Nepal’s two largest communist parties were preparing to celebrate Russian revolutionary Vladimir Ilyich Lenin’s birthday on 22 April like never before in Kathmandu this year.

UML and Maoists wanted to announce the birth of their unified party by organizing a symbolic ceremony for unification. But Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s insecurity about his own political future has made unification uncertain again.

Dahal says UML-Maoists will unite before mid May, but political analysts are skeptical. They say Dahal will not agree to unification unless he gets what he wants: UML Chair KP Oli’s promise to handover the PM’s chair and/or the unified party’s leadership.

Political analyst Purna Bahadur Achariya says: “Dahal can sacrifice his political ideology but not his political future for this unification.”

In 2015, Oli had refused to hand over the PM’s chair to Dahal, prompting the Maoists to team up with the NC to topple the UML government. Dahal is afraid that Oli might betray him again, so he wants to lead the unified party.

This is why Dahal is pushing for half the seats in the unified party. He might even compromise on 49% seats, which will give him enough strength to checkmate Oli, if needed. However, in addition to 49%, Dahal also wants Oli’s promise to support him when the unified party’s first General Convention takes place.

The UML has a well-organized structure, and its cadres do not like to see a Maoist or party Chair. Without Oli’s support, Dahal cannot be elected even as General Secretary of the unified party, let alone President. But Oli’s growing closeness with his internal arch-rival Madhav Nepal has made Dahal even more insecure.

Just like Dahal, Oli is also desperate for unification. Unless the Maoists unite with the UML, Oli will always have a sword hanging over him. As in 2015, the Maoists can forge a coalition with the NC-Madhav to oust Oli. It is difficult this time, given how big UML has become after last year’s elections.

But it is not impossible. However, Achariya says: “If Oli gives in to Dahal, he will be unpopular within the UML. So, he wants unification, but on his own terms.”

Political analyst Nishember Achariya is hopeful that Oli and Dahal will be able to reconcile: “They do not have the luxury to part their ways,” he says. “If they do, it will derail the newly-found political stability.”

Om Astha Rai

Nepal moves on 3 years later

Nepal Times brings special coverage on how survivors and communities are finally trying to put the trauma of the 2015 earthquake behind them, and build a new future.

Mind the gap

2015 was a warning sign to be better prepared for the finally big One

EDITORIAL

PAGE 2

Past disasters foretold

Time to prepare western Nepal for a disaster that is sure to come

PAGE 8-9

All in the mind

Survivors try to overcome long-term psychological impact of the earthquake

PAGE 4-5

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Sismoologists say that the 2015 disaster in Nepal was the most data-rich Himalayan earthquake ever studied. The 7.8 magnitude earthquake moved outward along a rupture zone from its epicentre in Gorkha, butยยi mysteriously lost speed and intensity by the time it arrived in Kathmandu before finally outshining the idea of the Valley. Nearly all the 14 districts affected are in Gorkha. The amplitude and the pulse ripples in the sediment of the Valley floor doused many monuments, but left most of the concrete buildings intact.

The 2015 earthquakes were an important warning for us to be better prepared for the really big one. Despite the tragic loss of 8,400 lives, Nepal got off relatively lightly this time. We have not had a quake of that magnitude in 30 years.

Lots of other structures kept the fatal damage low: it struck on a weekday. Many tens of thousands of school children would have been killed in the 8,000 schools that were badly damaged. Telecommunications did not go down, Kathmandu airport was back in operation within hours, and the highways remained passable.

We may not be so lucky. All structures in this special third anniversary edition of this newspaper points out (page 6) that many of the badly-engineered ferrocement structures in Kathmandu will collapse in the next major event. We will need specialised equipment and personnel trained in search, rescue, and collapse-damage structures.

Newly-elected municipalities will have to ensure preparedness by shifting encroachment on urban open spaces, prepositioning water and digging equipment, and having contingency plans for telecommunications and transportation networks being knocked out.

This is not an earmarking. Sismoologists predict two dangers we have to prepare ourselves for: one is the incomplete tension release after 2015 affecting faultlines below Kathmandu Valley. This could set off another quake below 6.5 magnitude in the next decade.

More worrying is the seismic gap in western Nepal where there has been a major earthquake in the last 300 years. The last one was in 1731. Monocentric earthquakes in Tibet allow us to pinpoint the exact time when the last big earthquake there 6.0M on 1 June 1950. Estimated at 8.3, that earthquake devastated north India, destroyed Agra and other Moghul-era cities, may have triggered the Amdo-Aruna slope collapse that disfigured the Sutlej River landscape, and may have resulted in the 1811-1812 Great Quake.

GUEST EDITORIAL
JUN SAKUMA

Reconstruction and resilience

Being an earthquake-prone country as well, Japan understands only too well the consequences and affects of earthquakes. For Japan, the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami has shown that the preparedness and response to the disaster was both effective and efficient.

The retirement of about 20,000 public schools has been completed, and 237 public schools in six districts including Gunma, Tochigi, and Ibaraki are ongoing. We are also supporting the reconstruction of other important public facilities such as the Gymnasium and Tochigi Maternal Hospital in Kathmandu, bridges on the Ganga in Bairak, etc.

Our support not limited just to financial assistance, we also provide technical cooperation such as man and machinery to help in the first stage of operations for affected families — benefiting more than 13,000 people.

We have and are on heritage restoration experts and are engaged in the her 안에 to the rehabilitation of Gaiumaru and Tanumura Andoke. We are also helping in strengthening DRM (Disaster Reduction Management) in the country, which was on an undertaking to assist the reconstruction of the disaster-affected areas such as the Maru Mokaid for Gaiumaru and Tanumura Andoke, future development in the context of future earthquakes in Kathmandu Valley, the Kathmandu Valley Resilience Plan, a 15 year plan for developing urban resilience, and city-wide disaster recovery plans and guidelines.

I am frequently asked to evaluate the progress of reconstruction so far, and although some areas are precisely on course, some have made slow progress. The NDR and other related ministries are working hard to achieve their missions. Reconstruction takes time, but the process is crucial to strengthen the future for disaster. For instance, the reconstruction process is still going on after the 2017 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami which killed more than 13,000 people.

The possibility for reconstruction does not rest solely upon the government. We are also supporting the reconstruction of the earthquake-affected areas including the Gymnasium and Tochigi Maternal Hospital in Kathmandu, bridges on the Ganga in Bairak, etc.

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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER
It’s all in the mind
The conflict and earthquake added to Nepal’s hidden epidemic of mental disorder

Sonia Awale

One-third of Nepal’s already suffering from PTSD, but mental health experts say the numbers went up significantly during the Mekong conflict and Nepal’s worst aftershock since 2015.

A survey of the earthquake-affected districts of Ramechhap, Sankhuwasabha and Makawanpur by the group Trauma and Psychosocial Organization (TPPO) showed that nearly 40% of respondents suffered from depression and anxiety in an 8-month period after the earthquake, with 56% suffering from stress. The group had also been conducting weekly psycho-social risk assessments for the past year.

The government had been working on a mental health policy since 2013, but the gains were offset by the conflict. The government was forced to address mental health issues.

Indeed, the government trained 1500 mental health workers and provided psychological help to survivors of the primary health care systems and district hospitals. Nepal’s Mental Health Policy, adopted in 1997 but rarely implemented, is finally being reviewed.

At an international conference on mental health in Kathmandu in November, the government pledged to prioritise mental health, increase investment in a mental health focal unit in each provincial health ministry, and to recognize alcohol and substance abuse as mental health problems.

School-level psychological education can help change societal attitudes towards mental disorders, and since Nepal is a resilient and family-oriented society, there is a support system,” says psychiatrist Namita Pradhan at Model Hospital.

Nepal has one of the lowest rates of patients to psychiatrists in the world. In addition, society has entrenched stigma around “mad” people who are often ostracised and treated poorly by family members. Even before the earthquake, patients were left to fend for themselves.

Rahi Shakya, professor of psychiatry at the Patan Academy of Health Sciences, says the public is more aware of mental disorders after the earthquake.

“The government has been a visible change in terms of awareness and general awareness,” he says.

Japan quake aid in pictures

Growing GDP
Nepal is ranked highest among South-Asian countries in the GDP growth of 7.6% in FY 2017, showing steep recovery after earthquake and blockade. The country can create 340,000 jobs a year to maintain its employment rate which is expected to slow down to 4.1% in 2018 according to South Asia Economic Focus report by World Bank. In Nepal, growth in FY 2018 will be 4.6% according to the World Bank’s latest report on Nepal Development Update. The main challenge will be managing fiscal and current account deficits.

The World Bank

Laxmi carholders
Laxmi Bank’s VISA carholders can enjoy a 10% cash back offer, after making 3 payments at IOFS terminal and/or online merchants till 15 May and receive 10% of the transaction amount. New cardholders will also receive free e-booking for four years.

Qatar partnership
Qatar Airways hosted a lounge inside the Asian Eagle lounge at 2018 Cambodian Airlines convention, held in Phnom Penh. The airline is the official airline partner of the 2018 Cambodia National Airlines. The event was hosted by Emirates Airlines on 14 April.

Championships in Rome. The event in the official Airline Traveler of the 2018 Cambodian National Airlines. The event was hosted by Emirates Airlines on 14 April.
Hidden Aftereffects
Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) Nepal surveyed 510 earthquake-affected people in Rasuwa, Nuwakot and Makawanpur 18 months after the earthquake.

acceptance level regarding mental health, and as a result patients are coming out and seeking treatment," he told Nepal Times this week.

Post-earthquake studies have shown higher rates of psychiatric disorders, but the major limitation is the lack of a baseline study. The Nepal Health Research Council is now preparing a nationwide mental health survey this year to help develop a long-term plan to upgrade psychiatric care.

Says mental health activist and former patient Jacques Lamsamane: "We need public awareness and acceptance so that people are comfortable with sharing their experiences, and that can be the most powerful tool for prevention."

Some patients have been changed.

Time heals

Immediately after the earthquake, there was a sudden surge of patients with mental disorders in Kathmandu’s psychiatric clinics.

But since 2015, reports at the Nepal Mental Hospital and Bhaktapur Hospital show a sharp decrease in the number of patients with post-traumatic stress disorders. Doctors say the reason is that most patients with earthquake-related psychiatric issues received medical, counseling and support from families in the last three years.

Even so, some survivors still have anxiety attacks during an earthquake or when they hear loud noises. Tika Gurung was a college student who found himself in the narrow alleys of Patan when the earthquake struck.

"I was terrified and took cover below a sturdy beam," Gurung remembers. He was isolated for months afterwards, and even today feels claustrophobic in narrow, crowded alleys.

Many traumatized children had to be counseled when schools reopened two months after the earthquake in 2015. They could not concentrate on their studies, had difficulty sleeping and looked disoriented.

Nepal Mall is a teacher at Chautari Mahakali Academy in Taaluk, and remembers students were still in shock when they came back to school. Instead of regular classes, he had the children sing, dance and watch cartoons: "They are doing well now, the earthquake seems like a bad dream," Mall says.

Counsellor Bista, 32, works for the Red Cross and was trapped in a room in Bhaktapur with a visiting aunt when the earthquake struck. He was treated for persistent anxiety, and feels much better now. But his aunt suffers relapses and has to regularly visit the district hospital in Ramshup.

Chief Psychologist Lara Shrestha at the Nepal Mental Hospital confirms that the number of patients with psychological trauma has declined to levels before the earthquake. "I have seen more people now seeking psychological help and counseling for trauma and this is a positive side-effect of the earthquake," she says.

Nawal Par was posted to hospital in earthquake-affected districts and remembers treating many survivors with mental disorders. "Younger patients who had seen much death and destruction were even suicidal," he remembers.

Lumbini Lama was in a building in Bungamati and suffered a fracture when the house she was in collapsed. She needed medical treatment, but was reluctant to see psychological counseling: "It was scared others would think I was mad," she says, recalling how a relative was-upsset. From her village in Sudurpash, she was mentally traumatized after her brother was killed during the conflict.

Psychologist Bissa Dev Karki also says societal attitudes towards mental disorders are changing. "People now look at mental health just as with other medical conditions. That is a positive step in ensuring the mental wellbeing of the people."

Some names have been altered.

Prabin Dhungel

To new beginnings and journeys.

Happy New Year 2075!

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Thamel gets back to business

Hari Bhakta Shrestha was in his office at Hotel Budhan in Thamel when the earthquake struck just before noon on that fateful Saturday three years ago.

As the shaking got worse, he ran out along with other residents and once outside, watched as his own hotel tilted and collapsed into the historic Ga Hiiti stone water spout. There was a shattering roar, and a cloud of dust rose up in the air.

Six guests from Sikkim were inside having breakfast in their rooms, and did not make it out. Several women waiting to collect water at the bottom of the massive spout also perished.

Shrestha’s concentration then shifted from the rubble of the hotel to his family in Laximpal. Fortunately they were all right.

“It took a little time for people to understand what was happening, everyone was in shock,” Shrestha recalls. But three years later, he has rebuilt the renamed Hotel Ana’s Home at the exact spot where his old one used to be. The community has come together to restore the Ga Hiiti neighborhood, and it is difficult to imagine today that Kathmandu’s tourist centre once suffered an earthquake.

“We cannot stop an earthquake, but we can protect ourselves from them by ensuring stronger construction for the next time,” says Shrestha, who says he did not want to sell his land and move out. His patience paid off, and business is back to normal as Thamel’s tourism revived.

After the earthquake, local politician Yagya Shrestha coordinated with the municipality and ward office to clear up the debris from the water spout, and lending a helping hand was the Ga Hiiti Youth Club.

The Club’s Zafar Hussain said many monuments like Dhara and the Darbar Squares were destroyed there was no point waiting for help from the government, so the community got together to restore their own neighbourhood which took six months.

“Waiting was pointless, and if we had waited, this place would never have been restored,” Hussain adds.

Called ‘Operation Every Day Every Week’, the rebuilding effort gathered momentum under Yagya Shrestha’s coordination. Volunteers got to work to clear the rubble, volunteers helped lift out debris from Ga Hiiti. Every day members of community would work together, and at the end of the week, volunteers would join in - diplomats, politicians and people from other neighbourhoods.

Finally, Kathmandu Metropolitan City took notice and formed a new reconstruction committee where the community put up 20% of the cost. With private donations, the hill, road and broken water mains were all repaired long before similar reconstruction were completed in Kathmandu and elsewhere in the earthquake zone.

Shrestha gave the reconstruction of the neighborhood more priority than rebuilding his own hotel. “We had no expectations of help from the government, and perhaps that is why it got finished so quickly,” he adds.

Today, Ga Hiiti is once more a place for the community to get together to collect water, wash clothes and even bathe.

Hussain owns a jewellery shop in Thamel, and says Ga Hiiti is now a model for how much can be achieved collectively: “Even the elders were looking up to the younger generation this time, it showed that a cooperative society can function well in times of crisis.”

Nischal Pradhan, Pradip Rau, Prachanda Karki

नामको प्रत्येक वर्षको लागूमा पाकाउने होरिन, रमाउने हो अभि

नेपाली कारकृतकको वाड नल्ला रक्षाको अद्यावधिक बारपाय सार्वजनिक ऐक्टिविटी निर्माण

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Bhaktapur’s miracle boy at 3

Monika Deupala in Bhaktapur

It was a warm Saturday morning three years ago when Rasmila Awal walked over to a nearby shop to buy provisions, leaving her four-month-old baby Sonish and 16-year-old daughter Sonia at home. The baby was asleep and Sonia was watching TV when the whole building started rustling and shaking. Sonia remembers plaster falling from the ceiling and a big gash appearing on the walls. Instinctively, she ran out of the house, remembering she had left her little brother inside, rushed back in, picked up the baby and was trying to get out when it collapsed on top of them.

She tried to hold on to her little brother, but as the walls came down on top of her, she lost her grip on the baby and was knocked unconscious.

At the shop, Rasmila felt the ground swaying and knew immediately that it was an earthquake. She ran back, and crumpled on the ground when she saw her house in ruins with the two children inside.

“My feet were shaking, I couldn’t get up. I wanted to scream for help, but no sound came out of my mouth,” Rasmila recalls. The neighbours immediately started digging, and soon saw a girl’s leg sticking out of the debris. Sonia was alive, but unconscious.

The rescuers dug some more but couldn’t find Sonish. The ground shook relentless with aftershocks as night fell. Rasmila kept a silent vigil even after rescuers gave up the search, and neighbours prepared to sleep out in the open.

Just then, she heard a feeble wall from beneath the ruins. Army rescuers were called in, and after digging right through the night, they finally brought out Sonish, covered in dust but with barely a scratch on him. He had been under the rubble for 22 hours.

“I cannot describe that feeling of relief, I hugged him tight, all my prayers were answered,” remembers Rasmila. The baby started crying his thumb, and looked around seemingly to ask what the fuss was all about.

Three years later, it is Sonish who runs to the door when he hears the bell ring. He is a playful and inquisitive boy, and is excited to have visitors. Rasmila’s husband is a truck driver and is out most of the day. The family is still homeless, and lives with the two children in one room. There is talk of land being appropriated to widen the road, so the house has not been rebuilt.

The Nepal Army, which helped in the rescue has given Sonish and Sonia scholarships till they go to college. After he finishes primary school, Sonia will attend the Army’s high school in Kathmandu.

Rasmila says the iconic photograph of Sonish by Amul Thapa (see box, right) brought the family fame, but not much else. However, she feels blessed: “At least I have both my children, and we are together.”

Amul baby

Amul Thapa was in his bedroom in Basantapur when the building started shaking violently. His reporter’s instincts kicked in, and he grabbed his camera bag and rushed to Dharana where 60 people had been killed when the tower collapsed.

“Instead of taking pictures, we were helping rescue people from under the rubble,” Thapa recalls.

Only then did he decide to call home to find out how his family was doing in Bhaktapur. They told him about the great damage in the town, and how there was one house that had collapsed trapping children underneath the rubble.

The soldiers were digging brutally and the family was standing around weeping and praying. It didn’t feel right to be taking pictures, so I went home,” Thapa says.

Next morning, he went back to the collapsed house. The soldiers were still digging because they could hear the boy’s cries from beneath the debris. At about 10am, they found four-month-old Sonish Awal trapped underneath a wooden beam, which had actually protected him as the walls and floors collapsed all around.

Thapa clicked away: Rasmila’s tears of sorrow had turned into tears of joy, the baby was covered in dirt as he was extricated carefully from the rubble, and finally the now-famous photograph of rescue soldier Dipak Rai holding Sonish up amidst applause and relief which made it to the folding front page of Nepal Times and film! Khahapatrika that week (above).

Says Thapa: “I was able to tell the story of the child and the family to the whole world. My photographs made Sonish famous worldwide, and the story did the same for me. It was not just a picture, it symbolised hope and survival.”

Thapa often visits the family and helps in any way he can. He now works for Nepal Patrika.
Nepal lies in one of the most seismically active zones in the world. Nepal is number one in the list of top ten countries vulnerable to catastrophic earthquakes. But even the 2015 disaster will pale in comparison to a much bigger earthquake which scientists say threatens western Nepal.

Geologists are hesitant to predict when an earthquake will strike, they will only say it is going to happen. One day and that we should be prepared.

But Himalayan seismologist Roger Billam prefers to tell people that the 2015 earthquake was not the Big One which scientists had feared. He says it is still collecting energy that could be let off in future.

Billam and other seismologists say there are two dangers lurking beneath the Himalayas: one is the unfinished business of 2015, and the other is a looming megaquake in western Nepal.

Scientists agree that if a slip has already occurred in one section of the Himalayas, another earthquake of the same magnitude is unlikely to hit the same area for about 100 years — unless the energy has not been fully released.

The 2015 earthquake of 7.8 magnitude has been compared to a similar intensity quake that hit Kathmandu in 1839. That one also did not completely dissipate its energy, and were enough another quake hit the Valley in 1866.

Billam says that double whammy could be repeated. However, the second quake this time could cause more damage because its epicentre may be in faults directly beneath Kathmandu Valley. Fingers crossed that the energy will release itself in a creep, and not a jolt.

The second scenario for western Nepal is even scarier. It could be the mother of all earthquakes because there hasn’t been a megaquake in western Nepal since an estimated 8.4 quake struck in 1950.

Bijay Krishna Upadhyay of the National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET-Nepal) says the western half of the country is at double risk because of the long seismic gap and relatively low awareness about earthquake safety.

After a relatively low intensity 4.8 magnitude earthquake epicentred in Ilam killed nearly 700 people in Dharan and surrounding areas in 1988, it was easier for the government and organisations like NSET to convince people to build earthquake-resistant houses in eastern Nepal.

“We now need to shift our attention not just to western Nepal but the entire country while continuing with reconstruction in the earthquake-affected districts,” says Upadhyay.

A campaign to spread awareness about earthquake safety had been started in western Nepal after a 6.4 magnitude earthquake killed 180 people in and around Budhanilkantha district in 1988. But the focus shifted to eastern Nepal after the Dharan tragedy.

However, in the last three years the focus has once more gone to the 14 districts of Central Nepal hit by the 2015 earthquake.

As a result, the western part of the country which scientists consider the most vulnerable is not prepared at all for an earthquake that is sure to hit one day.

Ajoy Dutta, author of a recent book on disaster preparedness (Nepalins Risk), says: “Our response to the 2015 earthquake has largely been focused on rebuilding damaged houses, and we have not looked at disasters in their entirety to prevent systemic vulnerabilities from reproducing (badly) elsewhere.”

One government official who has been harping on retrofitting buildings all over Nepal after the 2015 earthquake is Govind Raj
Himalayan seismic gaps

What makes Mt. Mahaputhe (9360m), such a stunning peak, left is also what makes it dangerous. Central and western Nepal have not suffered a megathrust for 700 years. Map below shows potential future intensity of earthquakes and slip in metres based on estimate of stored seismic pressure along the Himalayan arc.

Preparing western Nepal for a future megathrust is now even more urgent than reconstruction in areas hit by the 2015 disaster

Fokkens, the former CEO of the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA). He proposed training in reinforced masonry all over the country, including the west, to ease the shortage of skilled bricklayers in the districts hit in 2015.

"It could have helped technology transfer. After building houses in the earthquake-affected districts, they could have returned to their own villages in western Nepal and inspired others to build earthquake-resistant houses," he explains.

But the NRA bureaucracy and donors prefer to focus on a disaster that has already happened instead of one that has not struck yet. Fokkens has decided not to contest elections, and his proposal was shelved.

One silver lining is that after last year’s local and provincial polls, enforcing building codes are now mandatory in municipalities and villages across the country. Local governments will be the best place to implement this requirement, and some provincial governments have already prioritized disaster preparedness in their first plans and policies.

In Province 4, Chief Minister Prithvi Subba Gurung has decided to set up an emergency relief fund, and promises to strictly implement the building codes in Pokhara and other towns to prepare his region for future shocks.

"Nepalis tend to forget a tragedy very quickly, but our provincial government will never forget the lessons learnt from the 2015 earthquake," Gurung told us. However good plans and policies sound, in Nepal the proof of the pudding is always in the implementation. Kathmandu has an excellent building code, for example, but it has been flagrantly flouted (see page 17) leading to the loss of lives in 2015.

Dixit says awareness about disaster preparedness among local governments and the new National Disaster Management Act that focuses on preparedness this year is encouraging. But, he adds: “Major limitations exist; lack of institutional capacity, lack of financial and other resources, skill sets and equipment.”

we for the next big one?

overhanging the street below. “Here, in this one, the lesion is never to copy and paste,” says Feenstra, pointing to a Rana era home with its walls and windows severely out of alignment. Malls period traditional buildings interlocked the timber and stones to create flexible but strong earthquake-resistant structures. Feenstra explains that the Rana were more interested in external scenic decoration and not strength, which is why a disproportionate number of Rana-era buildings were damaged three years ago.

Although most of the houses that collapsed in Kathmandu in 2015 had load-bearing walls with brick-and-mortar masonry, a slightly stronger earthquake that had lasted longer with higher amplitude of shaking would have brought down many concrete pillar buildings as well. Ambreil Ilusharu is with the Department of Urban Planning and Building Construction (DUUBC) and says that the fact that cement buildings survived has given people a false belief that they were stronger.

“Some of the concrete pillar buildings like this one here are constructed with just four beams in each corner, this can have disastrous consequences in case of a future bigger earthquake,” Ilusharu explains, pointing to a new building coming up near Mangal Bazar. Lack of urban planning, footing of building codes, and poor quality construction materials plagued structural safety in Kathmandu Valley even before the earthquake.

But three years later, it looks like residents have got over the initial shock of the quake, and have forgotten about safety again. It does not help that the municipal bureaucracy, lack of trained construction workers, and little awareness in the public have made it easy to flout safety codes. Sharing his Field experience from Newaukot and Kathmandu, Bhattarai explains: “Most people don’t know that in order to qualify for compensation, they must work with a government certified contractor or engineer to rebuild their houses, otherwise they won’t be eligible for the compensation even if they have already built their homes.”

This knowledge gap extends to technicians and building contractors as well. Many builders fall to abide by construction guidelines and have improper joints, don’t insert enough iron rods to give beams and columns required strength, do not mix cement in the proper way, and do not allow enough time for curing. Populations pressure due to rampant urbanisation, greed of flat- owners and the need to cut costs may turn most of old Kathmandu Valley structures into death traps in the next big earthquake.

"This is actually very badly mixed concrete, it is too sandy and does not even bind well together," says Feenstra, pointing out a poorly patch red wall, with chunks of cement falling off. As the architects exit a narrow alley, they come across a man prancing at a roadside shrine, rubbing vermilion on his door frame to protect his home which was badly damaged in the 2015 quake and still propped up by timber beams.

Ask Feenstra, “If you have a chance to create a safe home for your family, would you do many pros or would you rather talk to a structural engineer?"
**EVENTS**

Katjazz festival
Three days of workshops and concerts for aspiring musicians where they get to share insights and knowledge about their life and performance. Participants are offered scholarships for 4 months to further encourage their career in music.
26-28 April, 5-11.30am, Katjazz Music Centre, Katmandu, (01) 5354454

Graham & Sail talk
Special talk and presentation by American musician Graham Blake -Kalinca and Nepal performers Ardi Subedi. Sharing their personal interpretation of sound art.
20 April, 4pm onwards, Gokulpeth, Metro Park, Chaktari, (01) 5370710, 9817103709

Kathmandu in arts
Musa Mayhym, an artist, singer-songwriter and author represented by Kapoor Galleries is showcasing her love for Kathmandu through paintings.
21 April 5-7pm, Jom Americans, Kathmandu Art Centre, Lekhnath

Purple August
Roshan Thapa Magar in guitar and Praneet Gahlan in vocals performing someseasonal tunes for a tranquil Friday night.
20 April, 7.30pm-10pm, House of Music, Amrit Man, Thamel, (01) 4295707

New Orleans Café
Ole Kathmandu catches a glimpse serving food, beer and wine accompanied by live music every Wednesday and Saturday. Try their Norwegian Salmon steak with one of the regional craft beers.
(01) 4297824

Samby's Café
Newly opened restaurant offering flavorful dishes prepared by Chef Rajesh Rajbhandari, who previously worked in Hilton, Australia.
(01) 4216482

Hyatt Regency
Swim in the swimming pool while enjoying a weekend brunch at the hotel.
(01) 4266820

Binam
A soulful live acoustic session by Binam. 25 April, 11.30-9pm, Jazz Café and Lax, Thamel, (01) 4295623

Mongolian Heart
Mongolian Heart celebrates 2 years of involvement in Nepali music. Join in for a realistic concert.
27 April 7.30pm, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, Bouddha, (01) 5310773

Screaming Marionette
The winner of the 11th ICM CMC, Screaming Marionette is releasing their EP ‘Corrupted Society’ with an exciting performance in the company of guest artist Bina Gaur. 28 April, Purple Hare, Thamel, B250 live show, Rs900 (dinner), 9816350386

Thamel Festival
Thamel Art and Music Festival will have international food stalls, handcraft market from The Local Project Nepal and musical performances by Cadiz and the Himalaya Vines, Babin, and more.
21 April, 12pm, Market Mall (Thamel Market), Free Entry, (01) 4286891

Judo championship
55 male (judokas) and 47 female judokas will fight at the 8th South Asian Judo Championship. Get excited for a powher packed competition.
21-24 April, Nepal Army Sports Complex, Swayambhunath, (01) 5260267

**MUSIC**

**DINING**

Temple Tree Resort and Spa
A peaceful stay to take, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour and sauna, it is best to leave once you are here.
Gaurigaon, Lalitpur, (01) 5360689

Patalena Vineyard Resort
An eco-resort with great views, jungle walks, and picturesque retreats from your tedious routines.
Dhulikhel, Kathmandu, (01) 4376377, 9817790764

Park Village Hotel
Enjoy the services of Himalayan wellness center, a pine-scented centre to relax your mind and body.
Budhanigam, (01) 9815566161

Retreat at Damaara
A retreat for connoisseurs and connoisseurs in an undisturbed sanctum to enrich and enlighten your inner self.
Budhanilkantha, Kathmandu, (01) 4373842

Transquility Spa
De-stress, relax and pamper yourself to a wide range of massages at any of the spa’s pristine branches in Kathmandu.
www.transquilityspa.com.np, (01) 4422414

**GETAWAY**

**AIR QUALITY INDEX**

KATHMANDU, 13 - 19 April

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>AQI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 April</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 April</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 April</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 April</td>
<td>286</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 April</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kathmandu’s air quality has been varying and it’s the most critical over the last week. Not only has it improved drastically, but it has even improved on a Sunday when we usually see the highest traffic. Since the AQI measures the average daily concentration of fine particulates below 2.5 microns, most of the pollution is coming from vehicular emissions, both local and Indo-Asian, and open garbage burning. Kathmandu’s air quality continues to be among the worst in the world for the next few years.


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**Japanese aid in pictures**
On the 3rd anniversary of the 2015 Nepal earthquake, JICA is showcasing 25 visual essays on their post-quake reconstruction and livelihood enhancement initiatives along with some before and after pictures of ongoing projects such as the Parasang Maternity Hospital in Sighauli.
20-23 April, Lalita Niwas, Parklodge, (01) 4425308

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**Chirag Bangel’s art**
ARTS! Chirag Bangel’s multiple works are on display on the walls of the restaurant. Bangel uses bright hues like green, yellow, blue, red, and various symbols to tell stories.
20-30 April, G’S, Mashoom, Jom Americans, (01) 5554291
Earthquake doesn’t kill people, corruption does

Himol Thadepangari; 15-21 April

The April 2015 earthquake not only flattened mud-matrat houses but it also destroyed some seemingly sturdy concrete buildings in parts of Kathmandu Valley. The disaster jolted the government out of deep slumber, and the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development decided to investigate how the Building Code was flouted to create dangerously weak reinforcement structures. The Ministry also vowed to take action against those involved in building and giving permission to violate the design code. Three years later, with the memory of the earthquake fading, the government has forgotten what it promised. There has been no investigation. No action against the culprits. In fact, buildings are being reconstructed where genuine sans were destroyed that still violate the code. This is hardly surprising given how unscrupulous builders and businessmen are, and how much impunity they have enjoyed over the last two decades. A top bureaucrat admits lightly. “Who does we take action against? Everyone has political connections.”

Until the end of absolute monarchy in 1990, only a few had access to Kathmandu’s corridors of power. Democracy was supposed to give people a say and make rulers accountable, but it ended up fostering political patronage for the real estate and building mafia. An ex-secretary told us; “We do not regret the restoration of democracy, but the truth is impunity has proliferated after 1990.”

In their book, ‘Society and Corruption,’ ex-CIAA Chief Suraj Bhatti Upadhya and researcher Dipesh Ghimire claim that nearly half the houses built in the Valley have not complied with the Building Code. Engineers confirm that most of the houses that collapsed during the April 2015 earthquake were built without proper design, and with poor-quality construction materials. A 2015 damage assessment of reinforced concrete buildings of Kathmandu Valley says 50% of construction materials do not meet the required quality standards. Structural engineer Raju Swall put it this way: “Violation of the Building Code and the use of sub-standard construction materials are a killer combination.”

Nare Ramshwari, Chief of the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority, says: “If those involved in violating the Building Code are punished, no one will dare to violate it. But since no one is punished, everyone knows they can get away with it.”

Rameshwar Bohara

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Call Me By Your Name

What can I say about Luca Guadagnino’s Call Me By Your Name without being accused of sounding hopelessly enamored of this most true and tender of love stories? To get the particulars out of the way and move on to the dreamy stuff of the film itself, Call Me By Your Name was adapted by the great James Ivory from a novel by André Aciman, and while Ivory deserves a column to himself for the wonderful films he’s written and directed, A Room With A View (1986) and Remains of the Day (1993) being among my most treasured period films, I must move on to my lingering nostalgia for these handsomely orchestrated, exquisitely crafted films.

Nominated as one of the nine films in the Best Picture category this year (as lost to The Shape of Water), Guadagnino’s observed, funny, warm, sublimely intellectual and sensual film is about a relationship between two young men, the seventeen year old Elio (Timothée Chalamet), and a young American graduate student, Oliver (Armie Hammer), who come to stay with Elio’s parents and help his cerebral archaeologist father in a small town in northern Italy.

Most films are successful because their scripts are strong, here the film has the added benefit (in addition to ivory’s dazzling, almost virtuosic writing) of being shot in keeping with the actual sequence of events (as opposed to a schedule that prioritizes the proximity and availability of locations), and on a single-3mm lens that allows for wide shots that enable the actors to roam outside the usual constraints, allowing for an ease and spontaneity that can sometimes be absent from more traditional set-ups. While a film like Paul Thomas Anderson’s Phantom Thread benefits from such structure, Call Me By Your Name thrives and comes alive under this kind of direction, giving the viewer a sense of closely getting to know the characters as they move through their mini-drenched idyllic lives, that is, until both Elio and Oliver fall helplessly in love with each other against their own better judgement.

This is not the usual, chauvin ‘coming of age’ film where Elio enters into a rite of passage that opens the doorways into his adulthood, it is instead an exploration of what it means to fall deeply in love, and all the uncertainties, blues, heartache, and glory that surrounds this mind-altering human act. While the film is indeed the unforgettable story of Elio and Oliver, it is supported by an indescribably fine supporting cast including a gentle, wise performance by Michael Stuhlbarg as Elio’s erudite father Mr. Perlman, and the gorgeous Amira Casar as his brilliant, stunning, compassionate mother, Annalisa.

Call Me By Your Name like all the best works of art, is a story that is not bound by the gender of its protagonists, though it is defined in some ways by the hilarious depictions of the Italian countryside. One could argue that few films go wrong in such a setting, but that kind of creativity is for the small of heart.
The reincarnation of a holy valley

For the first time since 2015, Langtang’s survivors marked new year and a new beginning

Clara Bullock

Trekking guide Sanghu was on his way to Kathmandu to take his children back to boarding school in the city. He was on the road when the earth started shaking.

First information was that Kathmandu had been destroyed, but as the hours passed Sanghu found out that it was his own hometown of Langtang that had been wiped off the map.

More than 300 people including villagers and trekkers were killed within seconds at almost exactly noon on 25 March 2015. The quake triggered a massive avalanche that swept the Langtang Glacier onto the village below. Most people, their homes and livestock were blown away to the other side of the valley by the shock wave that preceded the falling ice and rocks.

The village today lies buried under 100m of debris.

“I am certain that if I had been home, my family and I would not have survived,” says Sanghu in a subdued voice, “I don’t know if you can call it luck. It was just circumstances. But me and my children are still alive.”

Three years later, there are signs that the people of Langtang are picking up the pieces and looking to the future once again. Many think they have been punished by the gods for being too materialistic, forgetting their deities. The ghosts of those who perished seem to whisper in the afternoon wind, sighing through the junipers, and among the fluttering prayer flags.

Like Sanghu, all survivors have stories of close calls. Some had gone up the valley to herd their yaks. Others were visiting relatives in Kyjyinth or Kathmandu. A few were miraculously spared when they ducked behind rocks just before the ground started to shake away everything else. Everyone here has lost someone.

Survival Tales

Sanghu, like his children, were saved because they were on their way to Kathmandu when the earthquake hit. He is now back in his village to help rebuild his lodge.

Kesom Tamang and his son Timrock, who broke both legs in the avalanche, now live in one of their former lodges (left). His two daughters study in Kathmandu.

Resumes in Langtang a week after the earthquake. Timrock is now working as a porter to 200 villagers and tourists a year. Three years ago (below), Langtang today has been returned to high on ground picture.

Dairy heritage

A taste from its stunning scenery. Langtang is famous for its yak cheese factory. Built by Swiss geologists in 1980, the factory was destroyed in the earthquake. The factory already faced a threat to its existence because of the decreasing number of yak breeders and the influx of the young people.

Nepali yak cheese from Langtang is almost as famous among trekkers as the Swiss (memorial). So, the community came together to preserve this dairy heritage to rebuild it. Various charities have provided help to restore two yaks to every family in the village so they can produce the milk needed to make cheese.

But even with this help, cheese production will only be 25% of what it was before the earthquake. That is why Gyapa Tamang, chief of the renowned cheese plant (portrayed above), is looking to expand his production by June with upgraded equipment. Cheese production will begin right after the yaks return to Kyjyinth from the high pastures, and will be sold to tourists in the town or sent down to selected stores in Kathmandu.

LANGTANG LIVES

Go online to join us on a journey to Langtang, and see how the sacred valley is picking up the pieces after the tragic loss of life and livelihoods three years ago. Listen to the villagers and their hopes for the future.

nepalitimes.com

ALL PHOTOS: CLARA BULLOCK
Caritas Nepal
Serving earthquake affected Nepali people and communities for recovery and reconstruction

Caritas Nepal has an encouraging story to tell on earthquake recovery and reconstruction. Caritas Nepal has strengthened the social spirit present in Nepali people and communities to work together for common good. Accordingly, local communities are working together to pursue earthquake recovery and reconstruction by applying back better techniques. The major earthquake events occurred in April 25 and May 12 of 2015, and Caritas Nepal is implementing integrated programmes to facilitate holistic recovery in 16 earthquake-affected locations.

The locations supported are: (a) Orang, Buling of Biga Gaupalska (rural municipality) and ward no. 6; & 7 of Salung Gaupalska of Dolakha district; (b) Katha, Thokpara, Sawakheri, Yemunudanda of Sunkoshi Gaupalska of Sindhupalchok district; (c) Balhat of Puwarae, Nauli Ranipal, Mandlingdurep Gaupalska, ward no. 1, 2, 3 of Chaurdeural Gaupalska of Kavrepanchok district; (d) Basewar of Dolanjore Gaupalska and ward no. 1 of Har Harpur Gadi Gaupalska of Sindhuhi district; and (e) Gorkha Nagarpalika of Gorkha district.

Titles of Caritas Nepal’s programmes whose achievements are presented here are Nepal Earthquake Recovery Programme and Gorkha Earthquake Recovery Reintegration Programme.

Some examples of families who have built earthquake resistant houses.

**MOTHER SANJAY TAMANG**
(Orang, Biga, Dolakha)

who lost his parents
due to the earthquake. His wife is working on the construction of a new house.

**MR. CHANKEY TAMANG**
(Buling, Baiso, Dolakha)

has built a new mud masonry house in 15 days.

**MRS. SWOSTHRA KHATI**
(Orang, Baiso, Dolakha)

took part in a mason training provided by Caritas Nepal and has worked with her team to construct more than 25 houses. She developed confidence to work effectively as a mason after the training and has done considerable house reconstruction efforts in her village. She and her team are extremely proud of their contribution.

**MRS. ANITA MAHDI**
and **MR. BHIM MAHDI**
are of Chandimandir of Mandlingdurep-10 of Kavrepanchok district.

They have constructed two earthquake resistant brick cement masonry houses.

**MRS. MAYANKI TAMANG**
has built a new house in 15 days.

**Water and Sanitation**

By March of 2018, a total of 3646 households affected houses (3235 people) had improved access to safe drinking water from the drinking water systems constructed by the local user groups with financial and technical support of Caritas Nepal. The local user groups have contributed about 30-40% of the cost of the systems by transporting materials and undertaking labour work.

**Livelihood and DRR**

1,000 households have been trained in livelihood recovery concerns and were provided inputs and they are re-establishing and improving their livelihoods. The livelihoods pursued are in the sectors of agriculture, livestock rearing, poultry rearing, etc. The cooperatives have been strengthened and they are providing micro-finance services to 6007 households. Soft loans are being provided by the cooperatives to their members to help them pursue economic recovery activities.

The disaster mainstreaming has been done in all intervention sectors, local disaster management committees have been formed in eight locations, and plans (LOM) prepared in two locations.

**Protection and Psychosocial**

Caritas Nepal has implemented the programmes by doing best to ensure safe, dignified and accessible service delivery to the target households. 56 disabled people have been helped to register with local government and District Women and Children’s Office so they can benefit from the related support programmes of Nepal Government. 325 people suffering from psychosocial trauma were provided funds to access medication (i.e., referral support).

Caritas Nepal was established in 1990 by the Catholic Community in Nepal with a mission to provide humanitarian and social development services in Nepal. Contact address: Caritas Nepal, Dhulikel, Lalitpur, Nepal. GPO Box: 9571 Kathmandu, Nepal. Phone: 5581722, 5539364. Email: info@caritas.org.np. Website: www.caritasnepal.org.
How to build back together

The government’s way or the people’s way?

Nigel Fisher

Even in developed countries, recovery and reconstruction takes much more than three years to complete.

Suyog Prajapati

B ut there’s no more commentator saying “nothing is happening” on the post-earthquake reconstruction front, I will scream. With the third anniversary upon us, observers and media from near and far, in their infinite wisdom, will be pontificating that progress is minimal and looking for examples to prove their foreseen prediction.

So, which of the following stories do you prefer?

A. After three years, the community of Somphong Cephe Gyang (Hlimampala Gapamphli-6 in Sindhupalchok) and its 65 primary school students still do not know when help will come to rebuild their shattered four-room school.

B. In the village of Beli, Benising in Sindhupalchok, at least 10 houses are under construction or completed, following the building codes. Community members are helping each other, while masons and volunteers supervising the process far away as the ‘Taru’ for the job.

Take your pick. Body accurately represents community life three years after the April and May 2015 earthquakes. Many houses, schools, health centres, heritage and local government buildings remain to be repaired or re-built. People most disadvantaged are struggling to: eat, live, own land rights, return to school, and take advantage of government support to acquire land, so that they can actually build a house of their own. But “nothing is happening”? Come on.

Here are a few statistics even though your eyes may be starting to glaze over already: evidence of the “slow pace” of reconstruction, a recovery report quoted the NRA’s data that the reconstruction of 2,373 schools destroyed or damaged by the earthquakes of 2015 has yet to begin. Of course, in every community where rebuilding has not started, parents worry continuously about the educational future of their children. This is the downside, and they are right to want schools functioning in their communities again as soon as possible.

On the other hand, out of a total of 7,553 destroyed or damaged houses, 3,079 (41%) have been rebuilt and another 2,014 (26%) are under construction. This is striking by any standards.

Compared with progress in many disaster recovery situations around the world, this is not unprogressive, to say the least. Yes, reconstruction of 31% of schools has yet to begin, but 66% are either rebuilt or under construction: is this a slow pace? Is the bottle one-third empty or two-thirds full?

Older than the last year, progress has escalated, much of it with government support, but also with many households and communities raising their own resources.

Look at housing. NRA data shows that in late May 2017, construction had started on 43,500 houses, while almost 27,000 had been completed. Eleven months later, construction has begun on 430,600 houses and 115,000 have been finished. That’s an impressive increase of well over 900% in housing starts and more than 400% in completed houses, in an 11-month period. Health centres, heritage buildings, rural roads and bridges, government buildings — whatever we look at, we are seeing progress.

Yes, many people and communities have not yet started to rebuild their houses and schools, or are struggling to put together the resources. This is particularly acute for the most vulnerable members of the population.

There are problems regarding compliance with building codes, and unresolved difference on how to rebuild heritage structures (see article below).

But look at all the rebuilding that is going on, from the remote communities of Sindhupalchok, Gorkha or Ramchechip to the buzz of reconstruction activity (with those strikingly symmetric scaffolding) on temples in Patan Durbar Square.

Nowhere in the world has recovery and reconstruction been completed or near completion after only three years — it just doesn’t happen. But it the Great Hambant (Kobe) earthquake in 1995, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, or the Haiti earthquake of 2010, it takes close to a decade to rebuild and there is still residual evidence of damage in some places. Christchurch is still struggling to recover seven years after the earthquakes that devastated it.

Experience shows that on average, it takes close to a decade to rebuild from such major disasters and even after that, it is usually replete with evidence of damage in some places.

Japan, the US and New Zealand have well-developed post-structure, local government networks and urban planning, significant financial resources, traditions of rigorous adherence to building codes and rapid accessibility to affected areas.

Compare these with Nepal’s 2015 disaster: the devastation over a wide geographical area, rugged, mountainous terrain, horrendous access problems to rural and isolated mountain communities, serious building code enforcement, building codes adherence and financial frustations, of finding and/or rebuilding homes and buildings as quickly as possible and you expect recovery and reconstruction to be completed after just three years?

Name a reconstruction challenge Nepal has not faced: an economic, budget or governance constraint and Nepal has it.

Recovery is taking place as Nepal struggles to roll out an incredibly complex deconcentration process. But don’t stop there, and say that nothing is happening.

Look around, go into rural areas beyond the motorable roads and you find that women, men and workers building alongside the men.

Reconstruction is underway, with and without government support. People are building houses not enough to rebuild houses, and are not marred to be.

This should always go faster and better, but don’t fail for the lack of rebuilding. It’s too easy, and it’s wrong.

Nigel Fisher

He has been an acting member of the interim Nepal Reconstruction Authority for the last two years, and has been involved in post-disaster recovery operations around the world.

POOL OR NOT: Dhurra Narayan Myag, in his courtyard in Kathmandu (left) is against house-pooling, saying he will lose control of his property, while Mahesh Mahajan (center) says it would be the best rational option and will preserve the original architecture of the neighbourhood. (Photo: SANGEETA PRAJAPATI)
Cute as an Ass

S o, it looks like the visa applications of two Greater Himalayan (or haired) rhinos for permanent residence in the People’s Republic of China has been approved and the animals in question will be flying off cover, once they get their exit permits from the Department of Foreign Employment after paying the requisite fees and bribes. Nepal is getting two rhinos to China, is that such a good idea? Should we at least save off their horns first? While we applaud this new episode of Sino-Nepal diplomacy making the endangered cuddly teddy bears of the Order Perissodactyla, we wonder where it will end if we make it a habit to gift our wildlife to friendly and non-so-friendly members of the international community.

However, a case can be made that there is great untapped potential to ship our all of Nepal’s first-rate deer to a camaraderie-loving country like the United Kingdom or North Korea. Kathmandu’s cats could go to Italy. And the cows from our friendly neighborhood garbage pile of Chobar could be gifted to Australia, which has a shortage of those feathered friends. And as long as we are at it, why not send us donkeys to New Zealand?

While reporting on all these international trade in animals, diplomatic correspondents have to be careful about using special language. These are sensitive times and we cannot continue to say things like ‘Nepal is going to the dogs’. That is an insult to our own police force, as well as dogfights in general. And alluding to our current rulers as ‘human rhinos’, a klar against all carnivores. It’s also be very unwise when we describe the current corruption con game by referring to some bureaucrats as ‘greedy pigs’.

Similarly, it would be inaccurate to keep an offering to a neighbouring country to the south whose name being with the letter ‘T’ as ‘the elephant in the room’. Much more appropriate in this day and age to say ‘the cow in the room’. However, in light of recent diplomatic overtures, it would be politically correct and acceptable to refer to our northern neighbour as ‘the rhinoceros in the room’.

And we have to be careful not to trust the feelings of all the people out there when we say that Nepal’s earthquake recovery is ‘moving at a snail’s pace’. As fast as snails are concerned, they are perfectly happy with the velocity they are limping in, and all Nepalis should be too.

You may want to call me rather rude and gross, and since there is still freedom of expression in this country you can. But I’d prefer it if you said ‘cute as an ass’.

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