A week after surviving a coup by the opposition Nepali Congress, a plot widely believed to have been hatched in New Delhi, Prime Minister K P Oli told diplomats in Kathmandu on Wednesday that his government is not in crisis, and will be replaced only when a new parliament is elected in 2018.

This contradicts the assurance Oli apparently gave Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal that he would step down after the budget. This means not everything is hunky-dory in the ruling coalition, and the NC is waiting for the right opportunity to strike again.

Dahal is under pressure from his party’s ministers in government, and is not publicly presssing for regime change, but he faces counter pressure from other comrades who are not ministers to unseat Oli. The leaders of breakaway Maoist factions, who are finalising a deal with Dahal to rejoin the main party, also want a new government so they can claim a share.

Rajan Bhattarai, one of Oli’s trusted aides, denied there was a secret deal last week to make Dahal PM. “Dahal backed off not because Oli promised him prime ministership but because he realised it was not possible to forge a ruling coalition with the NC and Madhesi parties,” he said.

To make things murkier, Maoist leader Janardan Sharma told us:

“Forget the wording, the spirit of the very first line of the deal is to form a new government under our party’s leadership.”

New Delhi appears determined to break the communist coalition which it believes was masterminded by Beijing. Last week, former Indian ambassador KV Rajan is learnt to have secretly met UML leaders, including Madhav Nepal, to break the UML-Maoist partnership. Oli is convinced India wants him out, and in retaliation cancelled President Bidya Bhandari’s visit to India, and recalled Nepal’s ambassador Deep Kumar Upadhyay. 

Oma Astha Rai

"Achieve an extra edge by attending our administrative training on 26th and 27th May."

buzz TOURISM IN HOT WATER
Nepal-Tibet tourism: government riles angry TIBETAN reunification front leaders in SAMINA SHRESTHA

Going places together

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Democracy press freedom are two sides of the same coin: while they strengthen each other, undermining one weakens the other. But western parliamentary democracy has a design flaw, it allows unbridled freedom to express the most outrageous views, which in turn permits populist politicians to prop up themselves to power. Usually, this happens during times of economic turmoil or conflict, when the mass media can be used to whip up support. On the eve of the 1990 movement, Nepal was feeling the aftershock of the 1988 earthquake, when a military coup led to the killing of thousands of people. The Madhes Movement represents the frustration of leaders from the plains that the hill-based parties have monopolised power, but only because they also want their hands in the till.

Nepal’s rulers have given every other amnesty for war crimes, and left the bleeding to bleed. They watch as millions work in slave-like conditions in the Gulf and Malaysia, often exploited and robbed by Nepali recruiters who enjoy political protection, in return for a share of the loot. They treat the treasury as their personal piggybank, plunder our forests and rivers, and poison our people. The rulers still rule, but they stopped governing long ago. Earthquake survivors and their own orthodoxy as they prepare for their second monsoon out in the open, and western Nepal reeks under a drought that threatens an unprecedented food shortage. Inside Singh Darbar, meanwhile, they go about the business of ‘politics’ with no sense of urgency, trying unsuccessfully to topple each other every so often at the behest of external powers and demagogues.

The most recent ‘coup’ attempt last week by Sher Bahadur Deuba to get his Nepali Congress to team up with the erstwhile Maoists backfired when Prime Minister Oli deftly out-manoeuvred him in a counter-coup. Suspecting that the Indian establishment had had a hand in it, Oli cancelled a visit by President Bidya Bhandari to India and abruptly recalled our ambassador in New Delhi. This petty tit-for-tat approach has unnecessarily ratcheted up tensions between Nepal and India at a time for much-needed healing after New Delhi’s grave blunder in foisting a five-month border blockade on Nepal. It would be naive to assume that this latest spat is only about strained relations between India and Nepal. Actually it is the result of intense political polarisations within India itself between the BJP and the rest, and within Nepal between the NC and the UML. Prime Minister Oli has found it convenient to once again play the nationalistic card and gain status by being seen to be standing up against India, while in New Delhi the anti-BJP forces are using the Beijing bogey in Kathmandu to embarrass Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The sooner we get out of all this populist posturing, the better for the peoples of both countries, who have not given up hoping for good governance, people-centred development and a better quality of life. The media in India and Nepal would do well not to fall into the trap set by politicians, by fanning the flames of conspiracy and intrigue at the behest of demagogues.

History keeps coming full circle, and is repeated as a farce.
Twitter is an odd phenomenon. It is a sinking ship and Silicon Valley predicts its imminent downfall. Around the world Twitter’s use has already peaked and is slowing down, and in the Nepali perspective it will be gone before most Nepalis even know what it is.

What a shame. People here are only just finally getting the Twitter groove on. Unlike Facebook, this is not the platform for posts about birthdays and anniversaries or the mediocre accomplishments of one’s kids (‘My 6-year-old can use the loo’) but a repository of comments on current affairs. One might say that for Nepal, social media has been filtered to create an online space for political activism via Twitter.

The street may remain eerily quiet, but Twitter is the new hotbed for political activism. It has brought to surface the most scathing criticism: of the state, of the left, of the right, of opinion pieces, of people and personalities. No stone is left unturned. Who knew people who didn’t write columns even had opinions? Well, now we know. Unfortunately, however, the real-world polarisation of public opinion manifests itself on Twitter in an even more wretched manner. We all know this, and yet we continue to egg on our preferred sides and actors with a 90:10 ratio of negative to positive energy.

Since people no longer even bother to have real conversations with people they disagree with, Twitter happily accommodates these fierce debates in a warped way. Fundamentally, when we have a heated debate face-to-face with someone we generally are guided by a code of conduct that is based on the overall demeanor of the person/group that one is debating—the gestures, tones, facial and body expressions.

On Twitter, you take away all of that and throw in intolerance in 140 characters. Being accountable to one’s opinions, choice of words, or tone is almost impossible. In real conversations you are forced to at least listen to the other side’s arguments, and choose your reaction strategically. It’s a jungle out there on Twitter, and politically-charged predators are on the prowl for the next prey to pounce on.

No wonder that even with a plethora of ‘discussion’ on Twitter, nothing ever really changes in real life. And yet, even the ‘best and brightest minds’ spend so much time and energy tweeting, mostly just calling other people out but with little to no positive result—only screen-shot tweet rebuttals.

With everyone so interested, no wonder that Big Brother is watching the Tweetosphere so astutely. In the case of our Oligarchic state, Big Brother has ventured beyond cyberspace and into real lives. And at that point, again, one’s opinions simply do not matter and the issue of democracy and free speech must indeed be brought up. Robert Penner’s arrest and deportation is a result of the shrinking democratic space in Nepal, there should be no doubt about it. Penner was targeted under the guise of immigration control. Needless to say, the right to voice opinions, counter-opinions and scathing rebuttals (better known as ‘trolling’) on Twitter, however fruitless it may be, is no crime at all.

Sure, trolls are annoying. But, more importantly, they become ‘trolls’ only when they disagree with you. In reality, most active Twitter users, who do more than just tweet the news, are ‘trolling’ one school of thought or the other and victims emerge left right and centre. One would think the Nepali and foreign intelligentsia at least would be above all this, but sadly, Twitter brings out the worst in us all. Maybe it’s best if Twitter folds up soon.
Nepalis have been using Himalayan hot springs for health reasons, but their full tourism potential has never been tapped

SAHINA SHRESTHA

Millions of years ago, when the Eurasian and Indian plates smashed into each other, they formed the Himalayan mountains, and gave Nepal its prime tourism attraction. The two tectonic plates are still rubbing against each other and have given the Himalaya another tourist attraction: geothermal hot springs. The same geological reason is what gives the country its at least 32 identified geothermal springs dotted across what geologists call the Main Central Thrust, that marks the suture between the two plates deep beneath the earth. Geothermal expert Mahendra Ranjit says although research on geothermal energy started in...

GETTING TOURISM OUT OF

SOAKING IT IN: Tourists on the Annapurna circuit at the Bhurung Tatopani in Myagdi district. Upgrading thermal springs could add value to Nepal’s tourist attractions.

Nepal more than 30 years ago, the emphasis was misplaced. “We looked mainly at generating electricity, which is difficult and costly due to the relatively low temperature of the hot springs in Nepal. What we need and should focus on is the direct use of these springs, like in tourism development and farming,” Runjit told us.

All over Nepal, locals have traditionally used hot springs for balneotherapy, to cure everything from back pain to arthritis, but the thermal springs are yet to become a stand-alone selling point for international tourists. All the towns next to hot springs in Nepal are called Tatopani, and there are dozens of them from Humla to Bajhang. The Tatopani at Kodari is the more famous hot spring among travelers since it lies right on the highway to the Nepal-China border. The Bhurung Tatopani in Myagdi and another in Ghorepani are popular because they are on the Annapurna trekking circuit. Many other thermal springs are not visited due to lack of road access, infrastructure and marketing.
hot water

GLOBALLY, mineral and thermal springs command a $50 billion market; Japan has a long tradition of bathing in natural hot springs (called ‘onsen’). Clinics treating ahead with luxury hot spring resorts and in Europe, Iceland, Austria and the Czech Republic have cashed in on the health market with wellness spas located near hot springs.

In Nepal, the huge potential of hot springs remains untapped. Tourism experts say the scope of hot spring tourism is vast and if properly developed can be a lucrative addition to the tourism market.

“With the current infrastructure, tourists may visit hot springs for the quasiness of it, but to attract international tourists we need to scale it up or leave everything natural,” says tourism entrepreneur Raj Gyawali. “Combining hot springs with yoga, sylvera and even shamanism can make it a viable product. Gyawal adds.

For the time being, Nepal could just cater to the domestic market and then expand to attract foreign tourists with additional services like spas and hotels as infrastructure is developed.

Clairce Ketke, whose company offers hot springs in a package to trekkers, says infrastructure is the main bottleneck. ‘The Bhurung Tatopani is popular among tourists because it falls on the Annapurna circuit. The Singh Tatopani is popular among domestic tourists. But there is an equally picturesque hot spring in Kavre, anyone hardly visits because it is difficult to get there.’

Nepalis believe that the natural mineral hot springs relieve ailments associated with joints, gastritis and skin among others. Since the springs are on public land, the private sector is not able to develop them to suit upmarket customers. Local communities lack the expertise and market reach to attract international tourists. Tourism entrepreneurs and local committees already running hot springs say that if the government provides the roads and tax breaks to invest in upgrading hot springs the private sector would jump in.

In Myagdi, the Singa Tatopani on the way to Bhalugiri Bag Camp is often overlooked by foreigners but Nepali patients have been coming here for centuries believing in the healing property of the spring. Income from the spring is used to operate the local Saraswati Secondary School with over 300 students. Income from the Bhurung Tatopani is also ploughed into the Saraswati Higher Secondary School.

Earnings from the springs are used in the development of not only the springs but the community as well.

“If the government and the private sector help to develop the springs, we are willing to contribute in any way we can,” says Yogendra KG of Singa Tatopani Management Committee. “Developed the right way, hot springs can be the pride of Nepal just like the mountains.”

Apart from tourism, the hot springs can be used in space heating, greenhouse farming, fish farming and crop drying. Says geothermal expert Ranjit, “There are multiple uses and we need to change our mindset about springs only being useful for geothermal energy and tourism.” 

Qatar helps rebuild
Qatar Airways funded a cheque to Global Sluggers Community Kathmandu to help rebuild Grameen Higher Secondary School in Budhanilkhantha in an event recently.

The school will be rebuit with modern child-friendly classrooms, smart grills, and interactive e-learning tools for students.

Nepal to UEFA
Carlsberg announced the winners all to live in ‘110’ campaign offering 11 customers a chance to watch

UEFA EURO 2016 live on an all paid expenses trip to France. The winning coupons were drawn by Raji, Mahat, Raja Raj Shalaya, Indu Manandhar.

Lounge and unwind
Tibet Airways has opened a new premium lounge at Melbourne

Airport. With a seating capacity of up to 133 guests, the airline boards of offering a comfortable environment for its customers to relax, re-energize, dine or work.
It’s about us
... It’s not about Ansari, Dixit or Penner

After prioritising a fast-tracked constitution instead of earthquake recovery, the Nepal government seems to have a new priority: persecuting its critics.

It first began when Prime Minister KP Oli reprimanded Human Rights Commissioner Molena Ansari for her statements in Geneva at the Universal Periodic Review. Soon after, senior journalist Kanak Mani Dixit was arbitrarily arrested and detained by the corruption watchdog, the CAA. The very day that the Supreme Court ordered Dixit’s release, a Canadian computer scientist named Robert Penner was arrested from his work place, detained and asked to leave Nepal, within two days. Both arrests were widely publicised in national and international media.

A country best known for its mountains, a unique flag, and the most dangerous airport in the world started to gain notoriety as the tinpot nation. Dixit is a well-known and highly respected journalist not only in Nepal but also in the region. Expectedly, his arrest sparked outrage in national and international media with statements of solidarity, public condemnations and many signed an online petition for his release.

Penner’s persecution for his critical tweets about Nepal’s affairs got even wider international coverage on The New York Times, BBC, BuzzFeed, Vice, and Canada’s Globe and the Mail. They provided free negative publicity about Nepal and its laws when the country is struggling to improve its international image after the lingering earthquake relief.

Outside Nepal, Penner is best known for his mathematical functions for creating motion using computer programs. Despite all the news and unprecedented publicity he received after his arrest, on search engines it is the ‘eating functions’ that come on top. Inside Nepal, he is best known as ‘that guy on Twitter’.

Most people know of Penner, they do not know him. Many have created mental images of him by recognising his public tweets to fit that imaginary person. Some have accused him of harassing users, a charge not uncommon on social media. I have also been harassed until I discovered two tools called ‘mute’ and ‘block’. Since they are freely available to any Twitter user, I would recommend their use since they have no known side effects.

Even though I have met Penner in person, my first interaction with him was through Twitter which many people can relate to. He asked me for statistics on the number of children with Nepali mothers, but a foreign father. He seemed to have taken interest in the gender inequality provisions to the new constitution. He was neither the first nor the last to write on this controversial topic. Manjushree Thapa wrote a lengthy piece in The Record titled ‘Women have no nationality. Why I burned my country’s new constitution?’. Even the US ambassador to Nepal, Alaina B Teplitz, wrote an op-ed.

In The Kathmandu Post titled ‘Women’s day, every day’ and admitted that ‘a provision in the constitution on citizenship is unfair to women’. While Thapa lives in Canada and Teplitz enjoys diplomatic immunity, Penner has no defense other than his basic human right to the Freedom of Expression, which is (un)constitutionally denied in Nepal. Penner has been accused of ‘making provocative statements that may jeopardise national integrity’. Penner is also accused of engaging in political activities. He has neither participated in any street protests nor contributed financially to any political parties. Recently, Thika Fokhare, a journalist turned UN worker revealed through his Facebook that Penner donated Rs 10,000 after he shared the sad news about the death of his cousin. The donation was for the education of his cousin’s two children.

Penner certainly took an interest in Nepali affairs as admitted in the memo revealed by his company’s boss Mark Sears, who wrote: “He quickly learned the Nepali language and immersed himself in the culture and customs of his new home. I for one always loved seeing a 6’9” Canadian performing traditional Nepali dances and songs.”

A brief review of his Twitter timeline shows that he has actively engaged in debates about Nepal’s issues whether it is about gender equality or human rights violations. It would be wrong to conclude however that his remarks ‘incite social discord’. He is merely engaged in a national and international debate about most urgent issues that already exist. If the emperors wear no clothes, he is stupidly logical about his worries about its consequences.

In reality, the much publicised events could well have started to gain notoriety about Penner is not about them, it is about us. The primary question is: what type of a new Nepal do we want to create? A Nepal that preserves our values as a tolerant Buddhist nation or a state that has no respect for rule of law where champions of democracy are squashed by powerful elites, while we silently watch until they come for one of us.

Puru Shah is the founder of Madhav Youth.

Imitating nature

Nepal’s most modern printing facility, JapaDamba Press, now makes natural colours come alive with its state-of-the-art equipment.

JapaDamba’s new Mitsubishi Diamond 1038
3 Colour Coating Unit
MADE IN KAVRE
A former migrant worker returns home to set up a jeans shop
TSERING DOLKER GURUNG
IN KAVRE

Former migrant worker Raju Pariyar (pic above) is one of the lucky ones. During his four-year stint as a tailor in Malaysia, he was never once abused by his employer, he always received his pay on time, and he had decent living conditions. He earned Rs 30,000 a month and was well treated by his boss who even offered to pay for his airfare back when he decided two years ago to return home to Kosi Pokhara, a small farming village in Kavre to set up a jeans workshop. “I spent a large part of my life living away from my family because of work,” says Pariyar who is married with two children, “opening this workshop was an effort at providing job opportunities to people in my village so they don’t have to move elsewhere.”

Starting with three sewing machines 18 months ago, Pariyar’s business now employs over ten people, men and women from surrounding villages. They work in a spacious corrugated tiffin that stands out in a village that had more than 90 per cent of its homes reduced to rubble in last year’s earthquake. All employees are first trained in use of sewing machines and taught various stitching methods. Depending upon the individual’s ability the training period can last from a week to a month.

Pariyar says his workshop is targeted towards the youth in his village. “Even if they don’t want to continue working here, they would leave at least learnt a new skill,” says the master tailor who worked for 20 years in Kathmandu before moving to Malaysia. Each employee makes Re 20 for every pair of jeans stitched which are sold to a supplier in Kathmandu. On average a worker makes 15 pairs of jeans a day, but there are those who can finish up to 25 pairs.

“Yes, the pay is nominal but when you add up an employee earns close to Rs 400 a day which is a lot more than what he/she would make working as a farm help, the only other job available in the village,” says Pariyar. Apurva Sunuwar, 20, was one of the first to join Pariyar’s workshop. A high school student, Sunuwar says working at the shop has enabled her to pay for her own tuition and also contribute to the family’s income. The flexible working hours at the workshop has also helped Sunuwar balance her work and school life. “My classes run from 6 to 10am and after that I come here,” says Sunuwar.

Munirahi Pariyar, 41, worked in construction before joining the workshop six months ago. His wife Sita Pariyar is also training to be a jeans tailor here. “It’s definitely much easier than what I used to do before,” says Munirahi. His wife agrees. Pariyar’s workshop produces only children’s jeans for now, but he hopes to diversify his products with an increased workforce and better equipment.

“The goal is to have a factory with 30-35 sewing machines and a lot more people working,” says Pariyar, “that will not only be a sign of my success but also of the village.” The only thing that stuck out in the denim produced here was the Made in Thailand labels attached at the back. When asked, Pariyar admitted sheepishly: “The name is provided by the supplier so I have no say in it but you can be assured they are as good as jeans made in Bangalore.”
LANGTANG IS READY FOR YOU
The scenic national park is open to trekkers again after last year’s deadly earthquake.

Liew Yu Wei
IN LANGTANG

Last year’s earthquake at 11:56 am on 25 April shook off a chunk of the southern flank of Mt Langtang Lirung (7,277m) and sent it crashing into the glacier below, bulldozing the ice over a cliff and down the valley. The shock wave that preceded the avalanche literally blew away the village, and buried what was left under ice and rock 100m thick. About 200 people perished, 70 of them tourists hiking in the national park.

One year later, Langtang Valley is as scenic as ever and it is hard to imagine that such a catastrophic event happened here. The only sombre sign of the disaster is the debris field above what was once a thriving town amidst some of the most stunning scenery in the world. There are scars on the cliff above, and tree trunks on the other side of the valley all knocked down by the force of the blast.

Langtang Village is gone, but as is the Nepali way of life, people have moved on and rebuilt. The trail is open and guesthouses dot the path from Syamra to Mundu and Kyanjin Gompa. The sound of hammer and saw is everywhere.

With trekking numbers down, those who have been lucky enough to escape damage in the earthquake are facing worries of a different kind: even though the blockade is over, everything from food to building supplies has to be ferried up via porters.

Chhomba Lama runs the Sherpa Hotel in Kyanjin Gompa, two hours walk from what used to be Langtang Village. He says his neighbours used to grow their own crops, but stopped ever since the earthquake, now they rely on porters to deliver essentials, which cost two to three times more than before. But incomes are down because tourist numbers plummeted, and Lama worries about making ends meet.

Proprietor of Hotel Ganesh View Lodge at Kimche, Tenzing Dorje, said there were far fewer trekkers this year even though the trail was open and the lodges were in operation. In previous years, his lodge, which accommodates 20 people, would be fully occupied.
Selling ourselves short

ARILD MOLSTAD

Nepal needs to raise the bar urgently for sustainable high-value tourism

Arriving in Nepal recently to disburse funds collected from enthusiastic friends in Norway, I encountered the harsh realities of a part-rich, part-poor country with an ambivalent mixture of amazement and disappointment.

What was amazing was the irrepressible optimism and indomitable survival instincts of Nepalis rebuilding homes and homesteads with the bare hands in a race against a second monsoon out in the open. They were working on their potato and rice terraces surrounded by scarred mountain slopes and dangerous rockfalls, or selling fresh produce and juice from bicycle trolleys to tourists slowly returning to Thamel.

But I was also saddened and disheartened by the slow pace of the state bureaucracy, making life in devastated towns and villages much harder than it needed to be since the earthquake.

The donations were from a fund-raising campaign in Norway called ‘Reis Nepal’ with its double meaning in Norwegian: ‘raise Nepal’s economy’, as well as ‘travel to Nepal’. The campaign motto was ‘from one mountain people to another’.

Organising the effort were people with backgrounds in international sustainable tourism and development assistance. We know well how the multiplicity and ripple effects of tourism can quickly reach out into poor communities and generate a long value chain in many other sectors: transportation, agriculture, forestry, fishing, food distribution.

Nepal’s tourism, once an efficient, enlightened model for the entire world via its pioneering sustainable mountain trekking and lowland salalas, has now been aptly described as a ‘race to the bottom’.

For decades, Nepal’s tourism presented a healthy, sustainable blend of high-end, medium-priced and budget backpacker menus to global travellers. Now, much of its core, the trekking industry, runs the risk of becoming a ‘failed sector’ if measured in terms of the traditional sustainable criteria. The absence of repeat tourists is only part of the problem.

It doesn’t help that Nepal’s tourism resources are pegged to visitor count – with fewer arrivals leading to lower promotion funding from the government.

On the first day of my trek north of Pokhara, when presented with a bill for a night in a perfectly comfortable, clean, friendly homestay with solar heated showers and a knockout view of the Annapurna range, the problem stared me in the face: the bill amounted to Rs 500 for my based trekking operators and actively promote a greater variety of actual destination areas like sections of the Great Himalaya Trail, national parks, and conservation areas.

He supports a ‘hub-spoke system’ that encourages shorter treks, but longer stays in the country, and remind international travellers of the presence of shelters constructed according to earthquake-resistant methods and bellhops within a half-hour walk. Schalken is concerned about the downsides of Nepal to acquiring an image of ‘being a cheap backpacking destination’, a low-value model that keeps an reducing itself in value. Samarzic hopes to facilitate ‘investment in entrepreneurial skills and development towards a more sustainable model that includes certification and higher rates’.

As somebody who travelled in Nepal when the country’s high income-low impact tourism in the seventies and eighties brought huge admiration and the first waves of affluent tourists to Nepal’s incredible diversity of attractions, I share Schalken’s sentiments. The bar needs to be raised higher, and urgently.

There is no reason why Nepal cannot once again become a world leader in sustainable tourism. Let’s not waste this chance.
Experience Sikhism,
Dont miss out on the tour of Guru Nanak's samadhi in Kapurthla with Cultural Studies Group Nepal to learn more about Sikh culture and customs 14 May, 8.30am, hotel Sowpya, Kapurthla, cnr@exkromundis.com

Amar Panchhi,
Join Bollywood stars Sonu Sood and Malika Arora in a concert organised by the Nepal Army Welfare Association to raise funds for earthquake victims. Tickets: Rs 300 onwards, www.jp.exkromundis.com 14 May, 6.30pm onwards, Tundikhel, Kathmandu

Art of doodling,
Master art therapy using Zentangle Method with Linzy Khem in a workshop organised by Satya Media Arts Collectif 14 to 15 May, 2pm to 5pm, Satya Media Arts Collectif, Justina, (01) 5337408, collectif@satyamedia.org

BAC mela,
Local products, local food and a second-hand garage sale- plan entertainment for the whole family in BAC’s first monthly mela. 20 May, 1 to 7pm, BAC Art Centre, Pulchowk www.bacplaycentre.org

Coffee queries,
A chance to explore and share business ideas with Clock B business innovations and meet enthusiastic young minds over coffee and cakes 20 May, 9am to 7pm, Matha Books and Blender, Monsoon Coffee Blender@gmail.com

Design workshop,
Pick up tips and tricks to curating an exhibition as well as display techniques. Registration necessary 15 to 18 May, 9am to 5pm, Nirmal Gendarme, Patan Dhulikhel, (01) 5359331/5359844

Literary launch,
Celebrate poetry, short stories, music and expression at the launch of These Fine Lines, an anthology of poems, and the sixth volume of the literary magazine Li Li. 14 May, 6pm onwards, AS MOTI, Godongothal, (01) 5332743/5337181

Solidarity,
An exhibition featuring veteran artist Kishan Manandhar celebrating his collaborations with building artists as well as seasoned experts. 19 May, 5.30am, Alliance Francaise, Kathmandu

Voofoo,
The new home of Newari cuisine that also has a life centenary menu for those who are not yet ready to experiment with new dishes. Lajpatra, (01) 4406322

Hyatt Regency,
Try the new scrumptious dishes added to the Cafe’s a la carte menu. From 14 May, onwards. 300 Motihari Road, Lalitpur

Top of the World Festival,
Join the Top of the World Festival at Jiri with music and art, held in celebration of Buddha Jayanti. Tickets available at www.Bytesnap.com. 30 to 31 May, 7am onwards, Jiri, Dolakha

Tribute to Dylan,
Celebrate folk American singer-songwriter folk legend Bob Dylan’s 74th birthday, and sing along as they play classics like “Like a Rolling Stone” and “The Times They Are A-Changin” 24 May, 8pm onwards, Tickets: Rs 900 (including dinner). Mokhot, (01) 5368652

Mezze by Roadhouse,
Spend a evening at one of Kathmandu’s most popular restaurants, Mezze by Roadhouse, Darbar Marg (01) 4227887

Nepathya Live,
Nepathya’s famed folk rock band performs live in the country after a long break. 14 May, 5pm onwards, Jawalakhel Football Ground, Lalitpur

Kasara Resort,
A luxury resort located in the lush setting of the Chitwan National Park. For those who value their galaxy and prefer a more secluded stay, Kasara offers two private villas with private pools. Chitwan (01) 4426751, 9841857139, kasararesort.com

Jhule Mountain Resort,
Kicking 250m above sea level, the eco-resort boasts a farmhouse that stretches across a hill covered in fresh green. Enjoy an organic homestay experience. Dhulikhel Nagarjun National Park, jhule@jhule.com, (01) 4492999, info@jhulemountainresort.com, http://jhulemountainresort.com

Pokhara Grande,
A swimming pool to escape from the sweltering heat, a massage parlor and spa to top it up, and a gym to release stress: a great place to unwind. Lakeside, Pokhara, (05) 441700, akin@pokhaira.com, www.pokhaira.com

Buddha Maya Gardens Hotel,
Add value to your stay in Lumbini with a stay at the probably the best hotel in the area. Lumbini (07) 3602000, 0773362300, info@bmgh.com

Barahi Jungle Lodge,
The first eco-resort lodge of Chitwan directly overlooks the Chitwan National Park, spa, boutique guest room, individual and two-in-one private villas, including a suite with a private swimming pool. Andrauli, West Chitwan, (01) 4411113, bjlh@barahijunglodge.com

Kathmandu, 13 - 19 May 2016 #808
Charles McDougall (1930-2016) was a leading tiger ecologist, conservationist, researcher and writer, who pioneered responsible wildlife tourism standards in Nepal and the region.

Chuck first came to the subcontinent as an anthropologist studying the Jang tribal people in Odisha, and then undertook the definitive study on the Kailash Rai in Nepal. Inspired by the jungle life of Jim Corbett’s books, Chuck switched his attention to tigers in the 1960s, initially to hunting them down to research and conservation. He was a dedicated and self-effacing man with a gentle and modest manner, widely respected for his uncompromising approach to tiger conservation, and exacting standards for wildlife tourism.

As Director of Wildlife of Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge, Chuck’s base for tiger research after 1972 was the Chitwan National Park, working with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, the Smithsonian Institution and teams of Nepali trackers and naturalists. His painstaking research yielded one of the largest and longest-running data sets of any tiger population in the world. It uncovered the secret world of tigers and what they need to survive in their forest habitat, providing today’s wildlife managers with the vital information required to protect these iconic animals.

Crucial to the data collection was Chuck’s innovative development of camera-trapping through a homemade pressure plate in the 1970s. Over the years he photographed hundreds of different tigers and also an impressive inventory of other creatures including sloth bears, leopards, jungle cats and the rare honey badger.

Chuck’s authoritative book, “Face of the Tiger,” in 1977, was the result of thousands of hours of observation and tracking. He published many scientific papers himself and with colleagues, notably Professor J. L. David Smith of the University of Minnesota with whom a major work on the tiger is being published by Harvard University Press. He recently completed a collection of jungle tales that will be published posthumously.

In Nepal, Chuck teamed up with English-born A V Jim Edwards to found Nepal Wildlife Adventurers, an early hunting company in the Tarai. But they soon realised it was time to abandon hunting and embrace conservation ideals. In February 1972, Jim and Chuck took over the management of Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge from the two Texas millionaires and big game hunters. Together their brand of purist wildlife expertise combined with commercial realities to set global standards for the adventure tourism industry.

Chuck avoided the limelight and based himself in Chitwan to study tigers. With a strong emphasis on nature interpretation, Tiger Tops wildlife lodges and tented camps extended throughout India as well as Nepal, with activities in Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Tibet and beyond. Tiger Tops formula of responsible wildlife tourism and conservation synergy was an acknowledged model long before ecotourism became a buzzword.

In later years, Chuck developed a pessimistic ambivalence towards the more rampant impacts of tourism, advocating that benefits only accrue when tourism is more carefully controlled and channelled as a positive force for conservation.

Many wildlife operations in Nepal and the region today are still managed and staffed by Chuck McDougall-trained specialists, who regard the quiet American as their guru and inspiration. Chuck retired from Tiger Tops in 2001, and devoted himself to travel, research and writing, continuing his tiger monitoring program in the Tarai through the International Trust for Nature Conservation of which he remained an active trustee.

Charles McDougall died on 11 May in Kathmandu and is survived by his wife Maggie, and children Robert, Juan Carlos, Malcolm and Linda. — Lisa Cheongyal

Tiger Selfie: The famous tiger selfie that Chuck McDougal took in 1996 with his innovative pressure plate camera capture technique.

McDougall stands on a truck in the Chitwan National Park in Nepal (left).
The thirteenth film in the Marvel cinematic universe, Captain America: Civil War, is miraculously substantial, choosing to engage in matters of friendship, loyalty, and most riskily for a film about superheroes, in “feelings”. Perhaps the reason for the success is the strong ensemble cast that have all, to date, been allowed to develop into complex characters with priorities and agendas and deep, dark pasts, saving this film from descending into the posturing frat boy antics that made Batman v Superman (also released earlier this year) so wince-worthy.

Yes, Iron Man (reprised with the usual verve by Robert Downey Jr.) and Captain America (Chris Evans) go head-to-head, but not in the same flash of humourless, over-pumped male egos that reduced Batman v Superman to such a bore. This clash between Tony Stark and Captain Steve Rogers is not just about their differing opinions. It involves addressing the very issues at the crux of humanity such as accountability, respect for one’s fellow creatures, and a few ethical issues that are exclusive to the fictitious Marvel universe, such as the extra-legal privileges accorded to the Avengers team, minus Thor, the Hulk, and Iron Man storm a building in Lagos, trying to stop a biological weapon from being stolen by an old nemesis. They recover the weapon but Wanda (Ashley Olsen), a young Avenger with telekinetic capabilities, accidentally blows up an entire building while trying to save the Captain from a bomb that he missed seeing.

On the heels of the destruction in Sokovia (the plot of last year’s Avengers film Age of Ultron) the world is aghast at the impunity that these potentially dangerous superheroes apparently enjoy, Tony Stark, himself, haunted by his missteps from past films, and the (surely temporary) loss of his moral anchor Pepper Potts (played in previous films by Gwyneth Paltrow) feels compelled to err on the side of the United Nations, who proposes that the Avengers be managed by a committee – a vast encroachment on their powers, and a restraint that Captain America does not take well.

As the Avengers split over these crucial decisions, the Captain is further torn by the framing of his boyhood friend Bucky Barnes aka The Winter Soldier (Sebastian Stan), a super-soldier manufactured by Hydra, who also happens to be the dear friend of Steve Rogers from way back when he was a skinny lad in pre-World War II Brooklyn. What ensues is a fine film with amusing surprises, stunning action sequences, and a bit of real heart.
Kakistocracy

The human rights situation is deteriorating with those in power quite used to overstepping their legal authority.

As a high-school dropout and life-long communist our PM has proven himself to be consistently out of his depth at every turn. His abrasive attitude towards Madhesi surely added months to the blockade, enriching the black marketers at everyone else’s expense, while his sheer determination to enjoy his turn at the top was especially inappropriate when disaster struck. The great earthquake’s recent anniversary brought international attention that, though mercifully brief, was clearly unwelcome, captured in a BBC interview that must be one of the shortest on record.

When asked why reconstruction had yet to begin, our remarkably relaxed PM agreed it was slow, delayed, and stated he wasn’t happy, though he looked much less worried than the agitated journalist. Sounding like a guru explaining the mysteries of the Orient to an impatient apto he delivered by the bunch with fantastic gravitas: but that is reality. Indeed, yet surely those still living under tarps, waiting for aid promised a year ago, deserve better from the man most able to help.

But there’s more to the new ethos permeating the parties than simply forgetting the peasants or trying to get rich quick.

Recent headlines declared Congress was ‘even ready to support Prachanda as PM in their efforts to topple the government, showing the voters that once the horse trading begins their vote counts for nothing. These Congress MP’s seem to forget the only reason most of them got elected in the first place was to keep those same Maoists at bay. Does it not occur that such opportunistic support of a party their voters rejected is a betrayal of their constituent’s sovereign right to choose (Future our lawmakers asking: Who? What?)

When asked why the Maoists were withdrawing support from the coalition, spokesman Haribo (Gajurel) explained they’re upset because so many of their leaders were getting arrested. Ten points for frankness, though he doesn’t explain why arresting convicted criminals isn’t a good thing. This threat of desertion was enough for KP Oli to sign a nine-point agreement giving the Maoist leadership everything they want, including immediate dismissal of all war-era crimes. The fact the PM has no legal authority to do so, proven by the Supreme Court’s previous ruling that dismissal of such cases is illegal, was conveniently ignored.

In yet another betrayal of democratic principles the deal makes Prachanda our next PM, despite the Maoists getting only 15 per cent of the votes! seats in the last election and the unfortunate detail he’s been charged with war crimes. Further examples of this departure from democratic norms include KP Oli’s unprecedented confrontation with the Human Rights Commission, demands from the military for details on those filing complaints of war-era disappearances, and more recent reports of open intimidation at regional TRC offices. Needless to say, such behaviour goes against the spirit of the peace agreement and is illegal.

The arrest of prominent journalist Kesal Mani Dixit on spurious charges, widely seen as a personal vendetta/reign of terror conducted by the anti-corruption chief against all who get in his way, was followed by the random deportation of a foreigner for tweets that ‘threaten the state’.

By all accounts the human rights situation is deteriorating and those in power, now quite used to overstepping their legal authority, aren’t even pretending to play by the rules anymore. One wonders if there’s a term for governance geared specifically to gaming the system and subverting the functions of state. Suggestions are welcome.

In some ways the war still continues 10 years later, for the victims who await justice as well as the perpetrators who continue to deride/undermine the system and institutions of good governance. We suspect more of the same to follow and can only hope the judiciary and civil society can save the nation from those without principles.

For eternal outliers like your columnist, getting here has been a journey of linguistic discovery, rich in terminology if poor in meaningful change. During the Panchayat days our hope was for janapatri (democracy) and bhabhida (multi-party system), soon followed by crises for janakari (freedom) and the Maoist specialty: ganastantra, or communist ‘democratic people’s republic’, which hierarchy shown, is neither democratic nor the people’s.

So what does Nepal have now? Though supposedly democratic village level elections haven’t been held for almost 20 years. Any pretense of internal democracy within the parties has long been abandoned and the last national election in 2013 was for a Constitutional Assembly that no longer exists.

With six Deputy PM’s and an absurdly bloated cabinet this government was designed primarily to enjoy the spoils of power rather than actually govern. KP Oli’s coalition brings Marxist-Leninists, Maoists, Royalist and a Momin together in an improbable cabal that’s best described as kakistocracy (from the Greek ‘kakistos’ meaning ‘worst’, rule by the least qualified and most unprincipled citizens).

Despite having tried everything from absolute monarchy to absolute anarchy the goal of finding a system of governance that’s accountable to the people seems more distant than ever. Instead, aristocratic principles remain, giving the divine right of petty rasaj组成的 is to be back in vogue, including time-honoured concepts of staying ‘above the fray’, so nobody has to work, and being firmly ‘above the law’, so nobody goes to jail.
Hounded out of Malaysia

OM ASTHA RAI
IN KUALA LUMPUR

A fter getting his boarding pass for a Kathmandu-bound plane, Basnet, 22, looked relieved at Kuala Lumpur airport last week. He was going home after four years in Malaysia. When asked if he plans to return, he replied firmly: “No way.”

Basnet is from Bung district, and was only 19 and newly-married when he first went to work in a poultry farm in Perak in Malaysia. From the beginning he was often beaten up and robbed by local Tamils. The last straw was when a fellow-Nepali worker was beaten to death by a local youth when he resisted a robbery attempt.

“We couldn’t save him, but we collected money to send his body back to Nepal,” he said.

Nepalis are preyed on not just by jobless young Malaysians, but also by employers. Last month, when a few chickens died in the farm, Basnet was stripped naked in front of co-workers. “He would cut my pay every time I made a mistake, but this time he humiliated me,” he said.

Unable to bear the abuse, and constant threats from the locals, Basnet decided to return — together with 27 others in the poultry farm. “Malaysia is a jungle and we were the easy prey, the locals are always hunting for us,” he said.

Exploitation, an increase in the Malaysian government levy on worker’s earnings, a falling Ringgit and a temporary ban on foreign workers are some of the reasons why the number of Nepalis going to Malaysia has plummeted (see article, below),

But in interviews last week with...

Staying home

The number of Nepalis going to work in Malaysia and the Gulf showed a drastic drop this year

SONIA AWALE
IN KUALA LUMPUR

Till recently Air Asia flights between Kuala Lumpur and Kathmandu would be full of Nepali migrant workers flying out to jobs in Malaysia, or returning home. But in recent months, while flights out are mostly empty, those to Kathmandu are full. Nepali workers in Malaysia are returning home for good, and there aren’t too many to take their place.

After the earthquake in Nepal last year, experts had predicted a surge in workers migrating overseas for work. But the opposite seems to be happening. A lot fewer Nepalis are leaving, and the most drastic drop has been in workers going to Malaysia.

Figures from the Department of Foreign Employment (DoFE) show that only 312,000 Nepali workers left for work abroad in the last nine months, whereas 513,000 left in the same period last year — a whopping 40 per cent decline.

The reason for the drop to the Gulf appears to be the Nepali government’s inability to negotiate better terms for its workers. In Malaysia it is an inhospitable working environment, the falling Ringgit and a monotonous on foreign workers. The falling numbers will shrink remittances and raise the unemployment rate in Nepal itself. About 18 per cent of Nepal’s population works in India, Malaysia, and the Gulf countries, and they send home more than $6 billion annually — making up nearly a quarter of the country’s GDP.

Malaysia and the Gulf countries — Saudi Arabia, Qatar and UAE have been the most popular destinations for Nepalis seeking jobs. At the time of the earthquake, 1,500 Nepalis were leaving for overseas employment each day. That figure has come down by 40 per cent today.

One of the reasons is the shortage of construction workers after the earthquake has raised
Among the factors dissuading Nepalis from working in Malaysia is widespread harassment and robberies by locals.

Nepali workers have, another reason became apparent: robberies and beatings by locals. Every second Nepali interviewed said he has been robbed or repeatedly harassed on the streets, Suyam Bahadur Thapa from Kathmandu was on a recent flight to Kathmandu, he had been robbed so often that he decided to return to Nepal after five years. But on the day before his flight, while waiting for a ride to the market to buy presents, he was robbed again of his savings: “I can never come back, Malaysia is hell for Nepalis,” he told us.

Prem Magar of the Nepali trade union, CEPON, in Kuala Lumpur says most Nepalis are weak and vulnerable, and never seek police help. “We don’t go to the police because of the fear of more harassment, and the Nepali embassy is powerless to protect us,” he said. Magar has been working at a factory in Klang near Kuala Lumpur for six years, and has seen many of his friends robbed and beaten by locals. “Nowadays, we only travel in groups and we never retaliate, because if we do we get deported,” he said.

Nepal’s ambassador to Malaysia, Nirmal Ram Singha Basnyat, says his embassy has started a hotline service to help Nepali migrant workers, but admits that they rarely call the embassy when they are robbed. “It is easier to call the Nepali embassy for help,” says Keshav Khadka, another plastic factory worker in Klang who remembers submitting a petition at the embassy after a Nepali worker was brutally assaulted two years ago. “The embassy could do nothing,” he told us.

Nepali workers are now vulnerable to abuse and harassment in areas like Pardang and Johor Baru. They even get harassed by police who frequently check them for documents. “Our earnings have fallen because the value of the Ringgit is still low, and the labour levy is increasing,” says 35-year-old Anil Chaudhary, one of the 150 Nepalis working to build an under-ground metro rail network in Kuala Lumpur, “But whatever little we earn is also not safe from robbers.”

The Malaysian government has increased minimum salary of migrant workers to MYR 145 effective from July 1, but it has also raised the labour levy.

G. Rajasekaran, General Secretary of Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC), says: “The Malaysian government is forcing employers to pay more to migrant workers so they can collect more taxes from them.”

Nepali workers less competitive, and there is the fall of the Malaysian Ringgit,” he added.

Additionally, the Malaysian government in late February announced that it wouldn’t be recruiting any foreign labour, but on Wednesday lifted the ban.

The drop in traffic to Malaysia has meant a drop in the number moving to the Gulf, mainly the Middle East. The number of 120,372 people left for the Gulf nation in the last fiscal year 2015-16, compared to 78,460 a year before.

Jobs at home

The decline in number of people leaving for overseas migration and especially Malaysia will increase joblessness at home since the Nepal government has no systematic plan to employ young workers at home for earthquake reconstruction. Many Nepali workers interviewed said they gladly stay home in Nepal if the government could guarantee them a job with a minimum salary.

Malaknath Kumar Tiwari, a worker, is one of them. “Many of us work for less than US$100 a month. If the government could give us jobs with just that much pay in Nepal for earthquake reconstruction we’d never leave,” said Chhatri, who works as a security guard in Johor Bahru in Malaysia. “Why should we come here to face all this exploitation and harsh conditions?”

When Malaysia launched a massive crackdown on illegal migrant workers in 2014, thousands of Nepalis without passports were left with only two options: return home or get arrested.

Return home without passports, Nepali workers would require travel documents. But the Nepali embassy in Kuala Lumpur was understaffed, and issuing travel documents for so many of them at such short notice was not possible.

The usually stoic embassy staff worked extra hard to protect fellow-Nepalis from being detained by Malaysian immigration authorities. They worked all night, issuing travel documents as thousands of anxious Nepalis waited outside. The crackdown tapered off in a few days, but the embassy kept sending back Nepalis deemed illegal by Malaysia.

Between September 2014 and December 2015, some 58,000 Nepali workers were deported. However, over 500 ‘illegal’ Nepali workers are still in Malaysian jails and detention centres, and Nepal’s ambassador to Malaysia, Nirmal Ram Singha estimates that there could be another 20,000 Nepali workers whom Malaysian authorities can detain anytime and anywhere.

Most of those detailed are classified as illegal because they lack proper documents, not because they committed any crime. They just happen to be poor and vulnerable, and trying to earn enough to support families back home. Many lack papers because they were exploited by Nepali recruiters, or thrown out by Malaysian employers without documents.

Malaysia is obsessed with managing foreign workers, often jailing undocumented immigrants, and occasionally declaring amnesties. Even now, after the sudden temporary ban on the intake of foreign labourers in February, there is a chance that the PRK migrant could be rehired by new employers. But this rehiring program, a new amnesty period, or a fresh crackdown mean nothing unless Malaysia realizes why and how a migrant worker becomes ‘illegal’ in the first place.

Rosam: Bohara (pictured), above is a security guard in Kuala Lumpur and came to Malaysia as a legal migrant worker in 2010.

One year later, he failed a health test, and was disqualified to work. His supervisor did not send him back, but demanded a bribe of 5,000 Ringgit (B4). Bohara did not have money, but promised to find it. A few weeks later, he damaged a mop and the supervisor threatened to cut one month’s pay. Bohara got angry, and demanded his due salary and passport which was refused. Without passport and job, Bohara became ‘illegal’. For the next four years, he has kept changing his workplace to avoid arrest, earning a reduced salary. He has finally got a passport, and says he will return to Nepal soon.

There are many similar stories of migrant workers in Malaysia not just from Nepal but also Bangladesh, Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines who are ‘illegal’. In some cases, workers who do not get promised salaries join other companies and have to leave their passports behind. In other cases employers don’t bother to get their work visas renewed.

Three Nepali workers from Rautahat have been working ‘illegally’ in a pipe factory in Klang for the last four months. Their visa expired in January, but the company did not bother to have it renewed. If the immigration authorities raid the factory, they will get arrested. They haven’t committed any crime, but they are ‘illegal’.

Once ‘illegal’, migrant workers always have to be on the run, and earn less. They cannot go to the police even if they are harassed, abused and beaten. Corruption is so rife that Malaysian politicians, bureaucrats and employers together with Nepali recruitment agencies have created a system to fleece Nepali workers by making them useful to these authorities. It is illegal for employers to hold employees’ passports in Malaysia, but migrant workers are victims of this unlawful practice. Unless Malaysia cleans up its act, it will be known as a country that exploits workers’ rights, tainting its prosperity and growth.
Tax on kickbacks

I t was completely wrong on the part of Bollywood Prime Minister David Cameron to tell Queen Elizabeth on candid camera the other day that Afghanistan and Nigeria were the most "fantastically corrupt countries" in the world. He left out Nepal.

Not only was this a gross misinterpretation of facts (because Nepal is both "fantastic" and "corrupt") but it also belittled the enormous effort we as a country and people have put into downgrading our rankings in the Transparent Index over the last decades so as to be placed at the bottom of the heap among the corruptest countries in the known universe. It is due to these efforts that Nepal was successful in overturning Afghanistan, and the only reason the Egyptians are at the bottom of the TI rankings below us is because of match-fixing — their government officials bribed our government officials to be ranked as more corrupt.

By leaving out Nepal in his briefing to the Queen in the presence of the Lord Chamberlain and other dignitaries at the Buckingham Palace, Cameron missed a great opportunity to highlight Nepal's achievement as a tribute to a loyal ex-vasali state during this double centenary year of the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations between Great Britain and South Asia's oldest nation state. The remnants of the British Empire meeting in London this week therefore missed an opportunity to hear from us pros how we have perfected embezzlement into an embarrassment.

Since corruption has become such a part of everyday life in the Democratic Republic of the Republic of Nepal, we might as well legalize it — even if it means we have to bribe someone to do it. There are many advantages to determining craft, and it's time to bite the bullet, swallow the bitter pill, take the plunge, cross the Rubicon and burn the bridge after we get to it and cross it.

Nepal's GDP would get a huge boost because under-the-table deals, which form such an important component of our economy, will henceforth be legitimate transactions that will be counted in the national accounts statistics. The way it's going to work is like this: since bribery is an economic activity, it spreads the wealth around, reduces the income gap between rich and poor, and helps alleviate poverty. A Corruption Tax will be calculated on net profit and net gains from business and computations thereof will be determined by a flat pay-as-you-earn rate. In other words, the briber has to hand over to the bribee, the agreed bribe amount under the table, and profile an on-the-spot bribe to avoid paying VAT.

The Department for the Avoidance of Death and Tax has drawn up a list of various types of corruption levies that are applicable to citizens in the forthcoming fiscal year.

Fat Cat VAT: This is a flat rate on individual bribes, great and small that will deduct 13 per cent of the amount at source and will be added to the tax payer's annual returns.

Panama Rebate: Nepali businessmen named in the Panama Papers can bribe the fox who guards the chicken coop at the Commission to Abuse Authority not to be investigated, and will be granted a tax rebate on the earnest money handed over under the table.

Wide-body Duty: Officials involved in kickbacks on purchase of wide bodies for the national flag-carrier will be assessed on a pro-rated basis on the extra abdominal inches added to their girth before and after the purchase.

Oil Tax: The amount of palm grease that exchanged hands to lubricate the deal on private premium imports during the blockade will be retroactively taxed, unless we get our 10 per cent.

Pre-Paid Tax: Bribes paid by ministers, ambassador-designates, corporates heads and Commissioners to get their appointments approved will be taxed according to a sliding rate based on a formula that will include income, capital gain, net worth and state-sanctioned extortion.

Kickback Tax: Since bribes are also given in kind, and to prevent these from falling through the tax net, the Dept of Taxonomy will physically dis-assemble 13% of the body weight of the chassis of an SUV given in lieu of a bribe.

Inheritance Tax: Since a lot of officials have enriched themselves during their tenure as Director General of Customs and Culture, in the unlikely event of his/her demise, the state will repossess 50% of his/her ill-gotten wealth. Sorry lads, half of Daddy's moolah is ours.

Excise Tax: These taxes on bribes are hypothesized by keeping them very low in order to encourage corruption and contribute to growth. After all, if there was no corruption all transactions would stop and the economy would grind to a halt.

The Ass