Sunita BK was 6 months pregnant when the quake struck her Dalit village near Kerabari in Gorkha on 25 April. The baby was born in a shelter near her destroyed home. Sunita (seen behind) lets a relative take care of her first child. Help has come from volunteer groups, but not the government.

RUIN IN THE RAIN
BY SAHINA SHRESTHA
PAGE 17
nepaltimes.com
Watch interviews with survivors
VOX POPULISM

The people do not want the new constitution to make anyone stateless or second-class citizens, and they want a better quality of life.

So, the parties now need to agree on a fresh deal to name and demarcate federal provinces before passing the new constitution. That will not just be honouring the SC order but also ensuring that the disgruntled Madhesi and Janajatis are not left out, given that this was the sticking point for eight long years. A compromise will leave most (if not all) dissatisfied. Meanwhile, the political parties also need to remind people that certain provisions, even though that were challenged during the feedback collection campaign, cannot be retracted. Secularism is one of these irreversible provisions. All parties that are now steering the constitution writing process had vowed to embrace federalism during the writing process had vowed to embrace federalism during the writing process. No promise can move on. Whether they were in the opposition or government, use the process and the draft and feedback exercise, and the breakaway UCNP-M and IMF (D) also agreed on the NC’s proposal. The current clamour for a directly elected Prime Minister is probably a result of the parties’ failure to convince people that the Westminster model is not the reason for chronic instability, and that it is an idea they themselves endorsed by voting for the NC in 2013.

Feedback is just feedback, as CA Chair Subhas Nembang likes to say, it is not the people’s verdict. People gave their verdict in 2013. It will be impractical to include all public feedback in the new constitution. But the parties must grasp the gist. And the gist is: Nepalis do not want the new constitutions to make any one of them stateless or second-class citizens, and they want to ensure governance that improves their quality of life.
Federalism, republicanism and secularism

Whatever the political compromise, Nepal’s new constitution must stand on these three pillars of inclusive democracy

Last Tuesday, the controversial Hindu priest Kamalnayakacharya published an appeal in a mainstream Nepali paper calling on majority Hindus to launch a ‘religious war’ against secularism. A week later, Hindu groups continue to vandalise and obstruct life across the country, demanding that Nepal go back to being a theocratic state.

The Sushil Koirala government’s tacit support of religious extremists risks an escalation of tensions. Here in Sunsari, the local police was sympathetic to the protestors demanding a Hindu state. The fact that lawmakrs have been repeating public concern for religious freedom in the ongoing CA deliberations is proof that they haven’t done enough to convince their constituents that a secular state can impartially protect and guarantee religious freedom for all. This has raised serious doubts about whether our own lawmakrs fully appreciate the principle of secularism in a democracy, in the first place.

Last week’s feedback-gathering campaign also saw bitter clashes in the Tarai districts where locals protested against the draft constitution and burnt copies. Cadres affiliated to Madhes-based parties obstructed the feedback gathering process. UML leader Madhan Nepal was attacked in Rautahat, while protestors hurled stones at CPDM-M Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal who fled the scene. Similarly, an unidentified group lobbed a petrol bomb at General Minister Ram Shankar Mahat’s vehicle in Nuwakot.

These attacks are not acceptable, but they were expected. We were taking a dangerous gamble by trying to postpone federal demarcation in the draft constitution. Fed up with Kathmandu-centric politics and development, people had decisively called for Nepal to be declared a federal state from the streets during the Madhes movement, a demand that was incorporated in the Interim Constitution 2007 after 56 people lost their lives.

The last CA was dissolved precisely because the parties could not agree upon the number and boundary of the provinces. So, when the draft was tabled in the CA three weeks ago proposing to postpone the demarcation of provinces, Madhes-based parties protested once again. The protests inside the CA resonated with the local mood here in the Tarai, as thousands took to the streets. A week later, the situation remains fluid.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has condemned police brutality during the crackdowns and instructed the government to take action against the guilty officers who used disproportionate force. The rights body has also taken exceptional note of serious flaws in the draft and submitted its written concern to the CA Chairman Subhas Nembang.

“We are worried that the draft has overlooked universal principles of human rights and our international commitments in some provisions including citizenship rights to women,” Commissioner Mohana Ansari told me this week.

Article 12 on citizenship limits women from passing down equal citizenship to their children. Similarly, article 24(2) allows the state to ‘regulate’ the media, a draconian clause that could be abused to suspend press freedom.

Article 36(3) which guarantees right to free higher education for disabled, senior citizens, the homeless and the Dalits. Nepal has already been embarrassed internationally for its mistreatment of refugees, so watering down fundamental rights could see the country plunge further in the global human rights index. “Fundamental rights must be stated clearly in the constitution because they come immediately into effect and the state cannot postpone them under any pretext,” the NHRC says in its feedback to the CA.

There has been a deluge of such feedback in the past two weeks during the public consultation process. Still, hundreds of thousands of farmers reeling under a severe drought in the Tarai and those affected by the quake remained unaware of the proceedings. The best way to uphold their injured aspirations is by ensuring that Nepal’s new constitution adopts an inclusive democratic character in letter and in spirit.

While the individual’s religious freedom comes under the ambit of fundamental rights guaranteed in the draft constitution, there is no basis for questioning the provision of declaring Nepal a secular state. In a democracy, the principle of religious freedom is by ensuring that Nepal’s new state can impartially protect and guarantee religious freedom for all citizens. The Sushil Koirala government’s tacit support of religious extremists risks an escalation of tensions. Here in Sunsari, the local police was sympathetic to the protestors demanding a Hindu state. The fact that lawmakrs have been repeating public concern for religious freedom in the ongoing CA deliberations is proof that they haven’t done enough to convince their constituents that a secular state can impartially protect and guarantee religious freedom for all. This has raised serious doubts about whether our own lawmakrs fully appreciate the principle of secularism in a democracy, in the first place.

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New ride
Tata Motors has launched its new Bolt hatchback in Nepal. The multivibe car is available in both petrol and diesel variants at a starting price of Rs 23.95 lakh and Rs 28.35 lakh respectively. The car offers segment-defining features for design, driveability and connectivity and comes with a warranty of 4 years or 75,000 km. It will be available across the country in over 16 Sipradi sales outlets.

Freeze it
EDL, the authorised distributor of Godrej appliances in Nepal, has launched the all-new Godrej Edge Digi hybrid refrigerator in the market. The Edge Digi comes equipped with technologically innovative features including automatic frost control. Available in a range of colours, the refrigerator is priced at Rs 35,390 for 190 litres.

Building tools
TEREX CORPORATION
Auto- Electro-Mech Pvt Ltd, the authorized dealer for Terex Equipment in Nepal has opened a new office in Kathmandu. Customers can avail of latest construction equipments, primarily Terex range of backhoes loaders, skid steer loaders and aerial work platform.

Talk the talk
James Hogan, President and CEO of Etihad Airways addressed the future of global tourism sector in the annual Global Business Travel Association Convention in Florida. He emphasized the importance of consumer engagement.

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六 in a row
Nabil Bank Limited has received the “Best Presented Annual Report (BPA)” award for the sixth time in a row. The bank received the honour under Banking Sector (Private and Public sector) category at a function organised by Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nepal.

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Emerging market
There is a lot Kathmandu can learn from up-and-coming Weifang in China

BIZ BRIEFS
Even before the April 25 earthquake left Nepal’s tourism sector in shambles, the total number of tourists visiting was already stagnant. Visitor numbers were decreasing since 2011 and the average duration of stay was getting shorter. Amidst the gloom, there was one demographic of people who had been arriving in Nepal in hordes: the Chinese.

This shift in China’s position is not just evident in Nepal but across the globe. Armed with enormous spending power, China’s middle class is expanding beyond its first tier cities, which refer to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen or the “Big 4” to smaller, lesser known cities. Weifang, a prefecture-level city in Shandong province, is an example of that.

Situated in close proximity to coastal cities in a province, Weifang does share some similarities with Nepal. Although no tech hub, Weifang still values its traditions. As a developing country with a rich past, Nepal needs to learn to innovate and look to the future while not letting go of its roots. For example, Kathmandu could also host kite-fighting festivals like the one in Nagarik at Dasain, but perhaps in a bigger and more international way. By focusing on the technology and manufacturing, Weifang paved the way for more development and firmly put the city in the industrial map.

As a landlocked prefecture-level city, Weifang does share a few similarities with Nepal. As a developing country with a rich past, Nepal needs to learn to innovate and look to the future while not letting go of its roots. For example, Kathmandus could also host kite-fighting festivals like the one in Nagarik at Dasain, but perhaps in a bigger and more international way. By focusing on the technology and manufacturing, Weifang paved the way for more development and firmly put the city in the industrial map.

As a developing country with a rich past, Nepal needs to learn to innovate and look to the future while not letting go of its roots. For example, Kathmandus could also host kite-fighting festivals like the one in Nagarik at Dasain, but perhaps in a bigger and more international way. By focusing on the technology and manufacturing, Weifang paved the way for more development and firmly put the city in the industrial map.
There is a gross misconception which terms hydro, solar and other renewable energy developers as belonging to the so-called energy sector. Actually every citizen of Nepal and every Nepali home is a microcosm of the national energy infrastructure. What use is developing energy projects if they do not bring electricity to Nepali homes and make our country self-reliant?

From that perspective, the question arises: does this year’s annual budget at all address the urgent energy needs of Nepalis? Sad to say, it did absolutely nothing. It did not take one single measure to bring more electricity into the homes of Nepalis. It did nothing to reduce the consumption of imported petroleum products, which form the biggest component of Nepal’s imports and is a dependence that threatens our national security.

Instead, the Finance Minister wasted valuable taxpayers’ money funding projects that will probably take 20 years to complete, neglecting the immediate energy crisis. Any budget that relies on increasing revenue from taxes on imports is one prepared by people with no basic understanding of national economic planning.

To prevent this yearly calamity from re-occurring, the Customs Department and the National Planning Commission should be kept out of budget planning.

One intelligent move in the budget would have been to bring down the duty on electric vehicles and electric cooking stoves to zero. This would have wound Nepali families off gas and petrol, increased the demand for electricity and promoted domestic electricity generation. The Ministry Finance, obsessed as with revenue, would see a windfall of royalty from new power projects.

It would narrow Nepal’s trade deficit with India as petroleum imports decline, thus reducing Nepal’s political and economic dependence on the outside world. But our inept planners will never allow this to happen because they only look at short-term revenue generation from the duty on imported fossil-driven vehicles.

Did the Finance Minister announce any measures to reduce Nepal’s trade deficit? No. Did he introduce any substantial programs to decrease imports? No. Did he offer incentives for electricity generated and consumed within Nepal? No.

On the contrary, he allocated funds to build a petroleum pipeline from India to Nepal, thereby increasing the import of even more fuel, spending our foreign reserves and piling up our trade deficit. This year’s diesel imports by Nepal Oil Corporation went up by 14 per cent and petrol, by 13 per cent. Energy self-sufficiency through renewables has now become Nepal’s main national security need, and it has to be addressed immediately to protect Nepal’s independence. Otherwise the sight of Nepali leaders trooping off to New Delhi every time they have to take a major national decision will be even more frequent.

Who in his right mind levies VAT on hydropower projects when the country is reeling under crippling power cuts? Answer: Nepal’s Ministry of Finance.

The Ministry of Finance should do the energy sector and all Nepalis a big favour by waiving VAT on all power projects and announce zero duty for electric vehicles and cooking stoves. Private developers will rush in to generate the required power. All they need from the state are transmission lines. This will reduce the trade deficit and remove the chronic shortage of gas and fuel that occurs because of corrupt syndicates with political protection. A stronger, more self-reliant and more independent Nepal will then emerge.

Sujit Acharya is the Chairperson of the Energy Development Council.
The most frequently asked question in Nepal over the last eight years is: will there be a constitution? No one knew the answer, not even the astrologers. But the reason we were impatient and curious was that we thought a new constitution would spur economic development and raise living standards.

Fortunately, Nepal’s new constitution is finally taking shape after eight years of the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections. But better late than never. The enthusiasm with which thousands of people participated in the 15-day-long feedback collection was a manifestation of the people’s desire to get it over with. The CA must have rightly grasped the public mood.

The Business Advisory Committee of the CA has finalised a new schedule, aiming to promulgate the constitution by mid-August. A 94-page-long feedback collection was tabled in a CA meeting on Tuesday, and the onus now lies on the CA’s Constituent, Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee (CPDCC) to decide what suggestions can be incorporated (CPDCC).

The idea of a Hindu state seems to have rightly grasped the desire to get it over with. The CA swiftly completed its task of writing the constitution after an extended period of deadlock on its shape. The CA meeting on Tuesday, and the onus now lies on the CA’s Constituent, Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee (CPDCC) to decide what suggestions can be incorporated in the draft and what cannot.

So, the question asked, debated and disputed for so many years is no longer relevant. The new constitution finally looks within reach. Now, the question is: will the new constitution bring about peace, prosperity and political stability? Probably not. But no matter what, we need one. We need it to institutionalise the gains of the 2006 Movement, the non-violent pro-democracy protests that ended the conflict. But we also need stability to attract investors, create jobs and boost our stagnant economy. Madhesi, Janajati and Hindu Royalist parties have vowed to burn the constitution for different reasons. Madhesi and Janajati groups want names and boundaries of federal provinces etched out in the constitution itself. Extremist Hindus are against a secular state.

The idea of a Hindu state was rejected in April 2006 when hundreds of thousands of people rose up against Gyansiddhi’s rule. The RPP-N is being swept towards a particular religion past. The RPP-N is being swept towards a particular religion.

But the demand raised by Madhesi and Janajati is not only valid, conforming to the Supreme Court interim order, but also guarantied by the Interim Constitution 2007. Passing the new constitution only after naming and demarcating federal provinces would be the best option. That is precisely the point on which there has been most disagreement, and deferring the date for promulgating it would mean running the risk of losing the ground gained.

Who knows what might unfold if the draft constitution is put on hold to buy time for naming and demarcating federal provinces? The right deal based on which the new constitution has been drafted is to create eight federal provinces on the basis of identity and viability might be challenged, or even scrapped. Should identity still be accepted as a basis of federal provinces? Haggling over boundaries could go one forever.

Madhesi and Janajati leaders fear that putting on hold names and boundaries of federal provinces is a ploy by the big parties to sabotage federalism. They believe that the people will be so fed up with the wrangling that they may no longer want federalism. Their fears can be addressed with provisions for forming a State Restructuring Commission to divide the eight federal provinces within six months. The same draft also stipulates that the Legislative Parliament will endorse the commission’s report with a two-thirds majority within three months.

When something like federalism is already in the draft constitution, it becomes our constitutional right. No one can take that away from us. Fears about the big parties’ backtracking from federalism are thus baseless. If the Madhesi and Janajati groups think the big parties will abandon federalism, then their whole struggle for federalism is already in the draft constitution. What is the point on which there has been most disagreement, and deferring the date for promulgating it would mean running the risk of losing the ground gained?

However, the disgruntled Madhesi and Janajati parties must be engaged in the constitution-writing process. That is also a message sent by the people during the feedback collection this month. It could be that a fresh deal to supersede the 16-point agreement is now needed. Not dissolving the CA or restricting its role to that of the Legislative Parliament immediately after passing the new constitution might be one way to convince them.

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The dreaded El Niño seems to be manifesting itself, as predicted. There is a drought over most of Nepal with rainfall only 60 per cent of normal in most places. The reason has been a monsoonal circulation that threatens to become a cyclone in the Bay of Bengal. That system has switched wind direction, pulling in dry, cooler air from the west. Expect the precipitation to pick up over the weekend, but not in the amount required.

Gurung and Nepathya continue to innovate. Gurung says that is the way young Nepali musicians should engage in music: “To succeed, you have to create and recreate yourself and be original.”

In 2013, Gurung remembers being nervous before the Wembley Arena concert, but now he feels there was no reason to be. “It’s your performance that counts,” he says, “if the audience doesn’t feel your music, it doesn’t mean anything whether it’s in the Wembley Arena or anywhere else.”

Nepathya has performed to packed audiences all over Nepal, in Israel, in the Gulf, Hong Kong, South Korea, Finland and Australia in the past few years. Gurung admits that 25 years ago, he never felt the band would last as long as it has. Since then, he has worked with 19 different musicians and is the only founding member who remains.

Gurung says: “Dreaming is free, but hard work also pays off.”
Secondary School in Kante. Route will go from Nagarkot to Dhulikhel. Rs 600 for Nepalis and Rs 800 for foreigners. 1 August, 7am to 11am, Nagarkot, 9851150167, for registration: www.shilpee.org

Nakhipot Urban XC, A 4.25km trail race in Nakhipot, open to all. Registration: 1 August, to 8 August, 7am, Nakhipot basketball court, 9889891595, 9898303146.

Earthbag Rebuild Nepal, Workshops and discussion groups about the benefits of earthbag building and earthquake resistant design, 4 September, 10am – 5pm, The Summit Hotel, Anapurna.

Photo Kathmandu, Photographers, curators, photo-based artists, historians, anthropologists and other practitioners invited to submit work and ideas for digital projection, discussions, performances on the theme ‘TRAVEL’. Deadline 15 September, www.photoktm.com

Get Inspired, United States Education Fund Nepal has guest speakers Ashwin Basnet and Sanju Koirala sharing their experiences regarding the US college application process. 3 August, 1 pm to 2.30 pm, USEF, Gyaneswor, Kathmandu, (01)4444779, (01)4444780, fdkanneh@usefednepal.org.np

Monsoon story camp, Journalists and community leaders are trained in communicating about climate change so people improve their agriculture production and be better prepared for adverse weather. 27 to 29 August, Partial Gat, Karte, storycamp@gmail.com

Wholeness, A painting exhibition by Puran Khadka whose work is a meditative abstraction full of spiritual awakening. Inauguration on 2 August at 5pm, till 30 August, Prayer Tree Lodge, Mangu Treelodge.com

Six years of music, House of Music celebrates its 6th anniversary by introducing a new band, Whammy’s Up! 15% discount. 31 July, 5pm, House of Music, Thamel, (01)4410747/72

Metal for Nepal, A fund-raiser concert with metal bands for the benefiting of the earthquake victims. 31 August, 15 august, 2pm, Club 25 Hours, Tange, (01)4434846

Coffee Escape, In the heart of the city, the main highlights of this place are its Italian Illy coffee and pastries. Location, Anand Bhawan, (01)4444547, 7.30am to 8.30pm

Capital Grill, American style dinner offers a large assortment of appetizers and entrees to suit everyone’s taste. Bhojnamra, (01)4428426, grillkathmandu@gmail.com

Tasneem’s Kings Kitchen, A charming restaurant proposing the unique flavours of distinctive Bohra Muslim food. Jhanshi, 9801287277, (01)2299532, annemenoking@gmail.com

Fire and Ice, For the best pizzas in town. Thamel, (01)455010

Getaway to the outskirts of Kathmandu Valley, Situated at the other end of the Phewa Lake and nestled inside Raniban forest and the World Peace Stupa, best views of the Mansgunna range. Phewa Lake, Pokhara, (01)4411855

Dhulikhel Lodge Resort, Located on a hillside, this resort offers a magnificent vista of valleys, foothills, and mountains to the north. Dhulikhel, (01)48714484, dhulikhellodgeresort.com

Inspire with pictures, In celebration of the World Literacy Day The Non Formal Education Centre and UNESCO organized an open photography contest on the theme ‘Women’s Literacy’. Deadline 25 August, pe.wong@unesco.org.
Normally proud

In 2007 the Supreme Court of Nepal granted basic rights to sexual minorities and recognised third gender as a new category entitled to citizenship. This is a legal statement, but it is still difficult for Nepal’s Lesbian Gay Bisexual (LGBT) community to be fully accepted by society. As Saurav Jung Thapa of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Kathmandu points out in his foreword to the book Pride Climbing Higher: Stories by LGBT People from Nepal society lags behind laws.

The 12 stories collected in Pride Climbing Higher show the importance of media in raising awareness and promoting tolerance. In most of stories, we feel the relatives of the writers had no clue about LGBT - Rodham Mahato points out that it’s already difficult to talk about sexuality in Nepali society. Sometimes the writers themselves didn’t understand their sexuality and even question if they are normal. Mahato also writes: “People should know more about LGBTI identities.”

The book has also been translated into Nepali by LaLit Mag with the financial assistance from the Norwegian Embassy and will be distributed through 53 regional offices of the Blue Diamond Society. Manisha Dhakal, executive director of the LGBT rights organisation p(ictured, left) said she believes this book will change the perception of the community in Nepal. She adds: “We also hope it will make our law makers more aware of the LGBT issues.”

Stephane Hault

SAARC Summits.

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In the first story, Sita Phuyal brings out her hometown in Sunsari. Phuyal now has a job in the capital where she lives with her companion but regrets she has no family anymore.

Vishnu Adhikary was also beaten by his father and brothers because they didn’t accept his sexuality. But after he talked to media to explain his identity, his parents apologised to him. They now accept him and encourage him for his work towards the minorities.

Sadhana KC’s family was helpful until she came out publicly, and the fear of social stigma set it. Still, some of the stories are optimistic. Jyoti Thapa writes she was depressed for years, fearing her parents’ reaction regarding her sexuality, but when she came out, her family supported her to become a role model in her village.

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Stephane Hault

Fresco at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza.

Together with the Lucknow Moghal cuisine at Kakori next door, the restaurant is in the lower floor of the luxury villas built for SAARC Summits.

Al Fresco is offering a two-week pizza and pasta promo till 7 August, and Nepali Times was invited to sample this “Italian gourmet tour”, as executive chef Yubaraj Pokhrel likes to call it. The ambience at lunchtime midweek was decidedly Mediterranean, since the monsoon had taken a break and the sun was out in all its glory shining down at the palm bush outside the window. Inside, the décor with copies of oil on canvas by the early Italian masters lend an authentic air. The waiters, dressed up to their nines in bow ties and white gloves give a touch of class and they engage the guest in informal pre-prandial banter about the choices, as is the custom in Italy.

Chef Pokhrel recommends the bread starters with olive and tomato dips that are on the piquant side and appealing to the Nepali taste buds. The minestrone is not like minestrines elsewhere in Kathmandu, that’s for sure – the aroma of the herbs waft up even before the tongue gets a taste of it. All this is washed down with a very appropriate and refreshingly dry white Italian Chardonnay that is perfect for the Italian summer (and the Nepali monsoon).

Moving right along, the three courses arrive. Spaghetti con il Gambretti (Veneto) and, as expected, the pasta is just right in its oval platter. Not soggy like chowchow, and not too tough with just the proper hint of yellow. The right boil is the secret of great pasta, and Al Fresco has that small detail down pat. The shrimp is a perfect accompaniment to the spaghetti, the meat grilled to just the right texture, to be scooped out of the shell.

The Ravioli di spinaci con Noci (Abruzzi) came with a subtle ricotta and walnut topping to the tastebuds. This reviewer will skip that item next time, though, since you could easily make it at home by adding cheese and spinach fillings into a veggie momo.

Into the second glass of Chardonnay, we are right in the mood to explore Al Fresco’s innovative international pizza list. In a globalised world, the variety on offer does justice to the diversity of world cuisine and you can tell the mascarpone here is the original stuff, the cream layers are laced with coffee liquor and the sponge cake has the unmistakable scent of amaretto.

One can’t go wrong with Neapolitana, and this one had an extra sour tang from capers and pearl onions in vinegar. We were curious, however, about the Himalayan Herb Pizza with its Nepali topping made of chicken bits, a blend of yak and mustard greens, spinach, tomato, and timur. The end result is something that if you closed your eyes, you could be by the bay in Naples with your heart in Nepal. We suggested that Chef Pokhrel add jimbu to the topping next time, and perhaps concoct a vegetarian topping for non-carnivores.

By the time the tiramisu (complimentary till 7 August with all meals) came around, we were singing hosannas to the gods of gastronomy. You can tell the mascarpone here is the original stuff, the cream layers are laced with coffee liquor and the sponge cake has the unmistakable scent of amaretto.

We won’t give you prices of the items, suffice it to say that Al Fresco is not more expensive than some of the classier eateries in the city centre. You have another week to enjoy the pizza pasta promo.

Sunaina Rana
THE SETTING SUN FINDS ITS WAY THROUGH CLOUDS TO SPOTLIGHT KATHMANDU

THE MORNING AIR IS SO CLEAR MT. EVEREST IS VISIBLE 200KM AWAY.
GANESH HIMAL SHINY AND BRIGHT LOOMS ABOVE NAGARJUN.
in your lap or palm.
www.nepalitimes.com

NEPAL WHEREVER YOU ARE.
Tourists are told not to visit Nepal in the monsoon. It is actually the best time to visit. To see water in the sky in the form of vapour. You may not get to look at mountains, but you can pass the days cloud-gazing. Towering white water vapour castles are etched against an indigo sky, their shapes changing with every passing moment. Dazzling and billowing, they are sometimes blinding white, sometimes heavy and dark, then glowing pastel in the slanting rays of the setting sun. The next morning, after a night of rain, the sky is covered by an upside down carpet. All the dust has been washed away, and the snow mountains appear, tantalisingly brief, close enough to touch.
H
th of never read any
Thomas Hardy, I went into
the act of viewing this 119-
minute-long film with a little bit
of scepticism, knowing that very
possibly this particular cinematic
dramatisation of the muchloved

**MUST SEE**

Sophia Pande

Thomas Hardy classic may not
measure up, even though I am not
really qualified to judge it against
the original source material.

Directed by the Danish
filmmaker Thomas Vinterberg,
who co-founded the somewhat
infamous Dogme 95 movement
(which advocates for a kind of
visceral cinematic reality) along
with the now very famous Lars
von Trier, Far From The Madding
Crowd is clearly a very shortened
version of an intricate novel that
tells the story of the headstrong
Bathsheba Everdene (Carey
Mulligan) who goes from being a
penniless girl to relative wealth
when she inherits her uncle’s farm.

As the beautiful, spirited, but
also slightly churlish Bathsheba
sails through her new-found life,
revelling in her ability to make
decisions, and fighting the battles
that any woman of the time
would have to face head-on were
one to become a “gentlewoman
farmer” in the late 19th century
(the novel was published in 1874),
she catches the eyes of three
very different, and extremely
ardent suitors – though in the film
version, even while Cary Mulligan
is really quite lovely, no one can
attire her.

Clearly, condensing a long,
complex novel into a barely two
hour long film is not easy, and
here it is clear that the screenplay
written by David Nicholls,
sacrifices a great many logical
details for the sake of moving
swiftly through the story.

As a result, Sergeant Troy and
Bathsheba are relatively lightly
sketched out, and Schoenaerts and
Sheen are left to carry the relatively
heavy weight of the film, a task
that both of these veteran actors
are imminently capable of.

While it is a bit of shame that
a novel written with a wom an
as a central character in the 19th
Century has been reduced to
becoming a film about the integrity
of the men in her life in a 21st
Century film version, the presence
of two great actors more than saves
the film, making it worth watching
due to its production value, and of
course the suspense (for those who
have not read the book) regarding
who Bathsheba will ultimately end
up with.

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**HAPPEINGS**

**OLD AGAINST NEW:** Taxi drivers halt traffic in Kathmandu on Wednesday
protesting the government’s decision to import of 500 more cabs.

**PULLING DOWN THE CHARIOT:** The Rato Machhindranath chariot, damaged
by the April earthquake is now being dismantled before being rebuilt.

**BRIDGE COLLAPSE:** More than 20,000 passengers were stranded on the East
West Highway on Monday after this bridge collapsed in Gaindakot, Nawalparasi.

**FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD**

GOPEN RAI

OLD AGAINST NEW: Taxi drivers halt traffic in Kathmandu on Wednesday protesting the government’s decision to import of 500 more cabs.

BRIDGE COLLAPSE: More than 20,000 passengers were stranded on the East West Highway on Monday after this bridge collapsed in Gaindakot, Nawalparasi.

PULLING DOWN THE CHARIOT: The Rato Machhindranath chariot, damaged by the April earthquake is now being dismantled before being rebuilt.

DEBUT NOVEL: British Council Country Director Brendan McSharry, Regional
Director Stephan Roman and professor Abhi Subedi launch Bikash Sangraula’s
(second from right) novel Unlikely Storytellers in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT: Actor Neer Shah after receiving the ‘Chalchitra
Dirgha Sadhana Samman’ award from President Ram Baran Yadav on Tuesday.

GETTING THE MOST ECONOMICAL B/W PRINTERS ever

Best for Office and Commercial purpose
Life moves at a different pace in the sleepy town on the hill overlooking Kathmandu Valley. It is literally on the boundary between the hectic city and the bucolic farming villages to the south.

Chobar is so near, but get up here and within sight of Kathmandu you are in a different world. Cross the Ring Road from Jawalakhel and walk over the 100-year-old cast iron footbridge over the Bagmati, up the steep stone steps through a pine forest to the settlement on the ridge. Nearby Kirtipur is similarly located, but Chobar is less densely-populated and has the air of a place that history and geography have passed by. While Kirtipur gets its fame from the fierce resistance its inhabitants put up to the invading army of Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1770, Chobar is famous for the mythical story of Manjushree cutting the ridge in half to drain the lake that was once Kathmandu. The gorge with its rapids may not have its once-pristine quality, but is still dramatic.

The town takes up a good portion of the crest of the hill, and if you continue to ascend you’ll find its famous temple on which devotees have nailed metal plates and bowls to its walls to thank the deity for prayers answered. Like everything else in Kathmandu, Chobar was also rocked by the 25 April earthquake and its aftershocks. The damage is minimal: one house near the entrance to the temple has half fallen, there are angled beams supporting the walls of the temple and many homes have cracks. For most locals, however, life moves along at the same slow pace it did before.

Elderly men sit drinking tea near a new gumba that is under construction, the women are in the shade singing hymns. On a clear day you can see the whole Valley spread out below, the snow mountains beyond and even Mt Everest if there are no clouds. Most young men have moved out for work. The families here say they only go into town once a week if they have to. The air is better up on the hill, and things are quieter too, there are dragonflies, wild flowers and expansive cloudscapes.

Chobar is a perfect half-day walk or bicycle ride for Kathmandu residents. Enjoy being so near and yet so far.
Laxmi Prasad Ngakhusi is a photojournalist who has covered Nepal in all its facets over the past decades. Noted for his nature photography, he won the WCN Nature and Wildlife Photography Competition in the ‘Human Interaction with Nature’ category in 2009.

After the earthquake Ngakhusi began a photographic exploration of how people dealt with nature’s wrath. In his seventh solo exhibition, Rising from the Rubble at the Nepal Art Council till 2 August, he wanted to show the fortitude of the Nepali people after the 25 April earthquake. He said: “I hope my pictures will bring hope.”

“The images are taken from same spot and highlight the loss. Here, desolation somehow outweighs hope,” said UNDP Country Director Renaud Meyer. Rising from the Rubble shows pictures of people smiling amidst the ruins of homes, people going about their daily rituals despite the disruption to their lives brought by the disaster. There are many photographs of the aftermath were taken while on assignment for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which sponsored the exhibition.

“Laxmi accompanied us on field trips, and we felt the images convey an incredible message of hope,” said UNDP Country Director Renaud Meyer. Rising from the Rubble shows pictures of people smiling amidst the ruins of homes, people going about their daily rituals despite the disruption to their lives brought by the disaster. There are many photographs of the aftermath were taken while on assignment for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which sponsored the exhibition.

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A rising Nepal

Rising from the Rubble is on display at the Nepal Art Council till 2 August.

A perfectly cool machine for the hot monsoon days that turns healthy yoghurt cheaply and quickly into a fabulous dessert. Even the kids won’t ask for ice cream any more.

YANTRICK’s Verdict:

Gizmo by Yantrick

Home-made froyo

Let’s say your love handles are getting a bit too thick, and you don’t have a tub of ice cream around a replica of Dharara made of hollow petrol drum in Sanepa, the one depicting locals helping each to clear the rubble are iconic images of the last three months. The most dramatic images are those in which Ngakhusi displays panoramic pictures of the palace squares of Patan, Kathmandu (picture) and Bhaktapur before and after 25 April. The images are taken from same spot and highlight the loss. Here, desolation somehow outweighs hope.

With such beautiful pictures, we wished the exhibition was displayed with a more narrative sequence. It seems the first level is dedicated to photographs taken before the earthquake, but there is nothing to clearly indicate this. On the second floor, pictures of ruins lose their intensity as they are next to photographs apparently taken before 25 April. The captions need to answer the 4Ws and better interpret the pictures and magnify their impact. Money from the sale of photographs will go to the Community Art Centre, an initiative by Arjun Prasad, which organises art therapy workshops for children in affected areas. The plan is to take the exhibition around Nepal. Said Meyer: “We want to give Laxmi’s pictures more exposure to sensitize the people affected by the earthquake. It is important that they know what their fellow citizens have endured.”

Rising from the Rubble is on display at the Nepal Art Council till 2 August.

For more details about the images, you may visit https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/nepal-earthquake-
dead-90000.jpg

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Nepal’s leaders don’t know the meaning of shame and care about nothing but themselves

The Shameless

Nepal’s leaders don’t know the meaning of shame and care about nothing but themselves

A recent conversation with a taxi driver got the Hand wondering if our political leaders have any idea how far they’ve fallen in the people’s eyes. The cabbie declared the only solution to the country’s many problems is to string up every politician from the lamp-posts around Ratna Park.

When asked if this wasn’t a bit harsh, he calmly assured us that’s what they deserve and pointed out he’s being fair by condemning leaders from all parties equally. This sounded reasonable compared to his opening statement and my next question was “are there enough lamp-posts?”

An extreme opinion, no doubt, but milder versions like “jail them all” are common insider leaders heard nothing?

“Nepal is finished because of the electricity/ water, etc). If an alien moments of mentioning politics currency, usually heard within “jail them all” are common doubt, but milder versions like lamp-posts?”

our very eyes. It appears the face- our correspondent believes to the capital we can hope collective failure of the political to consult the people until the generation before reality, is low the latest ex-PM to have a chair possible to condone such relief it provides. For the reced, your correspondent believes harming anyone, including those who wrecked your country, is unacceptable, if only because it means lowering oneself to their level. That said, it’s also impossible to deny the intense frustration felt by millions at the collective failure of the political class.

As the MP’s scurried back to the capital we can hope their bubble burst, if briefly, before being restored by another round of meetings in 5-star comfort. Were they surprised by the hostility? Do they even admit to it? Have they spent enriching themselves while pretending to write a constitution so addled in 5-star comfort. Were they surprised by the hostility? Do they even admit to it? Have they spent enriching themselves while pretending to write a constitution so addled thwarted while they were marauding in the feudal past and somehow managed to create, locals replaced the traditional/thinnest of margins, was welcomed by black flags and verbal abuse. As if to break with the feudal past and honour the New Nepal that he waged a war to create, locals replaced the traditional/feudal showering of flower petals with a lively pelting of stones. Prachanda escaped unscathed while those around him got hurt (the story of his life) of stones. Prachanda escaped unscathed while those around him got hurt (the story of his life) to protect the people from the people. Not to be outdone, Congress Finance Minister, Ram Sharan Mahat, fresh from issuing his new budget widely hailed as mediocre, was welcomed in his ancestral district of Nuwakot by a petrol bomb tossed at his car. Fortunately, nobody was hurt, and I like to think the perpetrator was only trying to make a point. Maybe somebody was upset because his PA got caught red-handed stealing metal sheets donated to earthquake victims.

As usual, we’re left with the recommendation that ‘achievements’, were among the most frequent demands. You said you didn’t know the meaning of shame and care about nothing but themselves. Even when they realise they’ve betrayed and enraged the people, they continue doing the same thing they did before.

In most democracies, citizens can shame their politicians into behaving themselves. For this to work, the leaders must live in the real world (at least part-time) where nobody is above the law, incompetence isn’t rewarded, and shame is something to be embarrassed about. Surrounded by lawless tyrants and armed security, our leaders willfully insulate themselves from the people and their concerns; after these latest clashes with reality they’re unlikely to change anytime soon. Where does that leave us?

Perhaps the best answer came from another taxi-wallah, who patiently explained Nepal’s leaders don’t know the meaning of shame and care about nothing but themselves. Even when they realise they’ve betrayed and enraged the people, they continue doing the same thing they did before.

So where does that leave us?

Perhaps the best answer came from another taxi-wallah, who patiently explained Nepal’s leaders don’t know the meaning of shame and care about nothing but themselves. Even when they realise they’ve betrayed and enraged the people, they continue doing the same thing they did before.

Inevitably, the recommendations will be largely ignored, especially since cancelling ethnic federalism and the secular state, two of our Maoist netas’ main ‘achievements’, were among the most frequent demands.

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Aat a meeting this week organised by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to review the effectiveness of its loans and grants to Nepal, the Manila-based institution’s Director General Hun Kim couldn’t hide his frustration about delays in project implementation. That concern is now also spreading to the speed and effectiveness of proposed assistance for earthquake reconstruction.

“We will suspend, even cancel loans now,” Hun bluntly told the gathering. For proof of just how slow things are to get off the ground in Nepal, one needn’t look beyond the Melamchi Water Supply Project. The project was first conceived three decades ago and has been under construction for 15 years. But only half of the 26 km tunnel to augment Kathmandu Valley’s water supply has been completed. Progress in other ADB projects in hydropower, airports and highways is also slow with much of the allotted money still undischarged.

The fear is that the same problems will plague reconstruction activities. After the Conference on Nepal’s Reconstruction on 25 May, many expected the pledged $4.4 billion to speed up earthquake rehabilitation and jump-start Nepal’s stagnant economy. But more than three months after the earthquake and a month after the conference, the Reconstruction Authority has not even been set up yet because of a dispute between the NC and the UML about who should get to head the reconstruction agency and who should replace the chief secretary when he retires (See page 18). The government presented an ambitious budget earlier this month, but there are no concrete plans in it to expedite spending.

To be sure, most countries show accelerated economic growth after a disaster because the construction boom ends up injecting cash into the economy. But for that to happen, the right policies have to be in place for job creation, providing incentives to investors and curbing corruption. Which is why the ADB’s economic growth forecast has actually been lowered from 5.1 per cent to 4.5 per cent.

This year’s budget has a 140 per cent increase from last year in planned capital spending, which is crucial to growth. However, because of corruption and chronic mismanagement, up to three-quarters of the development budget year after year remains unspent, and it has become a tradition that 60 per cent of the budget is spent hastily in the last quarter of the fiscal year.

Chandan Sapkota, an economist at the ADB, says change is needed: “The usual way of doing business must end. Bureaucratic hassles, including a lack of coordination within and between ministries, must be dealt with. There must also be sufficient planning and readiness to implement projects.”

Finance Secretary Suman Sharma says his ministry has made arrangements to ensure that the budget is fully utilised this year. “Those projects which have not started work until the second quarter will be ended, for example. The surrendered budget will be reallocated to other performing projects,” he told Nepali Times. The budget is just one challenge for the government. Managing inflation will be another critical test. Because of heightened investment activity, supply-side constraints and the government’s plans to distribute cash grants to victims of the quake, inflation is expected to rise. This year, Nepal Rastra Bank plans to cap inflation at 8.5 per cent, an ambitious target. In recent years, the inflation rate has stayed above 8 per cent, and the only reason it was lower than in the last fiscal year was because of plummeting oil prices.

Although some macroeconomic indicators are sound, trade and investment don’t look promising. Even before the earthquake, exports experienced negative growth and imports were 11 times higher than exports. The current account surplus, almost singlehandedly sustained by remittances, will now decrease or even turn into a deficit mostly because of increased demand for construction material. Manufacturing has taken a hit, both because there is a shortage of labour and because there is reduced foreign demand. More than 20 hydropower projects have been damaged because of the quake, and this will add to the economic woes.

Few of the business-friendly policies presented in last year’s budget have been implemented. The term ‘socialism-oriented’ economic model in the draft constitution has also spread disquiet among private investors.

However, the lessons from Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Thailand after the Asian tsunami 2004 prove that countries don’t just recover from disasters but actually experience an economic boom. Says Kenichi Yokoyama, ADB’s Nepal Country Director: “All that is required is a mix of strong leadership and concrete changes.”

**Checklist for RECOVERY**

1. **Appoint independent, non-political CEO** of the Reconstruction Authority
2. **Address bureaucratic and legal hassles delaying reconstruction**
3. **Show a true commitment for public-private partnership**
4. **Encourage investors with business-friendly policies**

SARTHAK MANI SHARMA

Jump-starting the economy

... but strong leadership and an independent Reconstruction Authority needed first
Looking down at the newly-declared municipality of Panchkhal from the Arniko Highway is a sight that has come to define the landscape of the 15 mountain districts affected by the earthquake three months ago. Hundreds of bright spots of light reflect the morning sun off new tin roofs of temporary shelters. Just off the road in Ward 5 of Panchkhal, 56-year-old Dev Kumari Mijar has been living since April in a hut fabricated entirely of corrugated tin sheets. Her brick home nearby bears the scars of the earthquake and is too unsafe to live in.

“That is where I have been living since the earthquake,” said Dev Kumari, pointing to her shed that has its roof and walls made of corrugated sheets. The Rs 15,000 that the government gave out was not enough, so she had to sell gold ornaments to buy another Rs 10,000 worth of tin. “I don’t know if I can afford to rebuild my house,” she said, adding she couldn’t afford to tear it down either.

Kamala Majir, 29, finally received her Rs 15,000 last month after being given the runaround by local officials. But even that money is not enough to buy roof sheets and timber to build a temporary shelter. As a single mother of a 10-year-old daughter, Kamala cannot even afford to complete her unfinished shelter.

Rebuilding her destroyed home is a distant dream.

“I barely save anything from what I earn. I have to send my daughter to school and manage the household,” said Kamala, who started living alone after her husband took a new wife.

Up the hill, 80-year-old Bal Bhadra Majir hasn’t received his Rs 15,000 because his name was not on the list of those made homeless. Wrinkled and gaunt, he lives in a bamboo and tin shelter, looking out at the ruin of what used to be his house which he has no hope of rebuilding.

Kamala Majir sums up the dilemma of many here: “I had to borrow Rs 80,000 to build this bamboo and tin shelter. There is no way I can rebuild my house for another 3-4 years.”

Everyone here has heard that the government has promised Rs 200,000 for those with damaged houses, but they have no idea where they can get the rest of the money. “It would be a great help if the government could hurry up with the grant,” says Dev Kumari Majir, adding, “it would be a start.”

There is a lot of confusion here, as elsewhere, about the mechanism for distributing housing grants. Some have been told the initial Rs 15,000 will be deducted from the larger sum, while rumours are rife that those who have started reconstruction will not get the money. This has led many to keep living in shelters even if they can afford to rebuild.

But in the absence of the Reconstruction Authority, the housing grants are in limbo and there is confusion even in various branches of government about how they will be distributed.

“We have already allocated the budget and the policy is in place,” explained Ramsharan Pudasaini, spokesperson for Ministry of Finance, “but the guidelines and the standards for it are still being prepared.”

Another official at the ministry said the money cannot be disbursed unless the Reconstruction Authority has been formed, but insisted that the full amount will be given out in installments and the Rs 15,000 will not be deducted from it.

Quake survivors hunker down amidst confusion about rebuilding grants

SAHINA SHRESTHA
in KAVRE
I gave it all I had

Interview with Chief Secretary Leela Mani Paudyal, Hinal Khabarpatra, 26 July-1 August

Himal: Are you happy with your tenure as Chief Secretary? Leela Mani Paudyal: My motto is to lead by example, so I always prioritised my work and fulfilled it to the best of my ability. Unlike the security forces, civil servants are not under the jurisdiction of a Chief Secretary. The position doesn’t have power and resources. A Chief Secretary’s job is to coordinate between agencies, conduct meetings of the council of ministers and act as a bridge between the government and the political parties. Another important role is to serve as secretary of the constitutional council.

Were you prepared for the job? It wasn’t decided that I would be the Chief Secretary until the last moment. After I got appointed, I made sure not to compromise on issues of corruption, public administration, and to be impartial and efficient.

Don’t you think you could have done more? For one year during my term we didn’t have a parliament. Bumps went off to stop elections. It was a tough situation. I couldn’t work everywhere, but I did the best I could with what I had.

How much political pressure was there? There were a lot of pressure but I stood my ground. I had quite a few arguments with political leaders. The issues of public land as well as transfers got a lot of attention.

Instead of delegating, you did things yourself. Is it because you didn’t have faith in others? As I said before I believe in leading by example. Because a lot of civil servants volunteered during the Clean Bagmati campaign, many others joined us. If I had just given orders this wouldn’t have been possible.

Should a Chief Secretary be limited to policy-making or get feet dirty cleaning up rivers? The country is a developing one and when you say one thing and do another. Political leaders make the policy; a Chief Secretary alone cannot. For example: when the Civil Service Act to sack government employees possessing Diversity Visa (DV) and Permanent Residency (PR) of foreign countries was first taken to Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development, the minister called it my agenda.

Are you saying the role of the Chief Secretary should be broader? The Chief Secretary should be involved in hiring, promotion, and transfer of government officials and the transfer and promotion of security personnel.

Do you have a favourite successor? No, those are just rumours. All candidates went through all the selection process. I have even overlapped with them, so they get exposure.

The crime of reporting

Sandep Yogi in Setopati, 29 July

I was heading towards Bhat Bhateni from Baluwatar on Monday afternoon. A motorcade suddenly overtook my motorcycle, halting the traffic in front of the office of the CIAA (Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority). Motorists started honking furiously, but traffic policemen cordoned off the road. It turned out to be the CIAA’s chief, Man Singh Karki was coming to work. I was taking a few photos of the traffic jam and Karki’s car with my mobile when a policeman snatched the phone from my hands.

A few minutes after Karki’s motorcade passed, everyone was allowed to move forward but not me. The police not only seized my bag, camera and mobile but also beat me up. They broke one of my teeth and the lenses of my SLR camera. They informed the Kamal Pokhari police office about a suspect arrested with a bomb. Yes, they were talking about me!

When DSP Binod Silwal came from Kamal Pokhari, I told him that I was an Image Channel reporter. Silwal called the CIAA’s press officer, who asked Image Channel’s Chair RK Manandhar if he knew me. But Manandhar disowned me and denied any knowledge of me. I called Federation of Nepalese Journalists (NFJ) President Mahendra Bista, who is News Editor at Image Channel. I also informed Press Union Chair Badri Sigdel. They told the CIAA to let me go, which it did. But I felt humiliated not only by their behaviour but also by Manandhar’s failure to protect me. When I wrote up the news, Image Channel spiked it.

On Tuesday, I went to work as usual. My colleague Anupa Shrestha, who is also the FNJ’s Image Channel chapter President, told me not to come to the office from Wednesday. I asked why, she just said: “It’s the management’s decision.” I asked her to hand me my termination letter, but she said that was not possible. I lost my job just because I took a photo of a public figure in a public place.
All in the mind

Exercise and yoga don’t just keep you physically fit but help improve your emotional resilience.

ANJANA RAJBHANDARY

I have started an exercise program, probably more times than the number of Prime Ministers we have had in Nepal since 2008. Starting to exercise is not hard, but continuing with it is the challenge.

ALL IN THE MIND

Anjana Rajbhandary

My latest effort, which I have somehow managed to keep up with in fits and starts is probably the smartest decision I have made. In June 2014, my life had become a challenge.

As a teacher of Vipassana, I feel the meditation technique holds special importance to reduce stress and help us deal with disasters like this. After all, Vipassana means seeing things in a special way. In Buddhism, we have a word for the consequences of our own deeds: ‘sankhara’. It is our own sankharas that bring about misery, suffering, dukkha. They are the cause of our fear, and our life ends when it has to end, and our sankhara determine the kind of death we will face.

So, with or without an earthquake, it is our own sankharas that brings us misery, fear, and we die when we do, either earlier or later. If the things we do out of our own volition have such consequences, we need to be careful when we carry out those deeds. Unwholesome deeds will bring misery and suffering sooner or later. We carry with us a huge stock of past deeds.

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The Vipassana way

The meditation technique that holds the key to post-disaster recovery.

ROOP JYOTI

One of the rare and underestimated aftereffects of the 25 April earthquake was the psychological stress it had on individuals and families.

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The Buddha said that this life is like an arrow shot from a bow. It will fall when it has its fall. We all know that we have to do one day, we just don’t know when. Vipassana students know that the state of mind is most important when one meets death. If our life ends at a particular moment, it will end whether or not there is an earthquake. But if that is not the time when our life ends, it will not end. The important thing is not to fear it when it comes.

Dharma must be translated into our daily lives. If we don’t understand and accept that suffering, dukkha is the result. It means we have not understood, and are not living a life of Dharma. Ultimately, what is necessary is to maintain our equanimity at all times so that we are not affected by fear during natural calamities and other upheavals.

May all those who lost their lives in the recent earthquake be reborn as human beings and attain liberation. May all those who suffered come in contact with Dhamma and emerge from misery.

THE UNION WITH THE UNIVERSE

Why are we interested in yoga only after it is ‘discovered’ by the West?

SHRISHTI SHERESTHA

Yoga means the union of self with the universe, and in the true sense is the distribution of plurality into a single medium of existence. A voyage into the void of everything we think we are, to transform into nothingness.

Yoga is this unity of self with nothingness, the medium to initiate oneself into the world of ecstatic trance where matter dissolves into energy and becomes one with the greater truth of oneness. Such a transition from material illusion to a state of pure 'shunya' or nothingness takes an immense amount of ‘sadhana’ or dedication under the guidance of a guru or a master.

My guru is Adiyogi, the first yogi – the creator and the leader of the tribe, Shiva. He passed his knowledge to the seven rishis (Saptarishis) who were dedicated and patient enough to wait to be finally granted the secrets of yogic philosophy and enlightenment. Kansaas, meditation, mantras, dance and mudras are the vehicles within yoga as a medium to unite with the divine. Through these Saptarishis, yoga diffused to other parts of the world.

We have in the subcontinent the teachings of Agnya Muni, who introduced yoga not only as a philosophy and teaching but as a lifestyle. These were handed down from one generation to the next through the culture of ‘guru shishya’ or master student. India, Nepal and Tibet have helped create a universal solace for people from all over the world to be part of the school of yoga.

New age yoga teachers have highlighted the benefits of yoga by dressing freedom from ailments and mental handicap caused by an unbalanced materialistic lifestyle. Yoga is now a household name as more and more people from different age groups and backgrounds practice it, but very few are progressing into the next realm through kundalini yoga. It is a pity that this great teaching has been so commercialised.

As Yoga globalises, it is worrying that the real essence of the practice may be eradicated. Teachers from various parts of the world are taking classes. In Nepal, we are losing our grip on the roots of Yoga even though it commenced from our land. Very few Yoga teachers are studying the beautiful teachings from the Vedas and Patanjali that has the potential of changing the course of human civilisation. There are no workshops held by Yoga teachers, and I have met very few who can conversation about Adiyogi and the soul of yoga. Does it have to be that we are interested in yoga only when it has been ‘discovered’ by the western world?

In the land of Lord Pashupatinath, the lord of the lords and the ultimate Yoga guru, the place of the unity of Shiva and Shakti – this is where the ultimate union of masculine and feminine energies within ourselves should be a priceless revelation felt by all.

Perhaps some of those who adopted Yoga as an exercise will finally come and look at Yoga not only as a form of mental and physical progression, but also as much more ascetic and universal sense of being. We can look forward to the day when yoga will not only be limited to studios and classes, but taken in as a lifestyle consumed with care, wellbeing and the ultimate experience.

We should be proud of our roots and the embodiment of secret teachings from the past. We should be aware of what we are practicing and recognize it as the worship of one’s body, soul and existence in its true sense. In the journey of self discovery, if one finds the true master or becomes one, it enlivens the surrounding with the seeds of higher understanding.

If you fail to find the guru outside yourself, close your eyes and you will find within you the supreme Adi Guru who will take you down the path of self discovery through the medium of yoga: towards divine unity, the core revelation of Yoga.
Secularism, federalism and rheumatism

Despite the fact that Nepal was never under the colonial yolk and is frequently visited by natural calamities, it is heartening to note that our Great Leaders are constantly thinking about our welfare and trying to find ways to address our urgent day-to-day concerns about God Almighty.

Going by the number of column inches that have been devoted to the Omniscient Being in the past month, the number of tyres that have been burnt to terrorise people in 12 districts so they stop work and demand that Nepal be holier-than-thou, or the amount of saffron that has been imported from a certain large neighbouring country to the south which begins with the letter 'I', it is clear that we are the most god-fearing people on Earth. After all, Nepal's human population is now approaching the total number of gods and goddesses in the Pantheon (33 million at last count) and given the rate at which we are procreating, is expected to overtake the population of Heaven in another 7.5 years.

Since God is now such an important player in Nepali politics, Nepali Times approached the Celestial Creator for an exclusive interview in order that He shed light on some of the relevant issues of the day like secularism, federalism and rheumatism. God was forthright and forthcoming, answering questions directly without beating around the burning bush.

Excerpts:

NT: Mr God, sir, how many of you are there actually? Some say you are one, while others believe you are member of a divine jumbo cabinet.

God: Well, there is just me, my Dad and the Holy Ghost at the moment. Sometimes, when I find myself in times of trouble Mother Mary comes to me. But colleagues come and go in my office, so the number is not constant.

NT: Is it true that those who support secularism will not go to Heaven when they die? Totally off the record, yes. But I can't say that in public because, as God, I am supposed to love atheists as much as I love revanchists. But we have a full list of CA members who voted for secularism, and we will be barring them from the Pearly Gates when they breathe their last, or when they kick the bucket, whichever comes first.

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Throughout the ages mankind has asked that if God is as compassionate as He makes himself out to be, how come He allows so much suffering in the temporal realm?

OMG, I was wondering when you'd ask me that because, even as Yahweh, I have no idea. ROFL.

And on a slightly personal note, are you a man or a woman, or both?

That is an insensitive sexist question. You're a Badmass.