tiwari in 1987. They started exhibiting noted Nepali artists of that time and went back in history of Nepali art to exhibit the works of Nepali masters.

After some years of showcasing the same artists, Thapa felt the need to propose more innovative works. “I was seeking new narratives,” she explained, “and I was happy to see young artists in the art community.” The gallery helped launch a new generation of Nepali artists such as Sujan Chitrakar and Ashmina Ranjit.

Her biggest challenge was to create an appreciation from the Kathmandu audience for whom the new genre of artwork was not as comprehensible. And while the gallery churned out exhibitions, five years ago Sangreeta set up the Siddhartha Art Foundation to use the medium of art to educate and engage the community.

It was during the height of conflict that Siddhartha organised The Open Doors Project which brought artists and citizens from marginalised communities and disparate social backgrounds together in the quest for dialogue and peace.

Another project, Shanti: An Art for Hope, involved an exhibition and concert dedicated to the 327 children killed during the conflict. A monument in Sinamangal documenting the names of these 327 children is a testimony of this project.

With a grant from the Danish Centre for Culture and Development (DKU), the Siddhartha Art Foundation is currently organising various talk programs on art and curation to encourage the next generation of Nepali art managers.

At the same time, Thapa is preparing for the third edition of Kathmandu International Art Festival (KIAF) in March 2016. The first two themes were Status of Women in Nepal and Climate Change, and the next KIAF will focus on the city and urban issues.

Thapa’s only regret is that there isn’t an actual museum of contemporary art in town. She adds: “I’m working on it.”
**Nippon cinema,**
A two-day Japanese film festival organised by the Embassy of Japan in association with Japanese Language Teachers’ Association of Nepal.
27 and 28 February, Tribhuvan Army Officer’s Club, Tundikhel, (01)4426680, cultural-emb@km.mofa.go.jp

**Indo-Nepal,**
A joint exhibition by Nepali artists from Banaras Hindu University.
Till 18 February, 11am to 5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, (01)4218048, sthapa@mos.com.np

**Clean up,**
Talk by Rabi Karmacharya on the use of technology to maximise the impact and presentation of household waste management survey by Krisha Shupali.
7 February, 7 am onwards, Café & Shop Mitini, Lazimpath, 9843547288

**10 minutes drama,**
An innovative concept giving an opportunity to theatre aficionados and people with no theatrical backgrounds to showcase their artistic potential.
22 to 28 February, Sarwanam Theater, Kalikasthan, (01)4011027, 10minutesdrama@gmail.com

**Sustainable art,**
An interactive session with artist Samar Singh Jufda on the topic of “Sustainability and Capacity-building through Art,” moderated by Kunda Dixit, Editor of Nepal Times.
6 February, 5.30pm, Himalayan Bank Auditorium, Kathmandu, (01)4519933

**Saturday Bazaar,**
Local organic producers come together to host this weekend market.
7 February, 11am to 5pm, Moon Alam Road, (01)4415613, nepalgolfzone@hotmail.com

**Journeying for art,**
Painting exhibition by a promising young artist Dhwoj Gurung.
20 to 24 February, Siddhartha Arts Foundation, 984-9519933, nischal.oli@gmail.com

**Curation 101,**
A workshop with Veerangana Solanki to discuss the role of a curator through dedicated material on exhibition design and documentation.
22 to 24 February, Siddhartha Arts Foundation, 084-9519933, rochel.chel@gmail.com

**Talk and Slideshow,**
A talk by Jan Banning, Dutch photographer, whose works have a socio-political focus: state power, consequences of war and injustice. His anthropological documentary portrait series Bureaucratics won a 2004 World Press Photo Award. Banning is currently working in Nepal as part of a series about communism.
10 February, 5 to 6.30pm, Yala Maya Kendra, editors@nepalitimes.com, rabsuwal@gmail.com

**Slam Finale,**
After two rounds of workshops and auditions, the top 20 poetry slammers compete in the final round of QC Awards – Youth Poetry Slam. At 6, 7 February, 12pm, Mandala Theatre, Anamnagar, (01)4587974, wordwarriorsnepal@gmail.com

**Art market,**
A place to sell and buy paintings, prints, posters and design products, live gig by Herbal People.
7 February, 12 to 5pm, The Yellow House, Sankhu, (01)5008685, sinta@image-ark.com

**Chez Caroline,**
Authentic ambience, exquisite French food, glorious sunshine and more. Babar Mohit Revisited, (01)4063870

**Fire & Ice,**
For the best Italian pizzas in town.
Thamel, (01)4250210

**Lal Durbar Restaurant,**
Authentic Nepali dinner with a cultural show.
Hotel Yoli & Frei, Durbar Marg, (01)4248999, reservations@laldurbar.com

**Manny’s,**
Head down for some delicious Corn Fritters, Pad Thai Noodles, Crispy Crunch Potatoes and don’t forget their signature Manny’s Spicy Wings. All served with fine hospitality in an excellent space.
Jawalakhel, (01)5536919

**Japanese goodness,**
Enjoy a wide selection of Japanese cuisines – delights like sushi, tempura, udon soba, donburi and more.
Garden Terrace Restaurant, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, (01)4359889

**Valentine night,**
A free rose and a free glass of hot mulled wine followed by a free Irish coffee on Valentine’s Day in a balloon filled dining room.
14 February, K-too Beer and Steakhouse, Thamel, (01)4700043.
Tribute to reggae,
Joint Family Internationale celebrates Bob Marley’s 70th birthday and opens the Black History Month 2015.
Rs300, 6 February, 8pm, House of Music, Thamel, 985-1075172, sonoy@hotmail.com

Wave tour,
Wave Magazine celebrates its 20th anniversary with a series of concerts.
Rs100, 7 February in Pokhara, (01)5010772, info@wavemag.com.np

Underground,
Local metal bands get together to celebrate Underground Nepal’s fifth anniversary.
Rs300 (door sale), Rs 250 (pre-sale), 7 February, Purple Haze, Thamel, 981-845754, mail@nepalunderground.com

Relax,
Yoga, detox and ayurveda treatment in a quiet corner of Kathmandu.
Annapurna Peace and Wellness Center, Park Village Resort, Budhanikhet, 01-453586, peace@wellness.com.np

Shangri-La Village Resort,
Set amidst peaceful surroundings with a breathtaking mountain view, landscaped gardens, water bodies and a relaxing ambiance.
Gharipatan, Pokhara, (61)462222, (01)4410051, shangrilavillage@gmail.com

Barahi Jungle Lodge,
The first eco-jungle lodge of Chitwan directly overlooking the Chitwan National Park, along with a spa, boutique guest room, individual and two-in-one private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool.
Andrauli, West Chitwan, (01)4411113, bjl@barahi.com, www.barahijunglelodge.com

Uglyz live,
Back in Nepal to celebrate the 10th anniversary of their debut album, 7 February, Trisara, Lazimpat, (01)4410200, trisara.restaurant@gmail.com

Dance Valley,
A concert with some of the most innovative live electronic music acts in the Sub Continent.
Rs 1000, Club 25 Hours, Tangal, 980-1014018, info@eleven11.com.np

Jhule mountain resort,
Rising 2050m above sea level, the eco-resort has a farmhouse that stretches across a hill covered in fresh pine. Enjoy an organic homestay experience.
Shivapuri-Nagarjun National Park, Lapsipedi-2, Jhule, (01)672399

Valentine’s Day Celebration

Happy Valentine’s Day

This Valentine’s eve melt your beloved’s heart with an invitation at The Lost Horizon Cafe for a Delightful romantic dinner with live performance by popular singer Ciney Gurung.

Date: 14th February, 2015
Venue: The Lost Horizon Cafe, Hotel Shangri-La
Time: 7:00 pm onwards
Rate: Rs. 1800 nett for single
       Rs. 3500 nett for couple

(Includes a glass of Kir Royal or Valentine Love Mocktail)
After the death of their parents, brothers Suman Pariyar and Sujan Pariyar from Bhaktapur had to quit school to work full time. Sujan, 20, joined the Everest Band Baja in 2007 where he played the euphonium. Three years later, Suman, 21, followed in his brother’s footsteps and joined the band. While Suman has rejoined college and is now a management student, Sujan says it is unlikely he will go back to school.

“Circumstances were such that I had to drop out and we can’t both afford to go to school,” says Sujan. A majority of Kathmandu’s wedding bands are owned and operated by Pariyar (Shilpi) families from Western Nepal, who have been in the trade for generations. Their traditional flutes and horns were replaced with modern instruments long ago.

Everest Band Baja was started by Ram Kumar’s father, Bhim Bahadur Pariyar in the late 1950s. Ram Kumar, 56, took over the business when he was 22. All four brothers work for the same company. Middle brother Sudarshan Pariyar is the band master, while his other two brothers help with administration. “It’s a family-run affair,” says Ram Kumar. His eldest son, Pabitra is also in the band and plays the clarinet. Pabitra will take over his uncle’s role once the latter retires.

While Ram Kumar would like to see his children and grandchildren continuing the family profession, he says the younger ones are opting for other jobs. "This is a seasonal job where the

**A DAY IN THE KATHMANDU WEDDING BANDS**

**TSERING DOLKER GURUNG**

**6.30AM**

It’s still dark outside and in the dimly-lit room at Patan’s Tadholka, members of the Everest Band Baja are busy preparing to perform at a wedding: their 30th engagement of the season. The members put on their uniforms: black trousers, white shirt and a trademark red coat with golden epaulettes and sit down for a last minute rehearsal.

**6.45AM**

Band leader Ram Kumar Pariyar signals that it’s time to leave. The 16 members lug their trumpets and drums, and squeeze into a microbus and set off for the day’s big event: a Newari wedding in Balaju.

**8.00AM**

The band has arrived for the ring ceremony, but the groom is nowhere to be seen. They wait outside, huddled for warmth. Some are smoking, others are goofing around. A relative of the groom shouts at them: “Don’t just stand there, play something.”

Trumpeter Abin Pariyar, 21, is used to the rudeness. “Even though the stigma about being untouchables is not as prevalent as before, we are still looked down upon because we belong to a lower caste and are treated accordingly,” he says.

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**TUNING IT**

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“Circumstances were such that I had to drop out and we can’t both afford to go to school,” says Sujan. The brothers earn Rs 800 per event and do not have any other jobs. They hope to open a company of their own in the future.

Since he took charge of the shop, Ram Kumar has trained over 70 young boys to play wedding instruments including clarinets, trumpets and drums. The trainees get accommodation and food and Ram Kumar pays them Rs 500 to play at events.

All band members are Shilpis, but why aren’t there any female band members? Ram Kumar replies: “There are a lot of drunk men at weddings. If they are disrespectful towards our girls, we won’t be able to defend them by fighting back because they are our employers, so it’s best to not bring them.”
For Santosh Tamrakar, a sales and marketing director, who was still reporting for work two days before his wedding, hiring a wedding planner was the best decision of his life.

“To wed in Nepal is a big, big hassle,” said the 34-year-old. In addition, both him and his bride’s parents were busy at work during the engagement. “We had no time to decide and pick good food, banquet locations or decorations,” he said.

Tamrakar is not alone. More couples are choosing to hire professional wedding planners to oversee their big day. Sarvadev Sigdel of Nepal Wedding Planners said the number of couples seeking his services have tripled since he started his business four years ago. He said this is because of time constraints and western influences.

“Brides are getting ideas from watching television programs, and have become more specific about what type of wedding they want,” he said. Nepal Wedding Planners offer to plan an assortment of weddings based on the couple’s choices, that could range from royal to garden settings or following the bride’s favourite colour scheme. “The couples have their preferences, and we serve as an extra hand to help them have the most perfect special day.”

The ability to customise one’s wedding without having to fuss over the minute details has made the wedding planning business quite lucrative. When Nepal Wedding Planners first opened for business, there were only one or two other wedding planners in the city, now they are all over Kathmandu.

Cynthia Choo
I haven’t been that long since I wrote a review of Begin Again (2014) a right charmer of a film starring Keira Knightley and Mark Ruffalo — that deals with real musicians making real music that sticks in your mind for months to come.

So, it was with a great deal of anticipation that I awaited Song One, another film about musicians, starring some real ones that premiered initially at the Sundance Film Festival in January last year. Perhaps the reason for my disproportionate amount of excitement had something to do with the fact that Johnny Flynn, who can only be described as a throwback to the English troubadours (really there is no other word for his kind of music), plays the lead role of James Forrester in said film.

Mesmerised, circa a decade ago, by the show he played with Laura Marling (another one of Britain’s great, young, singer-songwriters) in a small New York venue, I would have been perhaps a little disappointed had I been told that he would foray into cinema – although perhaps, in hindsight, it might have been inevitable on account of his romantic (in the Shakespearean sense) good looks.

Considering that Song One would have been a hideous film had Flynn been a bad actor, I am relieved to report that playing across Anne Hathaway as his love interest, Franny, Flynn does hold his own. Natural as he is the man is not a great thespian: his talent lies firmly in the world of music. Still, Kate Barker Froyland, the director, has been astute in her casting of Flynn as a famous musician who has had a great deal of success with his debut but has stalled while writing his follow-up album (incidentally, this is not a reflection of Flynn’s personal musical career). When Franny searches James out to understand why her comatose musician brother Henry (Ilen Rosenfeld) dropped out of college to follow in James’s footsteps, she stumbles onto one of his solo performances where he shifts effortlessly from the guitar to the violin in a one man show that highlights the lead character’s inherent charm and suitably shifts the film’s trajectory away from the clichéd kind of melodrama that most of us abhor.

I will stop there, for this is not quite a romantic comedy, much less so than Begin Again albeit perhaps a little clumsier and noticeably darker, and I do not want to give the game away. With the incredible music and the palpable attraction between the characters, Song One is a film that will keep you more than suitably entertained visually and musically; especially considering that all the songs were composed by Jenny Lewis and Jonathan Rice – two indie darlings that write the catchiest of tunes.
Indian artist Samar Singh Jodha has for the last 20 years been pushing the envelope of photography and film to address social issues like development, human rights and conservation. "Which brings us to the question: isn’t art supposed to be art’s sake? Does art need a cause? The debate is probably as old as art itself, but Jodha has no doubts about where his sympathies lie. It lies with people who are disenfranchised, and issues that are marginalised by the juggernaut of worldwide consumerism. Art itself is getting homogenised in the meat grinder of globalisation, and Jodha wants to rescue the medium before it is too late so that it can retain its honesty and character. Art has gone commercial, many investors see dollar signs when they see a work of art. And a handful of “experts” decide subjectively what is an important piece of work and what is not."

A working migrant miners in the coal mines of Assam, Jodha shows us images of the shackles of miners made from scrap metal crafted from the very raw materials that they sweat in inhuman conditions to excavate.

Jodha’s works have been shown in galleries and museums in Mumbai, Delhi, Barcelona, Boston, Frankfurt, London, New York, Washington DC and Australia. Jodha’s eight-year long project on ageing in India remains the single biggest social communication project in terms of outputs and outreach. Extracts of it were showcased at Whitechapel Gallery, London and Fotomuseum, Zurich in 2010.

Jodha’s five-year work on the making of world’s tallest habitat was featured on Discovery, National Geographic as well as exhibited at New York’s Skyscraper Museum. His television project has been showcased worldwide (most recently at The Needle On The Gauge in Adelaide, Australia) and described by The New York Times as “A beautiful series of photographs (that) documents the now-pervasive presence of television in Indian life.”

Bhopal - A Silent Picture, a 40 foot installation was showcased by Amnesty International during the Olympics in London, with 15,000 visitors at the multi-media public art project. Phaneng - his award winning portraiture project about the disappearing Tai Phake, a Buddhist tribe in India’s northeast was seen at Belgrade Art, New Delhi in 2008 and Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington DC in 2010. He continues to work closely with this endangered community.

Jodha is in Kathmandu this week, and will be showcasing his film and discussing his works at a talk moderated by Kunda Dixit at the Himalayan Bank Auditorium.

www.samarsinghjodha.com

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**H. Pylori: the good and the bad.**

In 1982, to the astonishment of the medical world, two Australian scientists, Barry Marshall and J. Robin Warren discovered a bacterium ‘helicobacter pylori’ (H. pylori) to be the main cause of gastritis and peptic ulcers.

Peptic ulcer disease (PUD), a distinct ‘break’ in the lining of the stomach, is a well-known problem in Nepal.

Many patients come to the doctor saying they have ‘gastric’, meaning ‘gastritis’, which is the inflammation of the lining of the stomach. Gastritis is one of the most common medical issues of concern reported in both rural and urban Nepal.

Those who tend to have repeated issues of gastritis are advised to avoid a long list of food, which is not always practical in Nepal.

Prior to the discovery of H.Pylori as the main culprit of PUD: stress, spicy food, production of excessive acid and certain lifestyle habits were believed to be the primary causes. Hence the approach to treatment was completely different. Patients were prescribed rest and medicines such as antacids, but the problem was recurrent.

Marshall and Warren shared the 2005 Nobel Prize for their discovery of H. Pylori. Their discovery has a very interesting story behind it.

Marshall drank a culture of the bug from a Petri dish to confirm if H. Pylori caused gastritis. He expected to suffer from the effects after days or weeks, but experienced the symptoms of gastritis within 3 days. He found the lining of his stomach wall was swollen and inflamed after a gastric endoscopy was performed on him.

While it may not be as deadly as the bacteria that cause tuberculosis, typhoid or cholera, H. pylori infects more people than all these three diseases combined.

Individuals of low socioeconomic and education status are more likely to be affected by the H. Pylori.

This medical therapy has clearly revolutionised the treatment of PUD and brought relief to thousands of people. Although drugs like aspirin and ibuprofen can cause PUD, H. Pylori is a more universal cause of PUD.

However, it is possible that the story of H.Pylori causing gastritis may not be as straightforward as it seems. There is some recent, strong scientific evidence to suggest that H. Pylori is not just a wayward villain causing PUD. The presence of H. Pylori in humans may be protective for childhood asthma, hay fever and some skin disorders. This is an example of the staggeringly complex relationship between humans and microbes in disease causation.

Finally other than H.Pylori, there are other sinister causes of stomach ulcers which have to be kept in mind. Globally, stomach cancer is the fifth leading cancer and affects more elderly patients than younger ones.

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**GAMER’S DELIGHT**

While most laptops are reserved for work, study, and casual entertainment, hardcore gamers will no longer have to stick to ‘normal’ laptops that are unable to play the latest games at full resolution. Dedicated gaming laptops have been out for a while, and the Dell-owned Alienware line is considered the market leader in producing one of the best gaming machines. The company scores again with the Alienware 17 R1.

The Alienware 17 R1 looks built to last. While most laptops are reserved for work, study, and casual entertainment, hardcore gamers will no longer have to stick to ‘normal’ laptops that are unable to play the latest games at full resolution.

Alienware 17 R1 looks built to last. While most laptops are reserved for work, study, and casual entertainment, hardcore gamers will no longer have to stick to ‘normal’ laptops that are unable to play the latest games at full resolution.

**Yantrick’s Verdict:** Packed with capabilities that satisfy the high-performance demands of gamers, the Alienware 17 R1 is also made to impress with its great build quality and handsome design. At NPR 2.26 lakhs, this is certainly for users that value and appreciate specifications over its price tag.

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**DHANVANTARI**

Buddha Basnyat, MD

**GIZMO by YANTRICK**

W

 Pale blue and black-matte rubber casing on the inside, along with a multi colour customizable neon-backlit keyboard: the Alienware 17 R1 looks built to last. Boasting a mammoth 17.3-inch LCD touchscreen, games appear sharp and vibrant from all viewing angles on the Full HD display. Being the cream of the crop of Intel’s processors, the R1 runs on an Intel Core 4th Generation 2.59Ghz (4710MQ) Processor (with 6MB Cache and a 3.50GHz Turbo Mode) which runs the Windows 8.1 (64-bit) operating system, along with a whopping 16GB Dual Channel DDR3L at 1600MHz and a NVIDIA GeForce GTX 860M with 2GB GDDR5 graphics card. All combine to produce the best gaming experience on a portable device.

The spacious 1TB SATA hybrid internal hard drive (85400 RPM and 6Gb/s) will give you more room to have your media collection always available on this device. It also comes with a DVD RW Dual Layer Slot Load Drive. The R1 has an impressive audio powered by a built-in Klipsch speakers and Creative SoundBlaster Pro Studio Software. A 200W Full HD webcam and a dual digital microphone array also allows for crystal clear Skype sessions. Gamers connection needs have not been neglected either with 3 SuperSpeed USB 3.0 Ports, a SuperSpeed USB 3.0 Port with PowerShare Technology, a Mini-Display Port, a HDMI 1.4 Output, a 9-in-1 Media Card Reader, Killer 1525 802.11ac 2x2 WiFi and Bluetooth 4.1 — all at your disposal.

Yantrick’s Verdict: Packed with capabilities that satisfy the high-performance demands of gamers, the Alienware 17 R1 is also made to impress with its great build quality and handsome design. At NPR 2.26 lakhs, this is certainly for users that value and appreciate specifications over its price tag.
Nepali Times: Were you surprised by the reaction from the government about your meeting with a Madhesi intellectual?
Rensje Teerink: At the outset, let me clarify the background of our meeting with Dr Raut, as there have been many rumours and allegations circulating in the press. We were apprised of Dr Raut’s case via local human rights organisations that pointed out that he had been the victim of serious human rights abuses. When Dr Raut approached several EU embassies with the request for a meeting we discussed the possibility of meeting him weighing the pros and cons. We were aware that he was seen as an agitator. On the other hand, there was the human rights issue and the fact that Dr Raut was not convicted of any crime yet. As you know, the EU is a staunch defender of human rights principles worldwide. Most times, human rights law is needed precisely to protect those who are rejected and unpopular. Refusing a meeting would not have been very consistent with these principles. We therefore decided to grant him an appointment to hear his grievances, which is something we routinely do with people from many different groups, be they Madhesi, Janajatis, Dalits, etc. And to be clear, contrary to what is being repeated in some media, we saw him as EU heads of missions. It was not a meeting exclusively held by the Danish Ambassador and myself. In fact, the Danish Ambassador was not even present, she was represented by her DCM.

To be honest, we were more surprised by the reactions in the media. Numerous allegations were doing the rounds: that it was a ‘clandestine’ meeting, that I had travelled to Chitwan to meet Dr Raut in jail, that we had some sinister agenda by kindling the fires of separatism in the Tarai, etc. What is disappointing here is that no journalist thought it necessary to pick up the phone to hear first-hand what was going on. As to the Government, there was no immediate reaction after these press reports. It was only during the briefing session with the international Community on 22 January that the Honourable Foreign Minister referred to the obligation to respect diplomatic norms, pointing out that MOFA should be informed of meetings with political leaders and activists. This prompted us to seek a meeting to explain the background to him. This meeting took place on the 26th. We were not surprised by the government’s reaction. It’s only natural that they reacted the way they did, after all, the rumours flying around were quite serious. We had a cordial and frank discussion both with the Honourable Minister Pandey and with the Honourable Prime Minister.

What has been the response from top government leaders, including the prime minister, to your clarification?
The top leaders made their point very clear. The MOFA pointed out that it grants a lot of freedom to diplomats accredited to Nepal compared to other countries. We asked whether we had breached diplomatic norms when meeting with Dr Raut. The response was that they didn’t think we had breached the norms but they would have appreciated being informed about the meeting. The MOFA also highlighted the particular sensitive timing at which the meeting had taken place. The way Dr Raut is perceived in Nepal at this particular juncture means that a meeting should better have been avoided. We fully acknowledged this.

But can a meeting with a political activist really be described as ‘apolitical’?
We never referred to this as an ‘apolitical’ meeting. When a breach of human rights is discussed the meeting is per definition political. But the issue at stake was not to discuss the situation in the Madhes or to condone Dr Raut’s ideas of separatism. We made it very clear from the outset that we would be in listening mode as his ill treatment was concerned but that it was not our role to comment on or endorse his political agenda.

Would you agree that on this issue you crossed the line of diplomatic propriety?
In hindsight would you have done things differently?

There is perhaps a grey area here. The Vienna Convention states in Article 41: ‘Without prejudice to their privileges and immunities, it is the duty of all persons enjoying such privileges and immunities to respect the laws and regulations of the receiving State. They also have a duty not to interfere in the internal affairs of that State. 2. All official business with the receiving State entrusted to the mission by the sending State shall be conducted with or through the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the receiving State or such other ministry as may be agreed.’

Does meeting a political activist mean that we interfered in the internal affairs of the State? If yes, then we indeed breached diplomatic protocol, but then so have numerous other diplomatic actors, who have also met Dr. Raut and many other actors. Moreover, if we have to conduct all our business through the MOFA it would make our day-to-day work effectively impossible.

As mentioned earlier, MOFA didn’t think we had breached protocol but highlighted the sensitivity of the case and the unfortunate timing. Ultimately, MOFA’s stance should be our guiding principle. Would we have done things differently? The EU will always be willing to listen to people’s grievances if so requested, except if these people are convicted criminals, which is not Dr Raut’s case for the moment. In this particular case, in hindsight, we should have probably waited for a less sensitive moment. In the past, Dr Raut has held public conferences with the presence of many international actors. His ideas were well-known at the time; that he talks to people does not mean that interlocutors agree with him.

What has been the response from top government leaders, including the prime minister, to your clarification?

The government is reacting to public opinion pressure on issues like proselytisation, so why would European ambassadors be defending conversion?

Would you agree that on this issue you crossed the line of diplomatic propriety?

It’s a pity that the EU is now associated with ‘meddling’ and ‘interfering’. Those who are familiar with our work here know that we always have tried to play a constructive role. We support a stable and prosperous Nepal and we try to do our bit by providing development cooperation and by fostering investments. As we said in various public statements, we have no specific views on the Constitution: that is something for the Nepali people to decide.

The government is reacting to public opinion pressure on issues like proselytisation, so why would European ambassadors be defending conversion?

The reference by the British Ambassador concerned the right to choose one’s religion, as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That is something completely different. If I want to become a Buddhist tomorrow, nobody should be able to stop me. That said, I will be frank in saying that I’m not comfortable with so-called NGOs who exploit people’s poverty in order to lure them into converting. This is unacceptable to the EU and we would never support such NGOs or religious organisations.

What is your assessment of how the constitution process is going, and what in your view would be the ideal outcome?

It’s a moving target at the moment. We’re of course disappointed that a deal could not be reached although the parties seemed very close on the eve of the deadline of 22 January. But we remain optimistic. As for the outcome, I look towards the long term: with the promulgation of the Constitution Nepal will be able to move on with other urgent issues, such as local elections, economic growth and development. That will be Nepal’s moment and the EU is committed to continue supporting this process.
The rate of reported suicides in Nepal is increasing, and although more men kill themselves than women, suicide is still the leading cause of death among women in the 15-49 age group. Even in this cohort, girls and women between 10-24 are at higher risk.

The problem was highlighted by the widely-reported suicide last year of a 15-year-old girl in eastern Nepal ostensibly after Brazil lost in the World Cup semi-finals against Germany. Experts say suicides are just the outer manifestation of a hidden epidemic of mental health illness in Nepali society.

“Mental health is not just a biological or medical issue that can be treated with medication, there is a need for psychosocial support,” says clinical psychologist Nita Rana at the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital. Up to 15 per cent of mothers in her hospital experience postpartum depression that could develop into psychosis, which makes them susceptible to suicide and infanticide.

The tragic suicide of Nepal’s most-renowned and up-and-coming film director Alok Nembang at age 40 last year was said to be caused by depression. His personal diaries and a suicide note revealed Nembang’s deep feelings of hopelessness.

Internationally, 90 per cent of all suicides are attributed to mental health causes and depression is the biggest risk factor. One in every five children and adolescents have mental health problems. The social and psychological effects of growing up in an abusive home can haunt individuals for life. There has been a rise in adolescents engaging in self harm by cutting themselves. It is a clear cry for help, and yet this usually goes unnoticed till it is too late.

In Nepal, the number of patients seeking help has risen dramatically, says Renee Gerritzen, a Dutch psychologist practicing at Anirica in Kathmandu. "Four years ago, 10 per cent of my patients were Nepali, now half of them are Nepali." Gerritzen takes this as a positive development because people are overcoming the stigma. Nepal’s conflict and natural disasters also have a strong impact on the mental well being of survivors. Mostly diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder, they require therapy, support and time. There is a danger of psychiatrists overmedicating patients even though some do need antipsychotics which could be abused or sold.

Research shows that the suicide rate in one of Nepal’s most prosperous and literate districts is rising alarmingly.

When 14-year-old student Sujan Lamgade killed himself in Ilam Bajar two months ago, his death highlighted a disturbing rise in the number of suicides in one of Nepal’s most prosperous districts.

Thirty-seven people killed themselves in this eastern district bordering Darjeeling between June-December 2014, according to an unofficial tally. If the trend continues, the year’s total will eclipse those of the late 1990s and early 2000s, when Ilam gained a reputation as Nepal’s suicide capital. The number of people killing themselves had dropped to 12 three years ago. "The numbers are going up again," said Bhupal Khatiwada of the Namsaling Community Development Centre (NCDC). When the suicide rates went up alarmingly in 2002-2003, the organisation ran a campaign to raise awareness about mental health issues, train health workers, and do a survey.

Like other people interviewed, Khatiwada has his own ideas about why the district is plagued by suicides: young people leave home to study and lack family support, older ones are unable to adapt to the lifestyle changes they see in the upcoming generations. The fact that Ilam has one of the highest literacy rates could also be a factor.

"If someone said there was bird flu in Ilam, lots of resources would be available to deal with it, but not for mental illness. The government doesn’t have the data or resources to address it," Khatiwada told Nepali Times.

Researchers at BP Koirala Institute
In Nepal, men above 35 have the highest rate of suicide, and relatively prosperous districts like Ilam and Chitwan have some of the highest suicide rates in the country (see adjoining story). Regionwise, the Mid-Western and Western areas have the highest suicide rates and the lowest in the Central Region (see map). The remote district of Rukum, for example, registered 10 suicides in the past four months, and police said the main cause was family disputes. The government has to invest more on mental health as the current budget for treatment and counseling is less than one percent of the total health budget," said Nir Prasad Giri of the Nepal Mental Health Foundation.

If mental illness is the disease, suicide can be the result. Health experts advise that the problem be addressed at the source. However, mental health has such social stigma that most families don’t want to discuss it and many patients fear being labeled “mad” if they see a counselor. (See column)

“Mental health is a relatively young science in Nepal, there is little awareness, people may consult astrologers or shamans as respected counselors, and because of taboos and lack of awareness people do not seek help,” said Lisa A Gautschi, a transpersonal psychologist with the Isha Centre in Patan.

The Nepali word for mental illness “bahulako” can span everything from patients with epilepsy to psychosis. Nepal’s Muluki Ain even bars “mad” people from standing in an election and be a member of the board of any organization.

“First, the language and definition need to change,” says Nagendra Luitel, a researcher at Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation that works on mental health and psychosocial issues in Nepal. “Legal policies on suicide need to change as it is considered a crime.”

In an increasingly consumer-driven urban setting, we have to remind ourselves to look beyond ourselves and pay attention to people around us. We all know someone with mental health illness, but what are we doing to help? Do we even acknowledge it, or do we ignore it?

It is important to be empathetic and non-judgmental towards individuals with mental health illness. It takes courage to ask for help, and it is the family and community’s responsibility to provide it. With awareness, knowledge, treatment and support, most people diagnosed with mental health illness are able to live happy and healthy lives.

Some names of patients have been changed.

Anjana Rajbhandary is a Mental Health Rehabilitation Technician and a sub-editor at Nepali Times.
Cracks in the Madhesi front
Marred by deep distrust, Madhesi parties look incapable of serving the Maoist interest

OM ASTHA RAI

The ruling NC-UML coalition looking determined to bulldoze through a new constitution through a vote in the Constituent Assembly and the opposition UCPN (Maoist) and Madhesi Front alliance equally resolve in preventing it. But both sides have a new headache: deep distrust among themselves.

Constituents of the 30-party opposition alliance led by the Maoists are distrustful of each other and fear backstabbing, raising doubts over success of their agitation against the NC and the UML’s efforts to settle the disputed issues of the new constitution through a vote.

It all started after the MJF (Democratic) Chair Bijaya Gachhadar, the leader of the Madhesi Front, tried to bring the ruling and opposition parties to a negotiation before the 22 January deadline ended. At the outset, all major parties agreed but Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the Maoists quickly backed out of it, clearly upsetting Gachhadar. On Wednesday he put forward another proposal: a three-province Madhes as a compromise over the disputed districts in the eastern plains.

Later that night, when opposition lawmakers shouted slogans to stop the CA from forming a questionnaire committee, Gachhadar stayed aloof. He did not raise his fist, publicly displaying his dissatisfaction with the Maoist.

Since then, the distance and distrust between Gachhadar and other opposition parties have only grown, straining relations not just between the UCPN (Maoist) and the MJF (Democratic), but also creating rifts within the Madhesi Front. The Maoists are distrustful of each other and fear backstabbing, raising doubts over success of their agitation against the NC and the UML’s efforts to settle the disputed issues of the new constitution through a vote.

OM ASTHA RAI

For and against

Discontentment between the government and the international community at a time when the country is facing political polarization is not a good sign. While Prime Minister Sushil Koirala’s outburst at EU ambassadors may have been an opportunity to vent his anger, it could be a diplomatic mistake. Such a complaint should have been channeled through the foreign ministry. The government’s displeasure stems from a clandestine meeting between two EU envoys and CK Raut, who has actively promoted secessionism. It is understandable that the government should react to such anti-national activities. The international community’s opposition to the ruling coalition’s effort to push the constitution to a vote seems to be nothing more than a display of its dissatisfaction with the Maoist.

“Solutions must be sought within the framework of federalism head on. He seems to have been enraged by Gachhadar particularly after the latter stopped the Madhesi Front from issuing a threat to walk out of the CA. On 1 January, Dahal had warned of quitting the CA and urged the Maoists to keep the CA. Yaday and Sadbhavana Party leader Rajendra Mahato, who named a joint group against the CA and launch a ‘fierce agitation’. Again, Gachhadar didn’t agree. “What do you mean by a fierce agitation? Picking up a gun? Waging a war?” Gachhadar reportedly told the meeting. “Solutions must be sought within the house, not on the streets.” Gachhadar was supported by another member of the Madhesi coalition, the TMLP’s Mahant Thakur, who has also been against the idea of walking out of the CA. Chandeshwor Khatwe, secretary of the MJF (Democratic), says Gachhadar’s outburst was misrepresented by the media. “There is no dispute within the Madhesi Front about hitting the streets, but unlike other Madhesi parties, we do not want to push the country into a new conflict.” Khatwe added, “We want to carry out street protests only to create pressure on the NC and the UML to come to a consensus with us. And that is possible within the CA.”

All is not well within the fringe parties either. Some of them have started distancing themselves from the 30-party alliance. The Janata Dal is no longer with the alliance and claims that other smaller identity-based parties will also follow suit. “Opposition parties have different interests,” said Hari Charan Sah, Chair of the Janata Dal. “For example, we just wanted proportional electoral system. Because the ruling parties have agreed to it, there is no need for us to be in the opposition alliance.”

The Maoist-Madhesi alliance was unnatural to begin with, and some members seem to be attracted by the Hindu royalist RPP (Nepal). Angered by the NC and the UML’s decision not to hold a vote on republicanism, federalism and secessionism, RPP (N) has publicly expressed their willingness to forge an alliance with the opposition. A Maoist leader told Nepali Times it wasn’t impossible: “We are open to everyone, be it Kamal Thapa or Mohan Baidya, but we have yet to discuss this issue.” If that happens, a Maoist-RPP(N) alliance would be even more unnatural.

In its recent Central Committee meeting, the Maoists concluded that the people are not ready for a return to revolution which is why it is relying on the Madhes Front to begin a new movement in the Tarai. The trouble with that is the Madhes Front itself is marred by mutual mistrust among members. It is incapable of serving the Maoist interest, at least for the time being.

Even while warning of strong street protests, the Maoists look equally desperate to hold face-saving talks with the NC and the UML. In a meeting of the 30-party alliance on 4 February, Dahal expressed his frustration at the lack of overtures.

International diplomats have overstayed their bounds with recent statement and actions. No sovereign country can tolerate that. Prime Minister Sushil Koirala needs to be commended for taking a stand against the European Union and their ambassadors. The international community and fears to have misjudged the Prime Minister’s tolerance for weaknesses. Almost all of those ambassador represents democracies, yet they are opposed to a democratic exercise on the constitution. This is ridiculous, yet unfortunate. A few ambassadors even met with a person who can’t even dream of serving the international community should take the PM’s warning seriously.

A true statesman always swaggers against the tide and reveals truth at critical junctures. UML Chair KP Oli is tackling political forces spreading communal hatred in the name of federalism head on. He has not even spared foreigners providing money and logistical support to them.

Oli has said that the Maoists and other opposition parties will withdraw their protests and pave the way for the constitution writing if they are given Rs 5-10 billion. Although Oli made this statement at an internal party meeting, a statement that an important public figure cannot be overlooked. There is a very thin line between public and praise for a senior politician like Oli. Though it is difficult to gather evidence, there are indications that our political parties regularly receive funds from foreign entities. Oli’s accusation against the Madhesi is even more serious. Why are the Maoists, arguably the biggest bore for change in the country and trusted by India after the 12-point agreement with the seven political parties, keeping mum? The onus lies on Oli to prove his allegation. But the silence of the Maoists has fueled public speculation. It is now time for the government to issue a white paper on politics and money if the political parties and leaders are themselves for sale, will they not sell out the country at the next opportunity? The money that has supposedly come for a ‘revolution’ needs to be investigated.

Oli must prove that his accusation is not just mud-slinging, but the beginning of a campaign to make political parties and leaders more accountable to the public.
Enjoy Chivas responsibly
Some of you have stopped the Ass in the street this week to ask questions like: “Which way is the country headed?” or “Is there going to be a constitution?” or “Have you seen PK yet?”

Being a veteran correspondent who believes that with great press freedom comes great responsibility, I am used to these questions and always make it a point to answer good-naturedly: “How the bloody hell should I know?” In fact, we hacks are as clueless, if not more clueless, about what is going on in this country as most of you, our valued clients. (The only difference is that we keep it a closely guarded secret.)

Even so, after decades of experience deciphering press statements that don’t say anything, we have become experts at reading between the lines. For instance, if the leaders of the opposition alliance and the leaders of the ruling coalition are described by their respective spokes as having had a “free and frank exchange of views at Singha Darbar” one can be sure they came to blows and one of them suffered a dislocated eyeball.

If, on the other hand, a one-on-one meeting between the UML Chair and the Indian ambassador in Balkot is described as being conducted in a “cordial and friendly atmosphere”, then it would be a safe bet that the two leaders probably sat face-to-face in stony silence for one hour and forty-five minutes until at least one of them fell asleep on the sofa out of sheer boredom.

Decades of experience has also made some of us in the media specialists in the art of reading body language and gestures when VIPs meet. How tight was the embrace between Obama and Modi, and were they also cheek-to-cheek or just cheek-to-jowl? How long did the bear-hug between Namo and Suko last when they met at the SAARC Summit? What about eye contact, if any? Did one of them, unbeknownst to the press corps, have the other by the gonads?

The good thing about covering Nepali politics these days is that with all the verbal bricks and non-verbal chairs being hurled around by politicians, one can be sure that what one sees is what one gets. There is no attempt to maintain diplomatic niceties and camouflage one leader’s feeling towards the other, no attempt to beat around the bush. We give it straight.

So, Comrade Oily accuses Baddie Dudes of asking for 10 Arabs in bribe to call off their agitation. The Cash Comrades, pooh-poohed it. “Whadya think, we would sell ourselves for so cheap?”

BRB, PhD, seems to be some kind of Freudian sexpert. For the last couple of years he has been making politically incorrect remarks casting aspersions about the gender, if any, of the UML (or to give the party’s full name: the Communist Party of Nepal Unified Marxist-Leninists). Why a communistic party would have a gender classification, and who decides whether a party is male or female, has never been satisfactorily answered. But Comrade Red Flag seems to be unduly curious about whether the UML is a) male b) female c) other [tick one] and seems to have come to the definitive conclusion that the party is actually hermaphrodite. This week in a tweet, the atheist Doc compared the UML to androgynous characters from Hindu mythology, and even went as far as to say that the Unified Marxist-Leninists are impotent eunuchs, compared to his own gloriously virile party.

Not to be outdone, the Maoist-Madhesi Dalliance passed a strongly-worded resolution recommending that Comrade Oily get his head examined by a certified psychiatrist at state expense. Warming up to the theme, Awesome then went on to tell the meeting that as penance for having gone soft on the revolution, he’d also like to have his head cracked open and let the blood cleanse him.

By this point in this article, many readers must be laughing their heads off. “Hahahahahahaha,” you may be saying. “Hohohohoho. Ass, you have really outdone yourself this week.”

Sorry to disappoint you, dear customers, but the Ass is not making any of this up. Those are actual quotes from Nepal’s top political leadership. It’s all deadly serious.