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The tragedy in this prolonged constitution-writing process all along has been that the long-term national interest of Nepal is being decided by politicians with short-term vision. Decisions on a new, inclusive constitution that will ensure justice, equity and prosperity through viable provinces are being based on electoral gerrymandering and bargaining for portfolios in the next government.
BORDERING ON BRINKMANSHIP

A constitution cannot be a pot-hole road to be hurriedly patched up. It is a highway to carry Nepalis to a prosperous future.

For a time after the 8 June breakthrough in which the four main political forces decided to push through a draft constitution in exchange for the formation of a government of national unity to address reconstruction, it looked like the six-year deadlock on the constitution had finally ended.

Even though the impetus was short-term power, we thought the forward movement could be used to iron out the kinks as we moved along. The public consultation process, though short and plagued with shortcomings, was surprisingly effective in voicing the people's misgivings about the draft. The top political leaders were working till late Thursday to work in the feedback into a new draft before sending it to the Constitutional Political Dialogue and Consultative Committee, a body that is as unwieldy as its acronym (CPDC).

The Committee has its work cut out, ironically because there is little political dialogue. The leaders and their wont, talking past, not with, each other because the word 'consensus' has become synonymous with 'contention'. It shouldn’t surprise anyone that the main disagreement is over federalism, with the NC, UCPN(M) and the MJF(D) now agreeing that perhaps they really should have demarcated the boundaries in the constitution because of the endless now. Which is why he is opposed to including provincial boundaries in the constitution.

The NC, whose leader K P Oli is in a tearing hurry to replace Sushil Koirala as prime minister as soon as the constitution had finally ended. The UML, whose leader K P Oli is in a tearing hurry to replace Sushil Koirala as prime minister as soon as the constitution is passed, doesn't want any obstructions to replace Sushil Koirala as prime minister as soon as the constitution had finally ended. The UML, whose leader K P Oli is in a tearing hurry to replace Sushil Koirala as prime minister as soon as the constitution is passed, doesn't want any obstructions to replace Sushil Koirala as prime minister as soon as the constitution had finally ended.

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The Constitution deadline 16 August will come and go without a constitution. KP Oli will never become PM. The Maoists will crumble, split and just disappear (Vox populi, Editorial, #769).

The people will rise again against the tyranny of political criminals. We will fight for women's rights. Do not underestimate the power of the people, especially women.

For secular use: 'right to' and 'religion'. Religion has to be translated as 'religion'.
Commodifying to survive

Insecurity about secularism stems from the fear among many Nepalis they will be converted

either conversion or any other minority religion – just Christianity. The fear of Christianity is, in turn, the result of the fear of the death of age-old practices.

The reason for this fear is predominantly grounded in the fact that Christianity is big and its association to capitalism makes it generally a very wealthy religion. Also, the world’s most powerful nations, while all ‘secular’, are often fervently anti-secular in practice in their favour of Christianity. There are also arguments to be made regarding the rapid secularisation of households in Europe leading to the zeal of missionary work outside the continent. And in the age of market capitalism, all other religions globally are losing out in the competition. As globalised capitalism further consolidates its grip on the world, so does Christianity.

All of this, in conjunction with the civilising missions of the colonial powers, which morphed into ‘charity’ after World War II suggests that there is a whole lot of baggage associated with notions of secularism, the word itself being inextricably linked to Christianity.

Fundamentally, Christianity is associated with the work of missionaries in Nepal who offer people what the state or any other religion cannot give them: food, education, medicines and opportunities. These initiatives should be greeted with appreciation. But while free will regarding conversion in the wake of missionary activity is important, it is equally necessary to call out manipulative and fraudulent activities which take advantage of the lack of education and awareness of science and medicine through ‘miracles’.

Going by experience not only in Nepal, but in African and Southeast Asian countries and even in the West (watch Jesus Camp in case you haven’t already) manipulative conversion is not only a myth but a reality which should be denounced by all secularists. In Nepal, it is unhelpful that aside from extremist Hindus, no one seems to want to talk about it.

Like every other religion, Christianity is mired in problems that are by and large fundamental. And the complete commodification of the religion. That may indeed be the only way to survive this cut-throat industry. Sitting around talking about purity isn’t going to get Hindus the numbers it wants, much less retain them.
Textbooks in Nepal’s schools aren’t just outdated, they are outrageously bad

SARTHAK MANI SHARMA

- ‘What is the main message from our martyrs?’
- ‘A Sherpa is a person who takes a long walk in the hills or mountains’
- ‘The feeling of proudness on having children is called virility’
- ‘The worst are the books for social studies. They show which has investigated the poor quality of textbooks. “They show a very poor quality of Nepal’s geography, development and history.”

Those are just some of the more egregious examples of sentences found in textbooks prescribed for school students and hint at the larger crisis of quality in Nepal’s education system. School textbooks in Nepal have always been notorious for their substandard quality. They are poorly printed and are awash in grammatical errors and spelling mistakes due to the government's substandard quality. They are poorly printed and are awash in grammatical errors and typographical errors. More worrying, they are rife with ethnic and gender stereotyping, brazen untruths, contradictions and examples of ethnocentrism.

One question from a prototype SLC exam paper published by the government asks students to ‘Write in short how to help the bad habits developed drug users nearest friend to follow the bad habits’ (sic). Students are also repeatedly asked to respond to this prompt: “It is repeatedly caused instead by a gender conflict in Nepal due to indifference of the government.” Another question asks: “What is the main message from our martyrs?”

Instead of instilling in students a sense of pride and understanding of government, a character named Kaji Sherpa climbs mountains. The book defines a Sherpa as ‘a person who takes a long walk in the hills or mountains’.

In other textbooks for Grade 9, children are seen asking their father for permission to watch tv and their mother for permission to eat bread. One question asks students to look at different pictures of Nepalis and guess their ethnicity. A Grade 7 Nepali language Social Studies text book declares ‘journalism is propaganda’; a recent Accounting text book said: ‘Secretaries should be good-looking and wear lipstick’. Textbooks published by private companies are generally of better quality. Health Population & Environment Education for Today (re-published by Ratna Pustak Bhandar this year) declares that ‘sterile people are hated by society’. Warming to left the government, a character named Kaji Sherpa climbs mountains. The book defines a Sherpa as ‘a person who takes a long walk in the hills or mountains’.

Textbooks in Nepal’s schools aren’t just outdated, they are outrageously bad. The worst are the books for social studies. They show which has investigated the poor quality of textbooks. “They show a very poor quality of Nepal’s geography, development and history.”

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Strategy for recovery

Nearly two months after the International Conference on Nepal’s Reconstruction on 25 June, an independent rehabilitation agency had still not been set up till press time Thursday. Meanwhile, 2 million earthquake-affected people are struggling to survive and waiting for help with reconstruction. Amidst all the confusion, a new report by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) highlights the need to reduce vulnerability to future earthquakes and floods by integrating preparedness and mitigation as part of post-disaster livelihood recovery process.

As the title suggests, Strategic Framework for Resilient Livelihoods in Earthquake Affected Areas of Nepal is a deliberately dry document riddled with development jargon. But between the lines, it has important advice that should be heeded by the new Reconstruction Authority. The buzzword ‘livelihood recovery’ appears often in the report and ICIMOD admits this is an enormous task given the extent of the quake damage. More than 600,000 homes, 7,000 schools and 700 health facilities were destroyed – it is a huge challenge to rebuild not just infrastructure but also lives.

The Nepal Planning Commission’s NPC Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) report pointed out that Nepal lacks not only the financial resources for rehabilitation but also the technical skills. The NPC has also drafted a Recovery and Reconstruction Policy that aims to ‘centralise planning and decentralise implementation’. The earthquake is seen as an opportunity to create jobs for Nepalis who would otherwise migrate abroad for work.

There will be a surge of demand for workers when the reconstruction grants start being distributed. Jobs will depend on the skills for contractor-driven, owner-driven or people-centered reconstruction. ICIMOD warns that when livelihoods are being revitalised, care should be taken not to create dependency. Instead of food aid, it advocates distributing seeds, providing farm machinery, and extension for alternative crops that require less water since irrigation canals were damaged. It suggests soft loans to bigger farmers for the replacement of livestock, and free livestock for small and middle income farmers. It highlights the power of social media to revive rural tourism.

While the earthquake has affected all segments of society, the impact isn’t equally distributed and the livelihood recovery interventions should ensure that reconstruction process doesn’t perpetuate inequalities already existing in society,’ says the report. This is confirmed by the PDNA which estimates that 700,000 people have been pushed below the poverty line by the earthquake. The most vulnerable are always the women, children, elderly, daily wage workers, the poor and indigenous groups. It is they who need special attention in livelihood recovery strategies.


The report’s main conclusion is to ‘build back better’ involving existing community groups which can be a strong drivers in the livelihood recovery process. Non-affected areas of Nepal can play a vital role in supplying the required resources like construction materials, human resources and food.

Gionee, a global mobile brand, has opened an exclusive showroom in Fuku, New Road which will feature Gionee smartphones. At present, there are 10 Gionee models available in the Nepali market.

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Samsung launches Z1

Samsung Electronics has announced the launch of the first Tizen powered smartphone for Nepal, the Samsung Z1. Its notable features include long-lasting battery life, enhanced web performance among others. Rs. 7,490.

Bajaj launches new bikes

Bajaj Motorcycles has launched its race sport and adventure sport RS 200, AS 150 and AS 200 bikes with telescopic front fork and long wheel base.

Gionee showroom

Gionee, a global mobile brand, has opened an exclusive showroom in Fuku, New Road which will feature Gionee smartphones. At present, there are 10 Gionee models available in the Nepali market.

Ford to open bookings

Ford has opened bookings for Figo Aspire for its compact sedan, Figo Aspire, at a nominal amount of Rs. 100,000. Aspire is set to go on sale this month and will be available in four different models.

Hyundai Eon

Laxmi Intercontinental offers its hatchback, Hyundai Eon, for taxi, together with an easy finance service and free road tax with the purchase of every taxi.
OM ASTHA RAI

Just when the new constitution looked possible eight years after the first Constituent Assembly (CA) elections, the same old dispute over federalism and where five disputed Tarai districts should go has resurfaced, threatening the statute drafting process on Thursday.

A CA committee tasked with revising the draft constitution by addressing public feedback missed its deadline owing to the dispute, and it appeared this week that the 16-point deal, the blueprint for Nepal’s new charter, would unravel.

However, the top leaders of the four political parties have claimed that they are now closer to a fresh deal on demarcation of federal provinces – the most contentious issue of the state restructuring. If that happens, acceptability of the new constitution will increase and some of the fringe Madhesi parties might come on board.

“Demarcating federal provinces before the new constitution is our agenda, and we might accept a deal on it,” Upendra Yadav, the new leader of the recently-revived Madhesi Front, told Nepali Times. “But the spirit of the new constitution must be followed when federal provinces are demarcated. The NC, the UML and the Maoists are creating as many as five provinces in the Tarai, which is unacceptable to us.”

However, soon after Yadav spoke to us, one of the key players of the four-party deal, the MJF (D) Chair Bijaya Kumar Gachhadar upped and left the talks for Biratnagar on Thursday evening, stalling negotiations.

During a break: Prime Minister Sushil Koirala, UCPN (M) Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal (top), UML Chair KP Oli, Bidya Bhandari (above) during a break from constitutional negotiations that stalled on Thursday.

Striking a new deal on demarcation largely depends on whether the dispute over the five Tarai districts gets sorted out.

Second-wrung political leaders privy to the closed-door negotiations inside the Singha Durbar this week say the dispute can be resolved by dividing some of these districts. But NC, and UML leaders like Sher Bahadur Deuba, Krishna Sitaula and Bihun Rawal look resolving it not to allow divisions of these districts. The UCPN (M) and MJF (D) leader, particularly Gachhadar, are opposed to the idea of merging these districts with the mountain provinces.

As of Thursday evening, the new map of the federal Nepal had six provinces: four in the mountains and two in the Tarai. Of the five disputed Tarai districts, Sunsari, Morang and Jhapa are most likely to be part of the eastern province. Kanchanpur is likely to be within the far-western province, but the fate of Kailali hangs in balance. The top leaders have been trying hard to decide on this district.

Kanchanpur and Kailali both have mixed populations of Hill Brahmins/Chhetris and Tharus. Supporters of the undivided far-western province and the Tharus have been haggling over this region over the last eight years.

“We have reached a point from where neither of us can return empty-handed,” says Ram Janam Chaudhari, a MJF (D) leader close to Gachhadar. “So the best way out is to divide these districts, include the Tharu-dominated area in the Tharuhat province and leave the rest with the far-west province. This is a win-win situation, and none of us will feel defeated.”

But supporters of the undivided far-west province, apparently at behest of Deuba and Rawal, complicated negotiations by calling a shutdown in Kailali and Kanchanpur on Thursday. CA members representing the far-west region have also warned of dire consequences if Kailali and Kanchanpur are divided.

In the east, Gachhadar (himself a Tharu) has not formally given up his stance on Sunsari, Morang and Jhapa. But insiders say he has softened his tone, and might agree to it. It is not merely a coincidence that the top leaders have expedited talks to draw Nepal’s federal map. When the UCPN (M) Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal and the NC leader Deuba visited India recently, New Delhi hinted at a possible solution. UML Chair KP Oli initially looked hesitant to waste time negotiating a demarcation deal as that would delay the constitution and his chance of becoming the new PM. But he relented, apparently after the Indian ambassador conveyed India’s message to him.

So, once the top leaders resolve the issue about the five Tarai districts, the draft constitution will be forwarded to the Constitutional, Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee (CPDCC) of the CA. The CA has scheduled its meeting on Friday.
LIFE IN BLACK AND WHITE

The provocatively positive tv talk show that spreads optimism and hope

SONIA AWALE

News on tv, radio and newspapers are mostly about what is amiss in society. In Nepal headlines were about war, now it is mostly about politics, corruption or disasters. Political talk shows are seen to be essential in boosting viewership of tv stations, but in the past few years the ratings for news and current affairs are shrinking as Nepali viewers migrate to entertainment programs on Indian tv channels.

Seven years ago, actor and airline pilot Vijay Lama realised that the media was becoming a part of the problem by spreading hopelessness and cynicism in society. He launched a unique talk show, Black and White, which came as a breath of fresh air at a time when mainstream tv stations were competing to be more strident and sensational.

“Determined to make a difference through determination and dint of hard work, Black and White strives to focus on hope in a country steeped in negativism by spreading the power of the good example. “There are so many unsung heroes and stories to tell that will inspire others,” says Lama. The show has seen Ani Choying Drolma as she talked about the neglect of Nepal by the state. Lama himself also tears up during emotionally-charged interviews like the one with Bishnu Gautam who lost both his sons within one year to road accidents. He and his wife decided that they would jump off a bridge and commit suicide, but on the way drove past a highway accident which made them change their minds. They set up Laxmi Pratishthan, a foundation that works for future preparedness plans. To make the conversation lighter Lama asked how outstanding chief secretary Leela Mani Paudyal manages to pack so much into a 24-hour day. Paudyal said: “Nepal will only have a future through hard work, honesty and a positive attitude.”

Lama usually starts a show with an enthusiastic welcome, shows viewers a prepared introductory video profile, the conversation flows, revolving mostly around the guest’s struggle against overwhelming odds to make a difference in society.

Lama’s latest acting role is in the Hollywood movie Everest about the tragedy on the mountain that killed eight climbers in 1996 which has a star-studded cast that includes Jake Gyllenhaal, Josh Brolin and Keira Knightley. Lama plays Lt Col Madan KC, the Nepal Army pilot who made the highest ever helicopter landing on Everest to rescue climbers. The film will be having its Asia premiere in Kathmandu in September.

Lama has been thinking of revamping the format of Black and White, perhaps record them in different parts of Nepal and focus on ordinary Nepalis doing extraordinary things. “We want to make the show more accessible to the public and less Kathmandu-centric,” says Lama. The plan is to also live stream Black and White so Nepalis around the world can watch it simultaneously via the Internet.

Says Lama: “I have learned from each one of my guests. Much like they are an inspiration to others, they inspire me, too.”

nepalitimes.com
Get well soon,
An exhibition of art by children of quake-hit areas during the ‘Get Well Soon’ art therapy sessions. See page 10-11.
7 to 13 August, Gallery MCUBE, Chitwan, Lalitpur, (01)4429410, gallerymcube@gmail.com, www.gallerymcube.com

In Visible,
A photo exhibition by Rohan Thapa bridges the gap between visually impaired and sighted through perceptual experimentation. Opening on 8 August at 5.30pm; 8 to 14 August, Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal, (01)4269720, nepalartcouncil@yahoo.com

Monsoon story camp,
Journalists and community leaders are trained in communicating about climate change so people improve agriculture production and be better prepared for adverse weather.
21 to 23 August, Pashupati Gyan, Kaveri, storylife@gmail.com

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

The Yeti Run,
Come out and test your strength, stamina and teamwork at Nepal’s first obstacle race. 26 September, St Xavier School, Godavari, (01)4263070, nepalartcouncil@yahoo.com

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

Bhojan Griha,
One of the finest restaurants with traditional, organic and ethnic cuisine of Nepal. www.bhojangriha.com

Little Italy,
Go vegetarian at this new Italian food chain and don’t forget to end your meal with the chef’s special chocolate bomb. Darbar Marg, (01)4233577

Chez Caroline,
Authentic ambiance, exquisite French food, glorious sunshine and more. Baber Mahal Residence, (01)4263070/304

Lal Durbar Restaurant,
Authentic Nepali dinner with cultural shows.
Hotel Fire & Iron, Darbar Marg, (01)4249990, reservation@laldurbar.com

Friday BBQ,
Enjoy a special Nepali BBQ with a can of beer or soft drink or local alcoholic beverage. Rs270, every Friday, 6-30, Fusion Bar & Pool side, The Darwan’s Hotel, (01)4479488, sobi@darwans.com

Salt & Pepper Restro Lounge,
Espresso, mocha, latte, frappuccino, cocktails, liquor, beers and flavoured chocolates, with an outdoor lake view terrace.
Lakeside, Pokhara, (061)463484, (0840)705682, www.saltandpeppernepal.com

E Sports Carnival,
The biggest gaming calendar event 25 August, Get Me! registration on ogamesclub.com/res2015/

Find your ambience,
Bringing together a combination of film, spoken word, live music and live art under one roof. Rs500 (imder at beat), 8 August 2015, 7pm to 10pm, Moksh Café, phnomolot, (01)5528362

Call for filmmakers,
Film Southasia invites submissions of non-fiction films made after 1 January 2013 for the tenth edition of the regional film festival to be held in Kathmandu from 19 to 22 November 2015. Submission deadline 15 August 2015, www.filmsouthasia.com/tanet

Support,
A special fund-raising print sale to contribute towards the rebuilding of heritage sites in Patan by Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT). http://photoktm.com/#upsport

Wholeness,
A painting exhibition by Puran Khadka whose work is a meditative abstraction full of spiritual awakening. See page 8. inauguration on 2 August at 5pm, 26 to 30 October, Park Gallery, Patan, (01)5522007, contact@parkgallery.com np

InspirEd,
In celebration of the World Literacy Day, The Non Formal Education Center and UNESCO organize an open photography contest on the theme ‘Women’s Literacy’. Deadline 25 August, pe.wong@unesco.org.

Inspire with pictures,
Emergency call for photographers, curators, photo-based artists, historians, anthropologists and other practitioners invited to submit work and ideas for digital projection, discussions, performances on the theme ‘TIME’. Deadline 15 September, www.photoktm.com

Nepal 425 launches a crowd-sourcing drive for a book of 700 pictures of the earthquake. All proceeds from the sale drive for a book of 700 pictures of the Nepal 425 launches a crowd-sourcing

Collaborative photo book,
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E Sports Carnival,
The biggest gaming calendar event 25 August, Get Me! registration on ogamesclub.com/res2015/

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Film Southasia invites submissions of non-fiction films made after 1 January 2013 for the tenth edition of the regional film festival to be held in Kathmandu from 19 to 22 November 2015. Submission deadline 15 August 2015, www.filmsouthasia.com/tanet

Support,
A special fund-raising print sale to contribute towards the rebuilding of heritage sites in Patan by Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT). http://photoktm.com/#upsport

Wholeness,
A painting exhibition by Puran Khadka whose work is a meditative abstraction full of spiritual awakening. See page 8. inauguration on 2 August at 5pm, 26 to 30 October, Park Gallery, Patan, (01)5522007, contact@parkgallery.com np

InspirEd,
In celebration of the World Literacy Day, The Non Formal Education Center and UNESCO organize an open photography contest on the theme ‘Women’s Literacy’. Deadline 25 August, pe.wong@unesco.org.
**Indians in a Globalizing World - Their Skewed Rise**

**Hippocrene, India, 2015**

by Dilip Hiro

344 pages, hardcover, Rs 1,100

The challenge in examining inequality among countries is relativity. The United States ranks higher than India for income equality, but each country determines its own standard on poverty.

“In India, the term middle class is elastic,” writes journalist and historian Dilip Hiro in Indians in a Globalizing World: Their Skewed Rise. “Whereas a middle-class household in the West has a mortgage on the house, owns a car, and enjoys an annual vacation of a few weeks, the one in India manages a balanced diet daily, sends children to school, and can afford to buy a colour television.”

India’s richest 10 per cent own about three quarters of the nation’s wealth, and Hiro relates personal tales of fortune and woe that offer insights into realms of complex data on inequality and India’s rapid development as an emerging economy. Hiro’s book, a good reminder of the complex realities for Indian policymakers, is a must-read for employees of multinational corporations striving to do business in the country.

With the normal challenges in the developing world, let alone the lingering notions of caste, India is not an equal society. The rag-to-riches stories, the surge of ideas in the workplace or coffee shops, exhilarate and inspire, each peppered with details on deliberate plotting, hard work and clever persistence in the competition to develop one’s self and business. The tragic tales are frustrating because stagnation and failure are not so mysterious with entrenched poverty, corruption, nepotism, inability to control natural resources and exploitation. The greedy and ambitious find ways to subvert government’s egalitarian intentions.

For Indians, the correlation between income and education is highly visible. Even in the slums, upward mobility, though slight, is possible. Hiro’s descriptions are blunt assessments. Education offers the most reliable path to comfort and affluence, and the theme is woven throughout the chapters. Agriculture is the leading source of jobs in India, employing two out of three Indians, but uneven education opportunities in the rural areas contribute to exploitive loans and support for subsidies, reducing India’s competitiveness in global markets.

Stark inequality is dangerous, injecting greed into every level of society for every transaction. The longing for shortcuts to wealth costs the country in the end. Irriating moments of corruption are detailed throughout, and the chapter on “Slumdog Crown Exponentially” details more than 10 cases that ignited public outrage—including the 2G telecom scandal when, in exchange for kickbacks and bribes, government officials sold the limited licenses at low cost to unqualified applicants, who promptly sold them to other firms. The loss in government revenues was estimated to be near Rs 5 billion.

The domino effect of bribes, corruption and excessive campaigning is hard to slow. Foreign companies and investors must be wary of fraud entangled with politics. Corruption and injustice encourage extremism, as suggested by the chapter on Naxal/Maoist opposition to neoliberal economic development, privatization and foreign investment on natural resources in tribal areas in eastern and southern India.

Hiro is eager for the country to tackle its most glaring flaws of inequity. He details the drudgery of call-center workers, the disdain of shoppers who order to security to bar entry to ‘ riff-raff’. He admires the industrialists, but maintaining they are not the only innovators. He marvels at the resourceful in rural areas and city slums who struggle for survival and minuscule improvements for their children along with activists who risk harassment and injury to promote accountability and justice. There is hope when turnout for elections runs more than 80 percent.

The definitions of poverty vary widely around the globe, and Indian officials estimate that 30 percent of the country’s billion-plus people are poor. The competitive and democratic society has an obligation to expand its meaning of the common good.

Susan Froetschel is the author of five novels; the most recent is Allure of Deceit, set in Afghanistan.
After the 25 April earthquake, the life of many Nepali children in the affected areas changed drastically. Some witnessed the death of family members, others were buried under the rubble themselves and miraculously saved, many lost their homes.

Although children are much more resilient than they are given credit for, they can suffer long-lasting emotional trauma. Volunteers, charities and the government have been trying to help children with counselling in schools, but with 1.2 million children in the affected areas the scale of the problem is vast.

Manish Lal Shrestha of the Gallery Mcube is using art therapy, taking volunteers to encourage children to paint, dance and sing. His ‘Get Well Soon’ sessions end up helping not just children, but their adult relatives as well.

“While performing art, children aren’t conscious that they are healing themselves,” explains Shrestha pointing to children painting postcards with greetings for patients in local hospitals. In turn, injured people are delighted to receive attention from the youth.

Some of this artwork from

Dealing with trauma through art and laughter

STÉPHANE HUËT

LAUGHING IT OFF

For more information on Earthquake Safety National Society for Earthquake Technology-Nepal (NSET) Ward No. 4, Bhaisepahi Residential Area, Lalitpur. Tel: (977-1) 5591000, 5929222 5929200, Fax: (977-1) 5692692, 5592693 E-mail: nset@nset.org.np Website: www.nset.org.np

Tips for Earthquake Resistant Construction

- Columns should be placed in straight (grid) lines.
- Every column should be tied with beams at each floor level.
- Beam connecting two columns should not be removed in any case

(There has been a practice of removing beams due to architectural & aesthetic reasons; this is not a good practical).
the ‘Get Well Soon’ sessions will be displayed in an exhibition at Gallery Mcube from 7 August. “The children are proud to know their drawings or videos of their performances will be shown in Kathmandu,” says Shrestha, “And that also contributes to the normalisation process.”

Laughter is another form of therapy that diverts the minds of earthquake survivors from their loss. Working with laughter are Belgium-based artists Rachel Ponsonby, Hélène Pimont and Virginie Krotoszyner who do clown and magic acts for children in affected areas.

Their Clowns and Magicians Without Borders (CMWB) has travelled to other disaster zones around the world to perform to child survivors. During a show this week in Bhaktapur there were squeals of laughter from the children as soon as the group put on their red noses.

“Sometimes children stay after our shows to dance and sing for us,” says Krotoszyner, “women come and chat with us about the gender discrimination they have experienced, a subject we sometimes address in our shows.”

Pimont says she felt their work had more impact in remote areas of the worst-affected districts. “We arrived in devastated villages where people were apathetic,” she recalls, “but after our show they perked up and it was awesome to see them so animated.”

Another group is using the technique of ‘inner dance’ as a therapy. Pi Villaraza of the Lasanaa Alternative Art Space combines music and spirituality. Nepali artist, Prakash Ranjit trained himself and is now an instructor of inner dance in which a person lies on the floor, relaxing and moving arms with the flow of music.

Lasanaa has organised sessions for about 500 students in and outside Kathmandu. The art collective organised a dance performance in Bhaktapur on 25 June during which passersby were encouraged to take part.

People who run art healing projects say individuals, families and even entire communities can regain their enthusiasm after sessions. “It’s a virtuous circle,” explains Shrestha from Mcube. “Once you are healed, you can heal others.”

Above all, instructors and artists who met earthquake survivors were full of praise for their fortitude and inner strength. Krotoszyner from CMWB says: “The best part is that Nepalis are already laughing, they don’t really need us.”

**HEALING WITH ART:**

(Clockwise from top) CMWB performed at the Tourism Market of Bhaktapur for disabled children.

A collaborative performance in Basantapur launched by Lasanaa.

Villagers in Nuwakot braved the rain to watch CMWB’s show.

A child draws a postcard for a hospital patient during a ‘Get Well Soon’ session.

An Inner Dance session with students in Sankhu.

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Russell Crowe has always been magnetic on screen despite his short temper, occasional hubris, and the recent lack of quality roles. The man is undeniably a bit of a phenom, with Ridley Scott’s Gladiator (2000) as a benchmark for any actor to hold to in terms of stellar performances. Russell Crowe’s brave, noble, humorous, brilliant and stoic General Maximus, is a mesmerising, beloved character that continues to stand the test of time.

With The Water Diviner, an Australian production, with Crowe as a first time director, we have a hodgepodge of a film that is only really saved by the performance of Crowe himself. Even as he comes to life onscreen, the man behind the camera is clearly a bit confused, making a seemingly straightforward story slightly too convoluted by his poetic indulgences. It is hard to understand why the writers of this movie, Andrew Anastasios and Andrew Knight, might have chosen such a banal story and then tried to imbue it with a hint of magical realism (perhaps as a last ditch attempt to save it from descending into utter triteness). The narrative is very facile: Russell Crowe plays Joshua Connor, an Australian farmer who has lost his three sons in the Battle of Gallipoli during the First World War exactly 100 years ago. Connor’s wife Eliza (Jacqueline McKenzie) never recovers from the loss of all three of her children, and when she passes away (she takes her own life), Connor, stricken with grief, vows to return to Turkey to try to trace the remains of his sons so that he may bury them next to their mother.

The film hits its stride as Connor reaches Istanbul and meets Ayshe (played by the truly lovely Olga Kurylenko) - the owner of a charming hotel who refuses to admit to the loss of her husband for the sake of her young, adorble son Orhan (Dylan Georgiades) who develops a marked affection for Connor.

As Connor rushes around trying to find clues to his sons’ remains, he ‘divines’ (hence the forced magical realism) that one of them may still be alive, a development that most savvy moviegoers will have guessed pretty much from the beginning. While parts of the movie are certainly very beautifully filmed and occasionally fairly thought-provoking (the death toll during World War I is estimated at over 17 million people including civilians), the film does fail to be a cohesive whole, and as some infuriated critics have pointed out, the makers mostly ignore important aspects of the larger context in which the film has been set, mainly the war, and the many issues surrounding it. While the movie is not quite a failure, one expects something better from a man who undoubtedly has a great deal more intuition than what the film conveys.
In his seventh solo exhibition, Wholeness, displayed at Park Gallery, Puran Khadka demonstrates his progress in abstract painting with 25 pictures. After graduating from Mumbai’s J J School of Art in 1980, Khadka dabbled in realism and academic paintings and only started working on abstract subjects in 2000. It was neither a conscious decision nor a choice. “It just came naturally,” says Khadka. “I realised there was something beyond reality.” Khadka remembers it was difficult for him to fit into Kathmandu’s art scene with his new technique at that time.

Neera Joshi of Park Gallery confirms Khadka had some hitches along the way. “I’m so proud to have Puran’s work here,” she tells us. “I remember when I first saw his abstract paintings in his studio at the Nepal Academy of Fine Arts, he was struggling.”

After delving into abstract art, Khadka’s work evolved from paintings loaded with coloured shapes and meandering lines to more simple patterns. “I guess I’ve reached maturity,” quips the painter. Wholeness has 25 paintings displayed at Park Gallery, but none of them has a distinct name. Khadka explains: “Wholeness depicts the seen and the unseen. These colours naturally came to me after years of contemplation.”

The only colours on his paintings are red, grey, black (the unseen) and white (the seen). Of the 25 works at Park Gallery, 19 were specially painted for Wholeness. The other six, regrouped in one corner of the gallery were painted three years ago and have curved brown lines which Khadka says represent ‘life’. In his more recent paintings, “life” is more discrete, the brown line passing vertically among the red, black, grey and white bulk shapes. “The straight vertical line is eternal life,” he explains. “With this exhibition, I’ve found my constant.”

Saroj Bajracharya, the curator of the exhibition, reckons Khadka’s work may not be intelligible for the broader public. “People tend to seek in art things they can relate to,” he says. Bajracharya himself needed to understand the painter’s way of thinking to select his work.

The exhibition could have displayed more of Khadka’s work, revealing the different steps in his career. As Bajracharya says, Khadka has evolved by never altering his nature. He says: “The language may have changed through the years, but the message has remained the same.”

Sébastien Huet

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Sébastien Huet
I'm in love with my ex-boyfriend. I broke up with him but we've been talking lately and it's going well. How do I win him back? XX

AR: It is normal to question the decision of a breakup, and go back and forth in your head but after some time goes by: you will hopefully eventually figure out what is best for you. Perhaps make a list of the pros and cons of getting back.

Elly everyone, 'Cyclical relationships' are more common than you may think. Teenagers and adults seem to break up and get back together, sometimes multiple times, to the misery of your family and friends. Loneliness and low self-esteem may make couples get back together for the temporary relief of reconciliation. It is much easier to rekindle an old familiar romance than to be brave and stay single. The strength also helps one move on to potentially find a partner who may better fit the individual. The chance of finding someone more compatible is highly compromised by today's generation's decision to choose the easy way out. Trying to see how the relationship might look in the long run might be a good indication of how much potential the relationship has.

Please send questions to: askanjana@nepaltimes.com or @AnjyRajy

The majority of studies say that reconciled relationships have a very low chance of actually working. Temporary comfort is not the reason to get back together. Maybe in the time apart, take time to see if you two would be able to have a conversation about the good, bad and flawed parts of your childhood and how it may affect your future relationship? The worst reason to rekindle a once broken romance is that you cannot find anyone better or, to put in a more direct way, because you may be too lazy, scared or uncomfortable to try.

There are reasons when it may make sense to get back together with an ex, for example when enough time has passed and you both have done enough soul searching, and decided you want the same things in life while willing to work on the differences you had that led to the break up in the first place. If you both believe in second chances and are sure you want it to work then yes give it a shot. If you and your ex-boyfriend understand each other and help each other grow into a better or even best version of yourself, then this should not be an issue. You are still in love with him but do you know if he feels the same way? Have you both spent enough time with each other? It has to be a two-way thing, I really don’t think you can ‘win’ someone when they do not want to be with you and if they do, it’s not exactly a competition. If you both feel the same way, then it won’t take too much work and planning - it will just evolve naturally. Good luck.  

Anjana is a certified mental health rehabilitation technician.

Tab that kids

If you’ve recently bought a top-of-the-line tablet, but even before your fings begin to get comfortable with the new device, your child takes it away from you to play (what else but) Candy Crush. When you do get your device back, most likely only after your child goes to bed, chances are it will look nothing like the sleek new gadget you had purchased only hours ago.

Like adults, children these days are gadget crazy. Most get their first tablet/ smartphone even before their teens and as with every tech-freak, they want to own the latest in the market. Keeping this in mind, Samsung recently released a children’s version of their popular Galaxy Tablet, the Samsung Galaxy Tab 3 Kids Edition that is tailor-made to keep both the parents and their children happy.

Despite its brightly coloured exterior, the kids edition is essentially the same device as the Tab 3. However, there are a few tweaks.

The Kids Edition comes with a rubbery cover case which protects it from low-pixel clarity fails to qualify as HD, it gets sluggish while playing more advanced games. Two modes of video display are available: standard Android screen and the Kids Mode, a simple colourful interface which makes it easy for your little ones to find their way around.

With 8GB of on-board memory, the tab offers a plenty of room for apps, videos, and music but if your child has a large appetite, then you can always expand the memory up to 32GB via a microSD card. But if you are worried about your child spending too much time on this new purchase, relax. The built-in parental controls and time settings ensure that parents get to regulate web and Google Play access and manage the time usage.

Your little ones are guaranteed to have a ball accessing a wide range of games and apps on this one. And, you are never too old to hold one yourself. If people do see you playing with one, just switch to normal mode and claim you are checking emails. At Rs 20,000 it is also much more wallet friendly than many of other tabs on sale.

Yantrick’s verdict: The Tab 3 Kids Edition might just be the best gadget in the market for children today.

The Kids Edition is powered by a dual-core 1.2GHz processor, and is backed by 1GB Ram, which keep most of the kids’ apps running at optimum speed, although the speed gets sluggish while playing more advanced games. Two modes of video display are available: standard Android screen and the Kids Mode, a simple colourful interface which makes it easy for your little ones to find their way around.

With 8GB of on-board memory, the tab offers a plenty of room for apps, videos, and music but if your child has a large appetite, then you can always expand the memory up to 32GB via a microSD card. But if you are worried about your child spending too much time on this new purchase, relax. The built-in parental controls and time settings ensure that parents get to regulate web and Google Play access and manage the time usage.

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Yantrick’s verdict: The Tab 3 Kids Edition might just be the best gadget in the market for children today.
Same old story

The deadly Jure landslide last year presaged the earthquake as well as its delayed rehabilitation

BINITA DAHAL
in SINDHUPALCHOK

Exactly one year ago this week the entire side of a mountain broke off near the village of Jure, taking down dozens of houses, wiping out a 1.5 km section of the Arniko Highway and blocking the Bhote Kosi River.

More than 150 people were killed, 80 families were homeless, and there were mass evacuations downstream after fears that the 3 km long lake the landslide impounded would burst. The vital highway to China was finally reopened, and the river found its own way around the debris.

As it turned out, the Jure landslide almost became a rehearsal for the even bigger disaster that was to hit Sindhupalchok nine months later. There are signs that the delays in compensation and resettlement of survivors of the landslide will be repeated on a much wider scale with earthquake rehabilitation.

“We were living in a shelter in Lamouanga after the landslide, but after the earthquake even that place wasn’t safe so most of us have moved to Banepa and Kathmandu,” says Krishna Lama, 30, who lost both his parents in the landslide.

Help poured in from all over Nepal after the landslide, and Rs 22.3 million was collected in the Jure Landslide Relief Fund formed under the District Disaster Management Committee (DDMC) meant for the victims. That money has been frozen after the earthquake, even though Sindhupalchok CDO Bal Bhdr Nar Bahadur Giri said he has asked it to be disbursed since survivors of the landslides were also victims of the earthquake.

“We have categorised survivors into three groups, A, B and C and plan to distribute funds, we are waiting for permission from Kathmandu,” Giri told us.

If families affected by the landslide haven’t got their compensation even after one year, many here affected by the earthquake wonder how much longer it will take for them to get the Rs 15,000 emergency and the Rs 200,000 housing grants from the government. Families whose homes were destroyed in the landslide are still living in temporary shelters one year later.

Emergency rescue and relief operations, which seemed to be reasonably effective immediately after the earthquake, are now plagued by delays, mismanagement and uneven distribution. In the absence of the Reconstruction Authority, there is confusion about rebuilding grants and relocation of vulnerable populations.

Til Maya Bhari, 71, has been living in a temporary shelter for the past three months says her main necessity is a more permanent home for her family. She says: “How long can we live in tents?”

Her neighbour Sriram Giri has got his Rs 15,000 and relief immediately after the earthquake, but now thinks the money for rehabilitation and resettlement, which the government promised, will take years to come, if ever.

“There is just so much destruction, I think the government is overwhelmed,” Giri said, adding that there is much confusion about when and how the grants and loans for reconstruction will be distributed.

“The government and the district administration should be very clear about policy and provide guidelines on eligibility for grants,” says local journalist Yubanj Puri. “It’s not just houses that need to be rebuilt, people here need livelihoods.”

Assistant CDO Gauri Gautam says it is difficult to send relief out during the monsoon, and adds that many families are waiting for the rains to be over to start rebuilding their homes. Which must be why in the district administration office one doesn’t see a sense of urgency to address needs of earthquake survivors.

Gautam’s next remark sums up the attitude: “If we get instructions from Kathmandu we will start sending construction material in November after Tihar to the outlying villages.”

To be sure, there are bright spots in local government response. Volunteer groups and relief agencies have filled the gaps left by the local administration. But the overall sense here in rural Sindhupalchok is of survivors learning from the Jure landslide to make do with whatever they have because they know help from the government is if ever comes will be too little too late.

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Rebuilding lives in Jure, #731

Still waiting: Til Maya Bhari (above) like many survivors of last year’s Jure landslide doesn’t expect earthquake relief to come anytime soon. The field hospital in Chautara (below) after the main building was destroyed in the quake.

Image by BINITA DAHAL

The deadly Jure landslide last year presaged the earthquake as well as its delayed rehabilitation

Image by BINITA DAHAL

Binita Dhal

7 - 13 August 2015 #770

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PICS: BINITA DAHAL

STILL WAITING: Til Maya Bharati (left) has got her Rs 15,000 relief and Rs 200,000 housing grant immediately after the earthquake, but now thinks the money for rehabilitation and resettlement, which the government promised, will take years to come, if ever.

Her neighbour Sriram Giri has got his Rs 15,000 and relief immediately after the earthquake, but now thinks the money for rehabilitation and resettlement, which the government promised, will take years to come, if ever.

Image by BINITA DAHAL

She says: “How long can we live in tents?”

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“Til Maya Bhari, 71, has been living in a temporary shelter for the past three months says her main necessity is a more permanent home for her family. She says: “How long can we live in tents?”

Image by BINITA DAHAL

The deadly Jure landslide last year presaged the earthquake as well as its delayed rehabilitation

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Image by BINITA DAHAL

The deadly Jure landslide last year presaged the earthquake as well as its delayed rehabilitation

Image by BINITA DAHAL
Mothers and babies
Relief agencies move out, but the need for maternal and child care is greater than ever in quake-hit areas

The April earthquake not only flattened Januka Chhetri’s house but also damaged a health post she used to visit before having her baby. She was eight-month pregnant when a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck central Nepal, destroying over 600,000 houses and 619 health facilities.

Chhetri spent a few nights under a tent and then shifted to her maternal home in Melamchi. Her delivery date was nearing, but the village’s only health post had been destroyed. Waiting there could have cost her life.

“No one came to help us up there, so I moved down,” says the 22-year-old mother.

A month after the earthquake, she gave birth to a baby boy, her second child after a two-year-old daughter. She is now living in a shed made of wooden beams and roofing sheets salvaged from the ruins of her mother’s house. Her husband is in Kathmandu trying to land a driving job in the Gulf.

In the first month after the earthquake there were lots of relief agencies and volunteer groups in Melamchi. But more than three months later, the emergency workers have left and there are no more supplies coming in. “No one is helping anymore these days,” she says. “It feels like we are forgotten.”

OM ASTHA RAI
IN SINDHUPALCHOK

In the aftermath of the earthquake, the United Nations feared that the disaster could undo Nepal’s progress in maternal and child health because hundreds of health facilities were damaged, pregnant women were living in tents and there was not sufficient nutritious food.

But the Child Health Division’s Chief Krishna Poudel says: “Early indicators show the earthquake has not impeded Nepal’s progress in maternal and child health. We don’t think nutritious foods are left to fend for themselves.

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But the Child Health Division’s Chief Krishna Poudel says: “Early indicators show the earthquake has not impeded Nepal’s progress in maternal and child health. We don’t think
Building back Bungamati

Historic town struggles to rebuild and overcome a shortage of masons

After the earthquake flattened her house in this historic town on the southern fringes of Kathmandu Valley, Sunita Shrestha looked for a mason to build a shelter. But the few bricklayers that were around were all busy with their own homes.

Increasingly desperate, the 25-year-old tailor spent the first two weeks with her family huddled under a tarp in the ruins of the Mahchindranath temple. Then, she made a temporary shed out of salvaged material.

“I had money, but there were no masons so I had to build the shelter by myself,” she recalled.

The ordeal made Shrestha realise that there was a shortage of skilled masons, and this could be her new career path. So, when a three-month masonry training program supported by the government and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) was offered to Bungamati residents, she applied without thinking twice and was delighted to be among the 20 people selected.

On completion of the training next month, she will switch to masonry from her current tailoring job. “I will first rebuild my own house,” said Shrestha. “And then I will work for money.”

The 25 April earthquake destroyed most of the houses and temples in Bungamati, one of the worst-hit towns in the Valley. Known for its wood-carvers and artisans, many families lost their homes. They will be rebuilding once the government starts distributing reconstruction grants later this year.

The earthquake has not only created job opportunities for masons but also a chance for the government to encourage construction of earthquake-resistant houses. The training, for instance, teaches people like Sunita Shrestha (pictured above) the techniques of reinforced masonry that can withstand shaking during an earthquake.

Debendra KC, a manager at Training Centre of Nepal which is coordinating the program in Bungamati, says: “After the earthquake, people want to build houses that will not collapse in an earthquake, but we didn’t have enough masons with the knowledge in earthquake-resistant construction.”

The training mainly targets drop-outs and unemployed youth, but there also college students and masons who have learnt new techniques.

Sarej Shrestha, 23, is one of them. Having graduated from Patan College, he was about to apply for a short-term Chartered Accountant (CA) course. But when he found out that people were being trained in brick-laying he decided to enroll.

“I can resume my studies later, but the skills which I gain here can be useful to rebuild my own house,” he told us.

Kanchha Shakya, 50, has worked as a mason all his life and did it in the traditional way. After seeing the devastation caused by the earthquake, he knew instinctively that traditional brick-laying methods needed to be improved.

Shakya said: “After the earthquake, people want to make safer houses by reinforcing the walls, and I want to learn these skills. It will help me to get jobs when the real reconstruction starts.”

Om Astha Rai
100 days after the earthquake that destroyed much of its historic heart, the ancient city of Patan has pulled itself together. Motorcyclists ride under poles propping up houses and past debris of fallen temples. These relics of the quake have become a part of everyday life.

The cobblestone streets glisten with rain, as children feed pigeons. Devotees wait patiently in line for their turn to pray at the Kumbeswor Temple, right next to collapsed buildings. At the Darbar Square, a woman throws grains of rice at the Hari Narayan shrine where the god is intact under a red tent, even though the temple collapsed over it on 25 April. Passersby touch their heads with fore-fingers and utter prayers as they pass Krishna Mandir, itself supported by inclined beams.

Shoppers under colorful umbrellas wait for customers to buy marigold garlands and incense near the Golden Temple in Kwalakhu.
Motorcyclist negotiates beams holding up damaged buildings in Bhelachhen.

A vegetable vendor outside the Kumbeswor Temple.

An intergenerational chess game in Baglamukhi.

A man prays at the Swotha Narayan Shrine in front of piles of timber and bricks salvaged from the destroyed temple.

visit vendors selling fruits, vegetables or buffalo meat. The dogs are all well-behaved and take shelter from the rain by curling up under temples. Patan has gone back to its relaxed, easy-going pace.
Himal Khabarpatrika, 2-8 August

Nepal’s labour recruiters went on strike last month for the right to keep on cheating poor migrant workers and make them pay for their visas and tickets. Thousands of workers waiting to board flights to Malaysia and the Gulf were held hostage until the government relented. They agreed to lift the strike but are now using all their political connections to abort the government decision which would have required employers abroad to pay for the ticket and visas of Nepali workers.

The agreement between labour recruiters and the government looks like a play. Labour Minister Tek Bahadur Gurung knows he will no longer be in government by the time the three months come to an end, while the recruiters now have time to lobby for a rollback.

Labour recruiters started picketing the office of the Department of Foreign Employment at Tahachal, stopping pro-zero cost migration agencies from applying for labour permits. A series of failed negotiations, they accepted the policy on 25 July for three months. The government will review the policy if necessary based on the report.

Although Labour Minister Gurung is adamant he will not backtrack, there are fears that he will be forced to do so when the Shrestha committee submits its report. Powerful manpower agencies have already convinced Prime Minister Sushil Koirala that the policy will have negative impact on migrant workers and the remittance-driven economy.

Koirala has reportedly already asked Gurung not to implement the policy, but the minister balked. Koirala then sent instructions in writing to Gurung to implement the policy only after signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with destination countries.

“He has to write well in English. His language was limited to what he had learnt while in the army but Gurung is already helping undeveloped children with education in his home district with money from the sales of his books. And to sustain the pen mightier than khukri movement, I’ve realised that the pen is indeed mightier than the khukri.”

For someone who has only run away twice in a life, Gurung received an ex-Gurkha soldier-turned-writer.

Gurung is not very well known in Nepal because he writes in English and has lived abroad. In addition, he left for Britain as a teenager to join the British Army, and has been living in Hong Kong for the last 20 years.

At the festival organised by the Hong Kong Business Development Committee, Gurung was busy autographing his books: Missionary Or Mercenary, A Tree Called Okinawa, Japan, Kashmir and he is planning to publish a novel based on Hong Kong soon.

Amid a flock of foreign writers at a weeklong book exhibition in Hong Kong last month there was one unexpected Nepali face: Tim I Gurung, an ex-Gurkha soldier-turned-writer.

Gurung is the former chairman of the Department of Foreign Employment in Nepal and also has representatives of labour recruiters as its members. The committee will visit Malaysia and the Gulf countries in the coming months, find out if employers are ready to provide free tickets and visas and submit a report within two months. The government will review the policy if necessary based on the report.

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“On the pretext of signing MoU with destination countries, a pro-poor policy is being aborted,” migration expert Ganesh Gurung told us. Labour recruiters appear determined to force Gurung to withdraw the policy because it will prevent them from squeezing seasonal migrant workers.

Even before the zero-cost policy was announced, nearly 80 percent of employers in Malaysia and the Gulf used to bear the cost of migrant workers’ airfare and visa fee. But Nepali labour recruiters would share this money with their counterparts abroad. Most migrant workers were overcharged Rs 200,000 for airfare, visa fee and insurance.

The zero-cost policy allows labour recruiters to charge only up to Rs 20,000 from migrant workers for their service fee, insurance, labour permit cost and contribution to their welfare fund. A labour recruiter told us there is unhealthy competition among manpower agencies to grab job quotas, and some of them go to the extent of persuading Malaysian and Arab employers to give them just quotas and not bear any costs of workers.

“Such cases they just pass on that added cost to the migrant workers,” Gurung says. “Some Nepali labour recruiters have given cuts to Malaysian and Arab middlemen in advance to grab employment quotas. If the zero-cost policy is implemented, they will lose those cuts. That is why they are against it.”

Officials at the Department of Foreign Employment also want a cut of the money charged with every worker, and that is the reason there is reluctance in the bureaucracy with the policy.

Bal Bahadur Tamang, former Chair of the Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies (NAFEA), says labour recruiters are not against the policy but just want time to be prepared for it. “We could have accepted the policy had the government given us just three months to prepare for it,” he says.

Labour recruiters say the zero-cost policy sounds good but accuse Minister Gurung of trying to take advantage of it since he used to run a recruitment company himself, which he has now divested to his relatives.

NAFEA’s Kuamal Khanal says, “His sole purpose is to make a policy that will help companies belonging to his relatives.”

According to Khanal, Gurung received Rs 2,500 free ticket-visa job quotas and distributed them among his relatives in January 2015. In June, he received an additional 2,500 free ticket-visa quotas from a Malaysian company. Khanal alleges that a Bangladeshi agent whose company is lobbying with Nepal’s government to introduce biometric system for migrant workers is providing free-ticket-visa quotas to manpower companies close to Gurung.

Labour recruiters say those manpower companies that can grab free ticket-visa job quotas will benefit from the new policy, and most of these companies are indirectly owned by Gurung. It is possible that Gurung would have benefited, but there is no deny this. The zero-cost policy would have ended exploitation of Nepali migrant workers.

Advocate Som Luintel, who advocates on behalf of migrant workers says, “Whatever the truth, the new policy is in favour of migrant workers but manpower agencies have the political clout to sabotage it.”

Pen mightier than khukri
FOR STAYING IN, GOING OUT OR JUST WARMING UP.
The Landlocked Federal Kleptocratic Oli-garchy of Nepal recently hit by an unnatural disaster and on the verge of being declared a flailing state has urgent vacancy for a tall, pot-bellied, homely, convent-educated teetotaler, fair-skinned vegetarian DV-eligible upper caste Prime Minister to replace incumbent who is getting a bit long in the tooth, and to prevent another dude in a desperate hurry to get the job, from pulling a fast one.

Age, disabilities, gender if any, marital status, eating habits, incontinence and incompetence no bar. The post-holder ideally should be octogenarian or above, and have served multiple previous tenures as prime minister wherein he/she/it should have paid ample lip-service to “people’s democracy”, exercised the freedom to execute class enemies following torture, indulged in bombing passenger buses, wanted nationalism and xenon. Candidate should have a demonstrated talent for coercive fund-raising (known in some dialects as ‘extortion’), shown a can-do attitude towards backhand, and exhibited decisiveness when it comes to bandh and bhangada.

The prospective prime minister must have a proven ability to obstruct parliamentary proceedings for up to, but not exceeding, three months at a stretch. Should have blocked off the entire country and parts thereof for a cumulative period of at least 36 days in any given year. Candidate should also submit signed affidavits from international contractors to attest for experience in delaying projects of national prestige through wheeling and dealing. Must have recommendations in writing from at least three referees from the country’s leading business houses to guarantee the capacity to amass ill-gotten wealth.

Candidate should be of sound mind and body, and be in possession of at least one kidney and/or a functioning heart. Should have wife to assist with creative account-keeping. Should have wide, but expandable, girth.

DUTIES INCLUDE:
- Dozing through Cabinet meetings and taking cat-naps in parliament.
- Build personal rapport with leaders of a certain neighbouring country to the south whose capital is made of two words that begin with ‘N’ and ‘D’ so that no decision, however small, is taken without their nod.
- Wear outsized badges, cut ribbons, and blabber inanities from the podium for live nationwide broadcasts on state tv after awarding plaques and shields to victors in inter-services taekwondo tournaments.
- Keep a collection of well-preserved skeletons in the Cabinet.
- Do the needful to prevent a frightening situation in parliament from getting out of control.

EXPERIENCE REQUIRED:
- Should have stamina and endurance to wear 25-kg marigold garlands, have at least 20-year experience in lamp lighting, Khada wearing and bouquet accepting with flair and aplomb befitting of the prime minister of a Least Developed Country.
- Must have obstructed constitution-writing, refused to extend the tenure of local bodies, and sent goons to beat up journalists during past tenures.
- Must have made a Masters in Horse-trading, and a PhD in Sycophancy from an unaccredited university.
- Must have made an Ass of himself/herself at least once in career.

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WANTED: Prime Minister (1)