Cashing in on politics

Most of the 2 million earthquake survivors who lost their homes are still waiting for government grants to rebuild, but those who have received the first tranches of cash are spending it on Dashain shopping.

Most say the grant, which has been increased to Rs 300,000, will not be enough to restore their homes anyway, so they are using the first installment of Rs 30,000 to repay debt and for household expenses.

They are also tired of waiting for politicians in Kathmandu to get their act together. There may be even more delays because Prime Minister Dahal is expected to replace the head of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA), Sukhil Gyawali, with a party apparatchik. Gyawali himself was a political appointee of Prime Minister Oli, and replaced Govinda Raj Pokharel, who was a Congress candidate.

In trying to keep rivals away from controlling the NRA’s grant distribution and to prevent them from sopping up credit for rehabilitation, political parties have cancelled each other out and left survivors with little and inept assistance.

We asked Gyawal if he was losing his job, to which he replied: “Really? No one has told me anything about that. In fact, the Prime Minister has praised my work.”

With the bigger grants, the total amount needed for reconstruction of homes has shot up to Rs 93 billion, more than double of what was pledged by donors last year.

For the moment there is only Rs 34 billion in the kitty for reconstruction because there is a shortfall in what the biggest donors India and China pledged.

Former Finance Minister Ram Swam Mahat, who conducted the International Conference on Nepal’s Reconstruction two months after the earthquake, says the biggest challenge is to spend the money quickly and efficiently.

“The problem is not the lack of money, but our inability to use it,” he said, “further donor support will be forthcoming only if we can prove that we are using the fund properly.”

By Shreejana Shrestha
Read full story pages 14-15

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Govinda KC is once more using hunger to strike at the heart of the mafia that runs this country’s medical industrial complex.

KC called off his eighth fast in July after the UML-Maoist coalition government assured him that they would address his demands to have parliament pass the Medical Education Reform Bill, the impeachment of CAA Chief Lokman Singh Karki and Commissioner Rajanayak Pathak, and to follow the recommendations of the Kedar Maita Commission.

The Medical Education Reform Bill has been registered in Parliament, but various interest groups are trying to have it dropped from the current session of the House. Govinda KC says that despite assurances to him, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal who now heads the Maoist-NC coalition, is lobbying to license yet another private medical college in Kathmandu. He also accuses MPs in parliament of not acting on evidence of corruption by the CIAA in the medical education sector because they are afraid of repercussions.

It is clear to KC that Nepal’s medical sector has a serious chronic condition which cannot be cured with a simple surgery. The malignancy has spread, and it can only be treated by excising powerful political interest groups and putting public health in the hands of independent and professional regulators with integrity.

Given contemporary Nepali politics that is a tall order. But there is hope that Health Minister Gagan Thapa will use his first tenure in government to show that he is a man to be trusted to set things right. Thapa has toned down his activism since he became minister, but even so he is in the right place at the right time to address the unhealthy politics in the medical sector.

We know what the problems are: Unaffordable and inaccessible medical care because of over-commercialisation and political protection. KC is offering as solutions, and he is making his ninth hunger strike to push for them. Let us hope Gagan Thapa doesn’t make the same hollow promises like his predecessors. His political career, and Govind KC’s life, depend on it.
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True patriot
A tribute to Madhav Ghimire

GEORGE VARUGHESH

About 20 years ago, while researching the impact of foreign aid on local collective action in Nepal, a trusted friend suggested I meet a civil servant who could be relied upon to be balanced and pragmatic about Nepal’s complicated relationship with development assistance.

My friend also cautioned me not to try to meet this person on a Saturday, which I thought was a bit odd as that was the day to catch government officials for candid conversation. It turned out Madhav Ghimire used his Saturdays to spend time with his ailing father, managing and tending to him in the rented family home in Surepa. Over time, I would learn that devotion was a central tenet of Madhav’s being, in both his private and his public life.

Back then, Madhav was head of the Foreign Aid Coordination Division of the Ministry of Finance. In those early years of our friendship, we argued the nuances of Nepal’s first foreign aid policy and the Nepal Development Forum. I spoke of the need to mind the letter of international covenants, while he insisted that the recipient country’s dignity must not suffer even under circumstances of dependence. For Madhav, a constructive balance had to be found between those who would give and those who would receive. Indeed, his career was characterized by the motto of building together respectfully.

Madhav Ghimire moved quickly up the ranks during the years of conflict and, it is a testament to his broad acceptability that he was chosen from among well-respected peers to lead as Secretary the newly established Ministry of Peace and Reconciliation. It was a fraught period in Nepal’s post-conflict history, with the need to navigate the shoals of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and rebuild a broken nation.

The appointment also marked the start of the most significant and tragically short period of Madhav’s life as a public figure. We all celebrated when he was appointed Chief Secretary in 2009, for no one came better prepared to oversee the deployment of Nepal’s public administration in service of its people. We had to make up for the developmental losses of the conflict years, and doing so in cordial partnership with the international community.

From his concerns for gender-based violence as a binding constraint for social progress to his worries about inadequate preparation for administrative restructuring under the federal Constitution, Madhav the civil servant displayed the wisdom of a statesman.

From Madhav, I came to learn and appreciate the pragmatism of principled public administration, countenancing the demands of politicians and ministers while serving the public interest. Tried and tested as a civil servant through multiple administrations and every political colour, he emerged without blemish. With each appointment, he gained greater respect from the political class, the international community, and the general public.

Madhav’s retirement from the civil service was ever so brief – in a period of constitutional crisis after the collapse of the first Constituent Assembly, he was called upon to serve his country again, this time in the interim administration overseeing fresh elections for the second Constituent Assembly. He held both the foreign and home affairs portfolios and, as expected, conducted his work efficiently and without drama. He was accessible to anyone who was concerned with the Nepali people’s betterment. Madhav was wise and sophisticated man who stayed close to his roots.

As Home Minister he ensured the seamless coordination of security and administration that made the peaceful conduct of the second Constituent Assembly elections possible. Everyone had expected state failure, and Madhav delivered despite overwhelming odds.

Over the years, Madhav and I stayed in close touch, mainly interacting on public policy matters and related institutions and individuals. Recently, our meetings had become more frequent, and looking back, our conversations had taken on a reflective tone – about the two decades of turmoil we had witnessed together in our beloved Nepal, about the forthcoming changes in governance, and about how we would all cope.

In our last meeting only a few days ago we lamented the perverseness that has come to represent governance and government in Nepal, where the demos no longer seem to matter, where self-interest trumps everything, and those who seek to serve are without support and direction. We also reassured each other about the commitment and goodness that remains, especially in the civil service. Our last conversation was about how that goodness might be encouraged, protected and rewarded for the sake of Nepal’s future.

Madhav Ghimire had a breadth of knowledge, a mind brimming with substance and grace, and we must remember him by celebrating a life devoted to Nepal. There was so much more left in this true patriot to give to his country and people.
CELEBRATE WITH JOHNNIE WALKER
HAPPY DASHAIN
In most modern wars, a majority of those killed, maimed, displaced or dispersed are civilians. And even among them, it is women and children who are most vulnerable. Women have also joined the fray to fight oppression.

And yet, news reports of battles tend to focus on the operational strategy of the military, interviews with generals and commanders in the field, and weapons used in what are called ‘theatres’ of war.

Indian journalists Laxmi Murthy and Mita Varma have put together a collection of stories by women caught up in war to shine a light on a subject that few war correspondent visit. *Carissaimed Minds: Women and Armed Conflict in South Asia*, uses the work of local journalists who worked with mentions to produce chapters about women affected by militarisation in Kashmir and the Indian Northeast, Nepal, and the frontier tribal regions on Pakistan’s border with Afghanistan.

Civilians are always caught in the crossfire of insurgencies, sectarian or ethno-sectarian conflicts, but it is women who end up bearing the burden of ensuring not just their own survival but also of their families, while at the same time protecting themselves from sexual violence.

In her introduction, Murthy analyses the patriarchal and nationalistic that drive conflicts with their masculine character as a violation of the feminine construct of the ‘motherland’ — as if men always need to ‘conquer’ territories. The victimisation of women in wars, therefore, is not a by-product of conflict but an inherent part of the conduct of war itself.

In his introduction to the Nepal chapters, Deepak Thapa looks at how women came to be such a large part of the Maoist guerrilla force. Doubly downtrodden, rural women were easy recruits to Maoist mobilisers. However, as Deepak Adhikari shows in his profile of one guerrilla, they faced discrimination and abuse within the Maoist Army during the conflict as well as after. Indeed, reading the subsequent chapters by Sewa Bhattarai, one cannot help wonder if the commitment of female guerrillas to the cause of revolution was stronger than that of their male leaders. In her chapter, Darshan Karki looks at the status of Madhesis women who again face the combined oppression of an uncertain state as well as from male members of their conservative households.

In a chapter on Kashmir and an entitled Widowhood of Shame, Shazia Toosoff profiles the wife of a renegade militant who spies for the Indian security forces and is injured on the day that he is killed. Besides suffering the discrimination of being a widow, she is also ostracised by both communities. Together with another chapter by Zahid Rafiq, the book presents us the human side of the Kashmir conflict and a look beyond the so-many-killed-yesterday-in-Srinagar headlines from the region.

The Indian Northeast was finally in the news briefly recently because Congress’ Sharmila decided to end her fast unto death after 16 years protesting rapes by Indian security forces. It took her long sacrifice for India’s national media to take notice. But we see in two chapters in the book the kind of abuse from was trying to highlight with her hunger strikes. Writers Sonjoy Barbon in the introduction to the chapters: “In simplifying the experience of women in conflict in Northeast India, one is able to find a better understanding of the shortcomings of modern state-making and justice-building in the geographical margins of the country.”

Another forgotten conflict in the subcontinent that is suddenly thrust into the headlines is Balochistan. Four chapters in the book deal with Pakistan’s restive frontier with Afghanistan, and how geopolitical and tribal rivalries have fuelled a conflict without end. But even the reportage that we get to see rarely look at how the women of the region, already hidden away and facing discrimination and persecution, are coping with separation, sectarianism and terrorism.

We find the theme of double discrimination here too in a chapter by Muhammad Zafar about the Hazara Shias who faced religious persecution in Afghanistan to settle down in Quetta, only to face the violent wrath of Pakistan’s Sunni. Hazara womenfolk bear the brunt of the violence, widows having to take care of families and girls dropping out of school.

Like other chapters in this book, No-woman’s Land by Shazia Iram and Shaista Yasmeen reads like an anti-war novel. They portray both the tragedy of war, and how women find the strength to survive, protect families and hope for a better future amidst atrocities during wars waged by men.

*Kuwaaz Dozi*

*Garrissaimed Minds: Women and Armed Conflict in South Asia* Edited by Laxmi Murthy and Mita Varma. Fania South Asia and Speaking Tiger, 2016 272 pages, Rs 800.
Staging the past

Tanvi Mishra: What made you begin work on By an Eye-Witness?
Aazleh Akhtar: It began with a political shock in the aftermath of the post-election uprisings in Iran in 2009, and some of the arresting consequences was that many old political figures, murdered intellectuals and journalists came into the spotlight after decades. They emerged from the rules of history, even though they died over many years ago. Their souls took part in the movement, you could feel their presence out on the streets of Tehran. I believe rising up for freedom is also an attempt to redeem the oppressed history of your past. It is a demonstration of our gratitude to them.

I also tried to mark out the turning points of Iran’s contemporary history. Most of the叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙叙 Syadur R. Karim, a Bangladeshi photographer, spoke to Aljazeera about his project.

The execution of images is very detailed, extremely cinematic and its production is reminiscent of a film set. What was the process?
I looked at numerous cases of brace murders in the recent history of Iran, between the constitutional revolution of 1906 and the Islamic revolution of 1979 and the eight years of Iran-Iraq war, and chose 17 characters. My main goal was gathering political artifacts of different parties like the national front at the offices, to poets, writers, journalists, intellectuals, all the way to athletes, from areas who exposed armed struggles to areas who submitted to non-violent resistance, to those whose weapon of choice were pens. During the research stage, I was working by myself, I went to libraries and archives and collected as much data as I could. I had to go through the newspapers, written words, confidential documents, witness reports, newspaper articles or radio reports and so on. I searched the available documents, brought them together and re-enacted the moment. These photographs represent the most likely scenarios of their death.

You have put yourself in each of the images, always covered with a red scarf. Why did you choose to do this?
I had to re-enact the moment as it originally happened. I tried to be as factual as possible, but the more I studied the more I became sure that historical precision is simply impossible. So, instead, I focused on capturing the spirit of the moment. That is why I put myself in each of the images to emphasize that the whole image is what I, an artist, had witnessed.

It is ultimately a project about death - how did it impact you personally?
Well, it was quite depressing. I could consider the five years I worked on the project a very sad and depressing part of my life. My mind was fully occupied with the characters, however, after exhibiting the series, I was able to overcome depression. I started working on my new series immediately.

What was the response of the Iranian public to these images?
The Iranian public reacted to the images very passionately. Lots of people came to the gallery, there were people who had never been into a gallery, they came because they heard about it, and among them were friends of the characters, the relatives or others who deep sympathy with them. Many of them burst into tears, they came up and hugged me. It was full of passion and sorrow. There were some people who travelled all the way from other cities just to see these heroes on the walls of a gallery in Tehran. Even now, after five years, I still receive many emails from Iranian people all around the world who had just seen the images on social networks or in a show somewhere. Talking of or publishing a book about some of these figures was prohibited. I never imagined their death for many years. Now, people come and talk about the images, among them there are some ex-witnesses who would like to give me some information about their loved ones.
LUCIA DE VRIES
in CHITWAN

Raj Kali is 42, and walks surprisingly fast and light-footedly along a forest track in the Amaltari buffer zone of Chitwan National Park. Her trunk swings as if it has a life of its own; sniffing out edible greens, snapping the branches of acacia, and slipping it into her mouth while on the move. Her friend, Dilbya Kali is 46, and follows close behind. Visitors are guided by naturalist Shambhu Mahato on a jungle walk to observe the rhinos wallowing in a muddy pool by the river.

Earlier this year, Nepal’s oldest safari resort Tiger Tops discontinued its most popular activity: Elephant-back Jungle safari, and unchained 12 captive elephants including Raj Kali and Dilbya Kali. Tourists are no longer allowed to ride or touch them, taking selfies and feeding the elephants is prohibited. They are instead invited to observe the animals as they go about their daily lives.

Customers at this internationally known jungle resort in Chitwan do not miss going out on elephant backs, in fact they like this unique and intimate glimpse of the daily life of elephants, which gives them a different kind of respect and understanding of these majestic animals.

Unchaining the elephants was not an easy decision for Tiger Tops’ Kristjan Edwards. “I remember going on a picnic with friends in the jungle as a child, taking some of the elephants with us. They would be left grazing, there is no more powerful an experience than being with elephants who are allowed to be on their own.” Edwards says.

After being approached by a local animal welfare organisation with a proposal to stop elephant-back safaris, Edwards admits he was interested but not immediately convinced. It was after meeting Carol Buckley, founder of Elephant Aid International, that he saw the way forward.

Being a former mahout herself, Buckley understood elephants, and knew that they are very expensive to keep. Any change would have to be economically viable, and that is how the idea of letting visitors observe elephants at close range instead of riding them was born.

‘Moving away from elephant safaris 50 years after we introduced them, seemed too big a step, but I had seen young elephants being trained at the breeding centre. It was horrifying, they are scarred for life,” Edwards recalls.

Buckley, who helped the Chitwan National Park unchain its working elephants, used solar-powered electric fencing to corral the elephants instead of chaining them. A camp featuring six tents and a dining hall overlooking the corrals, enables visitors to observe the elephants as they forage.

“It took time for the elephant drivers to warm up to the idea,” admits lodge manager D B Chaudhary. “They were worried about losing their job and about losing control of the elephants. But slowly the mahouts learned to...
trust the new approach."

Not all mahouts are completely convinced, yet about leaving their stick and bullhook behind. Ratan Mahato wonders what he will do when his elephant Hira Kali gets frightened and starts running. But if the bond between a mahout and an elephant is strong the animal will respond to verbal or physical commands. Six months after the experiment began, the health of elephants has improved, they no longer have problems with their feet, ice and ticks have gone away, and they don’t have digestive issues either. The elephants are now inseparable from the friends they are grouped with.

For Edwards, the upcoming season tourist season will be a test to see if the experiment has worked. There are positive reviews already. International tour operators think elephant viewing rather than elephant safari will be a draw. “This is exactly what we have been waiting for,” says Prachanda Shrivastava from Explore Himalaya. “If we want to save Chitwan as a destination we have to be innovative, and offer experiences that are sustainable, culturally appropriate and do not harm animals.”

It is late afternoon when 10-year-old Sandra Kali wades into the Narayani river, only her trunk and hump are above the water. She nudges closer to her mother Hira Kali and friend Saraswati Kali, and soon the three are seen frolicking in water tumbling and trumpeting with delight.

Says naturalist Shambhu Mahato: “When we stop bothering them, the elephants become like children. They are happy and playful, and if we are kind to them they trust and obey us.”

defult_image.jpg

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**Events**

- **Farmers’ Market**: For organic local food, chef branches and wide green spaces visit farmers market at Le Sherepa and The Yellow House. Every Saturday, 8 am to 10 pm, Le Sherepa, Lepcha’s, and Sunday, 9 am to 12 pm, The Yellow House, Syangja, (01) 3325018.

- **Mountain Bike Race**: Get yourself ready for a three-day mountain race distance mountain bike race. The event features skills, form, race, sprint race, downhill race, etc. 26 December to 29 December, 7 am to 9 am, Shoavour International School, (01) 3319751/9594785510.

- **Morning Coffee Queries**: For interesting business ideas and experiences, entrepreneurs, students, and start-ups can participate in Morning coffee queries. 2 October, 9 am to 11 am, Both Bocks and Bake, Mahendrapur.

- **Yin Yoga**: Carry your mind with an hour of yin-inspired yoga followed by a singing bowl session. 1 October, 6:30 to 8 am, Sparaje Wellness Yoga Studio, sparajewellness@gmail.com, (01) 5550691.

- **Save the Date**: The world photography exhibition is in Kathmandu to launch ‘Stop!’ The Nepali issue and hold an exhibition. Don’t forget to mark your calendar for an exciting weekend. 30 September - 2 November, 10 am to 5 pm, Tonggar Mieuvein, (01) 489 7234.

- **Piano Lessons**: Register for 3 piano lessons and get to know about jazz theory, harmonies, improvisation, and composition, with Indian musician and jazz pianist Sharmi Kothimadu, Juu Visuddhvajaya, (01) 5079364.

- **Breast Cancer Awareness**: Participate in a Walkathon organised by lone Foundation Nepal to raise awareness about breast cancer and promote breast self-examination. 22 October, 8.30 am to 6 pm, Start at Patan Darbar Square and ends at Jawalakhel football ground, 9119803374, 9863527642, info@breastcancerne.org.

- **Clouds and Coffee**: Colours of October with Hyatt and enjoy breakfast dives like kathmandu, furniture, sasirana with a side of warm salads and pastries. 23 to 25 September, 12.30 to 6 pm, The Cafe, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, (01) 5178334, Rs. 250 per person plus taxes (including swimming).

- **Midnight Riders**: The Midnight Riders 2015 will be performing their best songs during the Sun Tea Festival event. 1 October, 7 am to 10 pm, Green’s Cafe, Patan Pokhara, (01) 9863686034.

- **Pataleban Vineyard Resort**: Located on a hilltop, the resort offers a magnificent vista of valleys, foothills, and mountains to the north. Dhulikhel, (01) 4690114/464, dhulikhelresort.com.

- **Hotel Landmark Pokhara**: For the best views of Phewa Lake, enrich your stay with the cultural performances every evening. Landmark Pokhara, (01) 4690106, 9851536009.

- **Hotel Shambala**: Take the weekend off and lounge by the gorgeous infinity pool located on the hotel’s rooftop. Rondani, Kathmandu, (01) 4693851.

- **Dhulikhel Lodge Resort**: Located on a hilltop, the resort offers a magnificent vista of valleys, foothills, and mountains to the north. Dhulikhel, (01) 4690114/464, dhulikhelresort.com.

- **Gokarna Forest Resort**: A luxurious paradise that relaxes you and encourages meditation; just a 20-minute drive away from Kathmandu. Gokarna, (01) 4651713, info@gokarna.net.

- **Music Mania**: Enjoy your party at a venue to receive the Nepali popular singer’s music. Every Friday, 7 pm onwards, Traveller Garden Cafe, Hotel Shangri La, Syangja, Rs. 2000 per person, (01) 3410000 Ext. 7200, 7208.

- **Hotel Shambala**: Take the weekend off and lounge by the gorgeous infinity pool located on the hotel’s rooftop. Rondani, Kathmandu, (01) 4693851.

- **Hotel Landmark Pokhara**: For the best views of Phewa Lake, enrich your stay with the cultural performances every evening. Landmark Pokhara, (01) 4690106, 9851536009.

**Dining**

- **Mul Chowk**: The bountiful Sunday Baj meal while watching the lakeside, humu nau from and various naus at Mul Chowk as part of its past India Jatra celebrations. 26 September, 4 pm onwards, Mul Chowk, Riber-Mela, (01) 4550941, 9856925527, mulchowkres@gmail.com.

- **Red Carpet**: Look down at the busy and happening Darbar Marg while dining at a lavish, cozy place that serves mouth-watering cuisines. Sherpa Mall, Dharan Marg, (01) 4557105.

**Music**

- **D Molly**: Spend Friday evening with D Molly and good food and drinks. 30 September, 5 pm to 10 pm, The Hut, Monksiga, (01) 4690588.

**Getaway**

- **Grill Me**: A restaurant with a warm ambiance that serves delicious grilled delights. Johna Khel, (01) 5550694.

- **Unwind with Ciney**: Enjoy the evening with one of Nepal’s most popular singers singing live. Every Friday, 7 pm onwards, Traveller Garden Cafe, Hotel Shangri La, Syangja, Rs. 2000 per person, (01) 3410000 Ext. 7200, 7208.

- **Music Mania**: Enjoy your party at a venue to receive the Nepali popular singer’s music. Every Friday, 7 pm onwards, Traveller Garden Cafe, Hotel Shangri La, Syangja, Rs. 2000 per person, (01) 3410000 Ext. 7200, 7208.
Preserving the intangible

Kathmandu’s monuments may have collapsed but their heritage is alive

CHANDANI KC

The April 2015 earthquake destroyed and damaged nearly 3,000 monuments of cultural and religious significance. More than a year and half after the disaster, many of the buildings are still in ruins or are propped up. However, even though the structures may have collapsed, the culture behind Kathmandu’s history and culture have survived. The Valley’s communities are a part of its living heritage and have maintained it after every earthquake, over the centuries. After the most recent earthquake, there was a debate about the involvement of the community in the reconstruction process. After every natural disaster, government agencies tend to focus on physical reconstruction and not on the socio-cultural bedrock on which they are built. Each tangible structure in Kathmandu is supported by its intangible heritage—the rituals, festivals and practices that are associated with it. The traditional rituals that were held in the Valley after the earthquake, despite the physical destruction played a significant role in helping people cope with the disaster, and adapt to it.

Last year’s weeklong Indra Jatra festival went ahead barely few months after the earthquake even though its important temples had been razed to the ground. Maji Deega temple from the base of which people watched the chariot procession is in ruins, the Tradihsya Mohan Narayan temple where important re-enactments of Lord Vishnu’s incarnations are performed has now a mound of debris, and the Kumari Ghar, residence of the living goddess is still propped up with timber support. Kathmandu’s narrow alleys through which the chariots are pulled were in a precarious state last year due to collapsed and teetering houses. Nevertheless, it was remarkable to see people observing the chariot procession with even more vigour and pride than before, proving the value they attach to their cultural heritage.

Despite the complete destruction of the 12th century Kathmandu, the local community has continued to perform daily offerings to the gods inside. A fence has now been put around the ruins by the Kathmandu Metropolitan City to protect the structure, yet the community continues its daily rituals by putting offerings on the locked gate of the fence.

A natural disaster tests the sustainability of a community’s culture. Kathmandu Valley has been tested often by earthquakes, and after every calamity it has adapted its practices, activities and rituals and has continued observing them. Guthis play a very strong role in keeping the intangible heritage alive, which is why Guthis should be involved in the reconstruction of Kathamandap and all other monuments destroyed or damaged by the earthquake.

Chiniya Kaji Tamrakar, of the Ta Chata Guthi

'The Ta Chata guthi is believed to be at least 1,715 years old. We have 45 members, and a group of 10 is picked each year to organise the annual Aarti gifting festival. On the first day, they take the lamp on the northern corner of Kathmandu, and the second day, they take it out and offer it to the sages. The Aarti gifting is done in a mandap made of four wooden planks in front of the Seng Satsal. Legend has it that Maru Satsal got its name Kathmandap from this very wooden mandala (Kathaa wood and Mandap-mandala). On the third day, the guthi members are served food, and the eldest member is given responsibility over the Ta Chata (big) guthi and the prayer which are supposed to be made from the same temple used to build Kathamandap. This annual festival has taken place after the earthquake as well, but adjusted in the absence of the structure.'

Nnhuche Narayan

Maharanj of Sa Guthi

Sa Guthi is located to have been established nearly 600 years ago when Kathamandap was first built, and every year since it has performed a flag hoisting ceremony in January called Sa Dhan. It brings together various sects of the Newari community. On the first day, a cow is brought from a day on the outskirts of Kathmandu and kept in the house of the eldest member of the guthi. Next day, a water vessel is worshipped in the house of the next eldest, and the third day, the eldest member of the guthi. The flag is hoisted atop Kathamandap by the Maharanj. It is made of cloth and tied around the flag. It is worshipped in front of the Sa Guthi and later in the house of the eldest member.
I really thought that seeing four awesome women chasing down ghosts would make for a pretty new Ghostbusters this summer. I was wrong. Despite my adoration of some of Paul Feig’s former productions like the hilarious, totally tongue-in-cheek Spy from 2015 (previously reviewed in this column), which also stars Melissa McCarthy, and was both written and directed by Feig, this new venture is a bit of a sorry spectacle.

Ghostbusters the reboot, starring the great comedienne Kristen Wiig, McCarthy, Leslie Jones, and Kate McKinnon, starts off promisingly, with some hilarity, and a few promising zingers that give false hope. Kristen Wiig, a great and versatile comedic performer, unfortunately, is given a pretty terrible character as Dr. Erin Gilbert, a physicist who was haunted as a child, and her progression over the course of the film as a clumsy, socially awkward professor type who appears not to be that bright is nothing short of painful.

It is the writing that is at fault here. Paul Feig and Karey Dippold who collaborated previously in the sharp, funny script for The Heat with Sandra Bullock and Melissa McCarthy as a classic odd couple team in a female re-imagining of the buddy cop genre have failed to come up with a story that also successfully re-imagines the beloved Ghostbusters classic from 1984. Instead, afraid to stray too far, Feig and Dippold have created a hackneyed pastiche of the original, starting characters that are versions and not originals.

The plot is incredibly facile, the jokes are not good enough, and the dénouement is so silly that I actually had to pause and roll my eyes before having the stomach to continue. As an unabashed feminist who had no reservations about an all female Ghostbusters cast, this film does not fail because of the women, it fails, as with other bad REMakes from past years because the director has not taken risks. Sticking too close to the original has handicapped Paul Feig and his talented cast.

Chris Hemsworth brings some much needed levity as Kevin Beckman, the male version of the slutty blonde stereotype that he plays with so much cheeky glee that it almost makes up for the lack of other really funny jokes in a film that is much too self-conscious that all its leads are women.

The Ghostbusters film should have been pure fun. So much of it has lived on in the minds of the people who grew up with the characters in the eighties, that it is indeed a heavy burden to re-make. Unfortunately, aside from the sassy theme song that has barely been changed, everything else could really have dated with a massive overhaul had all, if you’re gonna remake it, then go for it, don’t pull your punches like a scaredy cat.

nepalitimes.com
Blackmailing academia

Editorial in Kathmandu, 28 September

The Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) has once again overstepped its mandate, this time to smear Social Science Baha and the Alliance for Social Dialogue (ASD) with unsubstantiated charges of irregularities. This fits the pattern with which the CIAA has been bouldering other institutions and individuals in the past, the purpose of which seems to be to harm the credibility and the respect the Social Science Baha and the ASD have gained in intellectual circles. The CIAA is not sanctioned to investigate private or non-government institutions, the Constitution only gives it the right to look into corruption by public officials. If there is a need to investigate an NGO, the right body to do that is the Social Welfare Council. But in clear violation of the Constitution, the CIAA has been looking into the activities of NGOs, banks and private sector entities which, just like the accusations against Social Science Baha and the ASD, are prejudiced. The CIAA has no business interfering with academic institutions whose job it is to use donor support to fund research and in academic exercise and to foster debate on public policy. The CIAA has selectively used details contained in documents furnished by the ASD and Baha itself, and pretending that they were uncovered during investigations made the charges through a public statement. The CIAA has thus violated laws of protection of privacy with the intention to defame them. The role of thinktanks like the ASD and the Baha in supporting pluralism and generating ideas is important to address some of the distortions during this political transition to support the democratic process. It is unfortunate that a responsible state institution like the CIAA is seen to be against the values of democracy. The Commission should now apologies to the ASD, Baha and other organizations that it has been targeting, and to desist from repeating such activities in the future.

Saindra Rai in
www.nepalkhabar.com
27 September

Hours after 10 people were killed in yet another bus plunge in Dhading on Tuesday, former Prime Minister and UML Chair KP Oli sought time from the Speaker to deliver a 1-hour-long speech in Parliament. He spent most of it to slam Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s foreign policy, but did not utter a word about the Dhading accident.

Dhan Bahadur Ghale, an MP elected from the Constituency of Dhading where the disaster took place, was listening to Oli. But neither did he think it necessary to bring up the issue of road fatalities before Parliament, even though so many people from his own constituency had just been killed.

Again, most of the people who perished in the Dhading crash were earthquake survivors. They were returning to their village of Marpak after receiving the first instalment of reconstruction grants of Rs 30,000 from the district headquarters of Dhadingbasi. But that tragedy did not move Ghale, the opposition or the government. The dirt track connecting Dhading bosi with Marpak was built a decade ago, and had been damaged by landslides in several places after Monday night’s rains. In addition, the bus was overloaded. It had the all-too-familiar list of causes: Poor road condition, overloading and violation of traffic rules. The syndicate of transport entrepreneurs that prevents the administration from taking action. Political parties did not raise this issue adequately in the House, not even Ghale who is from the opposition bench.

A few weeks ago, 27 people were killed when an absolute and overcrowded bus fell off the edge of a dirt road in Kavre. Then, 22 people were killed when a bus driven by an exhausted driver plunged into the Tribhuli, and this week, former Home Minister Mahat Ghimire’s car fell into the same river. He has not yet been found. (See page 4)

Government promptly forms a probe panel after every plane crash, but there is no inquiry into bus accidents. And the opposition party is also indifferent because everyone is only obsessed with power games in Kathmandu.

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Reconstruction grant is Dasain allowance

Nearly one-and-a-half years after the earthquake, Radhika Dahal received the first installment of government’s housing grant, Rs 50,000 this week. Immediately, she used part of it to pay off a loan she had taken last year to build a temporary shelter.

The 41-year-old mother of three had built a tin hut after the earthquake destroyed her house in Panikhali, and is planning to spend what is left of the grant for Dasain expenses.

“The reconstruction grant will not be enough to rebuild our house, so we will use it to pay off our Rs 100,000 loan and to buy new clothes for my children,” Dahal said.

Dahal is no particular hurry to rebuild her house which will cost Rs 900,000. Like many families in the earthquake-devastated districts, and as a single mother, her immediate priority is to pay off the loan and celebrate the festival.

SHREEJANA SHRESTHA in KAVRE

Almost 21 years ago this year, Nepal was hit by the 2001 earthquake that killed thousands of people and destroyed countless homes. The country is still recovering from that disaster, and the recent earthquake has added to the challenges faced by people trying to rebuild their lives.

The government has been providing reconstruction grants to help people affected by the earthquake. However, the process of obtaining these grants can be slow and bureaucratic, and many families are struggling to make ends meet in the meantime.

The recent earthquake has also highlighted the need for better preparedness and emergency response systems. Despite the progress made in recent years, Nepal remains vulnerable to natural disasters, and it is important that the country continues to invest in disaster mitigation and preparedness measures.

In conclusion, the recent earthquake has added to the challenges faced by people trying to rebuild their lives in Nepal. The government needs to focus on providing timely and effective assistance to those affected by the disaster, and investing in better preparedness and emergency response systems.
“I will think of building a new house only after receiving the second installment,” she says.

The delayed disbursement of the housing grant by the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) and uncertainty about when the rest of the money will come has meant that many families are using the first installment of Rs 50,000 to meet household expenses.

Krishna Prasad Mishra, 50, also withdrew his first installment this week and on the same day paid off part of a loan he had taken to build his temporary shelter. His family of five had nowhere to go and nothing to eat after their house collapsed.

“I can’t think of immediately building a new house with the government grant because I have my wife’s medical bills,” says Mishra, whose wife was diagnosed with cancer. He has sent his son to Saudi Arabia to earn money to meet expenses.

Here in Kavre, villagers have just received because the grant money is not enough to build houses,” says Gautam.

The NRA recently raised the total housing grant from Rs 200,000 to Rs 300,000 to be provided in several installments. It has just distributed the first tranche of Rs 50,000 to nearly 400,000 households in 31 districts after Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal gave a deadline of 45 days to get it done. Panchkhal Municipality has signed agreements with 6,200 households including 100 here in Damiyakot village to provide the first installment of the housing grant.

Despite overwhelming evidence that most grantees are using their money to meet festival expenses and pay off loans, Basudev Bhotewal of Panchkhal Municipality says families should use the grant money only for rebuilding purposes in order to avoid any legal hassles later.

“The victims will not receive the second tranche of the housing grant if they do not rebuild their homes as per approved designs,” he says, “they are not supposed to spend it on anything else.”

But it doesn’t look like the people of Kavre are listening to him.