The countdown for election to the Constituent Assembly elections has stopped mid-way with much more complicated political developments overshadowing it. That election may not be held in November is not a mere speculation now, but something waiting to be formalised by the election commission anytime. It may however have much serious political fallout including the exit of GP Koirala as the prime minister.

The Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) has already begun collecting signatures to have the house session summoned to move a no-trust motion against Koirala. Maoist sources say although they do not have the requisite two-thirds majority to remove the prime minister, they believe that Koirala will have lost all moral ground to stick to the chair once Maoists formally declare that they would not participate in the November election.

India, the architect and facilitator of the 12-point agreement, has already warned Koirala that he would lose his legitimacy as prime minister if November polls are not held. To add to that worry, Baburam Bhattarai, Maoists key ideologue, has stated that the election in November will be nothing more than a farce and that Maoists would not be a part of it.

The election commission has taken the emerging situation into account. Commissioner Gorakh Bahadur Gurung said that elections may not be possible under the existing law and order situation. The commission, in the wake communal flare up in Kapilvastu and other parts of the country, as well as continued assaults by the Maoists on commission staff and rival political party activists, has asked the government, to improve the situation on a priority basis.

There are speculations that the Maoists will formally declare their boycott of the November polls once the Nepali Congress endorses a republican manifesto and goes for a parliamentary resolution in favour of republicanism. “Such a resolution will have no legal validity,” said Dinanath Sharma, a senior Maoist leader, indicating that the Maoist stance towards Koirala government in the days to come would be more of an opposition and non-cooperation. “We are not obliged to save GP Koirala any more. We are only committed to the peace process,” a Maoist leader told newsfront.

The fear in the Congress is palpable. Koirala shared his fear that he might be on his way out last week with some of the senior leaders of the Congress party. But party leaders believe that Koirala’s shaky position is the outcome of his politics of too much of compromise and surrender to the Maoists. Khum Bahadur Khadka, a central committee member, warned Koirala that, “once the Congress party goes republic, we will be burying ourselves in the grave dug by the Maoists and Koirala will be their first target.”

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Congress goes republic

GP Koirala sacrifices inner party democracy for republic

GP Koirala seemed all set to go republic as he bulked objections, dissents and advice against blindly following the Maoist agenda on their terms. On Sunday, Koirala appealed to more than 600 Congress delegates to discard its history and go for republic for the sake of eight party unity, although many including former Prime Minister K P Bhattarai asked him not to tread the republic path.

Koirala presented his agenda as the last wish of his political life saying he is not going to contest election to the constituent assembly; and that he is not going to contest election to the last wish of his political life saying he not to tread the republic path. “The republican slogan and its endorsement are against the sovereignty of the nation cannot be protected only by a democratic system.”

“As a prime minister, I think it is your responsibility to apprise the nation about such a threat. It will be a gross lapse on our part not to formulate ways to face this challenge together.”

National reconciliation envisages bringing democratic and nationalistic forces together and unification of the two Nepali Congress will be the first right step in that direction." The threat you see to the sovereignty of the nation cannot be mitigated without democratic forces coming together. Po-republic slogan and its endorsement are against the Congress policy and tradition. I firmly believe that Congress should avoid the Indian official viewpoint appears no danger message that a prime minister sends a threatening to lose out from the move. CP Gajurel, head of the Maoist party’s international affairs dismissed Boucher as a mere ‘echo’ of what the imperialistic powers have been doing all along since the 12-point agreement was signed. But it was not the US alone which is critical and apprehensive of the Maoist move. Maoists’ insistence that monarchy be abolished right now if elections are to be held in November, have not found favour from any country so far. European Union ambassadors issued a statement, endorsing sentiments expressed by the visiting UK Minister Sahid Malik, which said not having elections on time will lead to a betrayal of the people’s aspirations and damage the credibility of the peace process in the eyes of the international community. Indian official viewpoint appears no different from what the US and EU have stood by.

At least 13 central committee members told Koirala that not only was he dumping a history of wisdom and glory that Nepali Congress represented, but he also was being dictated by Maoists as well as external forces. "It will ultimately lead to Nepal’s disintegration,” dissenting central committee members warned. Koirala deleted references of BP’s reconciliation policy, and Bhattarai’s recent restatement in General Secretary K B Gurung’s resolution.

Bhattarai endorsed those views separately through the letter: "I am deeply worried over news reports which quoted you as saying that country’s sovereignty is under threat. This coming from a prime minister sends a dangerous message that the country’s sovereignty and independence cannot be protected only by a democratic system.”

As a prime minister, I think it is your responsibility to apprise the nation about such a threat. It will be a gross lapse on our part not to formulate ways to face this challenge together.

Maoists who quit the government recently in a move that appears directed at stalling the November 22 polls have come under focused attack of the international community, with clear warning that they may only stand to lose out from the move. The US which has still got the Communitary Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) on its terrorist list came down with a harsh criticism calling it a move to ‘trash’ the election, and revive the decade-long civil war.

"Trying to trash this election is trying to trash the whole process. Declaring yourselves an opponent to the democratic voting process, we can’t abide by that. So I hope they won’t go that far,” Richard Boucher, top US State Department said in Washington on Thursday.

Boucher said the US government would continue to treat the Maoists as extremist outcasts until the movement becomes a normal political party. So far the Maoists have not threatened to renounce the movement said in Washington on Thursday. Boucher added, “They need to give up the gun. They need to give up extortion. They need to give up the militant youth groups that have sort of extended their power and tried to intimidate people in the countryside.”

GP Bhattarai, the only surviving founder member of the Congress, disagreed on the Mbocessor agenda on their terms. On Sunday, Koirala appealed to more than 600 Congress delegates to discard its history and go for republic for the sake of eight party unity, although many including former Prime Minister K P Bhattarai asked him not to tread the republic path. "The republican slogan and its endorsement are against the sovereignty of the nation cannot be protected only by a democratic system.”

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India’s stick and carrot

India seems to be dangling carrots as well as sticks in front of the Maoists. Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon is believed to have invited Maoist leaders to visit India at their convenience and this was a tempting carrot for the Maoists. The casual offer was made when he had a meeting with Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai during his recent visit to the capital. But Menon did not hesitate to display the stick as well. He made it clear that India would have to go with the rest of the world if the Maoists pulled out of the peace process, obstructed or boycotted polls and abandoned the 6-party unity - an umbrella concept that India mooted to bring Nepal's seven pro-democracy parties and the Maoists together.

India is said to be cautiously observing the Maoists’ moves in the wake of their withdrawal from the government.

Election court

Although election in November looks still very uncertain, the government has set up an election court consisting of three judges of the Supreme Court to summarily address the election related disputes. The court is headed by Justice Arup Sharma with Balkain K C and Tap Bahadur Magar. All election related disputes will be dealt by the bench. One of the last businessmen to be heard in the House related to the adoption of the bill enabling government to form the election court.

PM and courtesy

G P Koirala is criticised by many for different reasons. But lack of courtesy is not one of them. But the experience of his childhood friend and the only surviving member of the Nepali Congress, KP Bhattarai was different this time.

Koirala refused to come on the line when Bhattarai made a call to Bhaubat to inform him that he is going to send him a letter on country’s crucial political situation. The answer from the switch-board was, “I tried, and nobody picks up the phone.” Koirala also did not bother to call back the octogenarian Gandhian leader who is known as Kishunji. Bhattarai shared this with some of those from Congress party who had called on him.

Fuel for election

As a follow-up to the recent visit by India’s Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon, Nepal’s petrol pumps which had dried up over a period of time will have a normal supply at least for some weeks to come.

To keep his promise, Indian Oil Corporation resumed supply, at a slightly elevated level, to meet the fuel starvation that has adversely affected the normal life, movement and activities in Nepal. On Friday, IOV dispatched 2,800 KL petrol which was 500 KL more than normal supply even though the Nepali Oil Corporation has not cleared the dues running over 6 billion rupees.

An Indian embassy source said that as a good-will gesture, and to facilitate normal activities, fuel supply will continue at least till the November elections are over.

World free from hunger

It was a lobbying for a cause. Malvika Subba, youth spokesperson for hunger free campaign, impressed upon Nepal’s permanent representative to the United Nations, Madhu Raman, Asharya, to voice Nepal’s support for the hunger free world campaign. Subba, a former Miss Nepal is the Action Aid (Nepal) ambassador in the campaign. She demanded that Nepal endorse the resolution on the right to food at the meeting of the UN member states slated to begin on 25th September at New York.

Social activists, youth spokespersons and civil society leaders from different countries are participating in various campaign actions in and around UN General Assembly to put pressure on the member state participants in order to influence a resolution for poor and excluded people who are suffering from hunger and malnutrition. 840 million people (17% of the global population) are hungry in this world of plenty, and this number is increasing.

Blood donation in Bluebird

Besides striving towards providing best services in their regular course of business, Bluebird has now undertaken activities for humanitarian services. To celebrate the 1st anniversary of Bluebird mall and 45th anniversary of Red Cross, Bluebird organised a blood donation program on 17th September, 2007. In total 112 participants donated blood out of which approximately 71 were males & 41 females. This event was followed by distribution of certificates by the chief guest Dr. Manita Rajkarnikar, Director of Central Blood Bank. Bluebird Mall is Nepal’s first only genuine brand concept shopping mall with over 50 brands and outlets all under one roof.

Mass Yoga class

Govt failed to cancel the event as Swami Ramdev refused to budge

The six-day Yoga (Yog) class conducted by Swami Ramdev began on Sunday, one day behind schedule, in Tundikhel after the internationally acclaimed Yoga master refused to budge an inch in the face of government warning that he faced a security risk.

"I cannot let down thousands of people who have already arrived here for Yoga class,” he told Koirala, adding, "I fear nobody." The government, especially the home ministry, ultimately relented and refrained from cancelling the Yoga training camp for which more than 30,000 people had queued up in the capital. As a result, classes began only on Sunday. On Saturday morning, many people got to know about the cancellation only after they reached the venue.

The government decision to cancel the camp altogether followed suggestions from the home minister that his presence in Nepal would help the fanatics Hindu and the king. The prime minister seems to have promptly endorsed the suggestion, only to take it back in the face of stiff protests from the wolves who had assembled in the capital and the defiance by the Swami. "I cannot let my disciples down,” he told Koirala on Saturday morning.

The Swami who is in Nepal for the first time also got into a series of negotiations on Saturday afternoon and finally succeeded in securing support of all major political parties including the Maoists in successful conduct of the classes, possibly making him feel Nepal’s ultra-left were much more positively inclined towards ancient Yoga and Ayurveda science compared to Indian Marxists. Brinda Karat, a CPI-M politburo member had falsely accused the Swami of using human and animal ingredients in his medicines bringing the swami into a controversy. Maoist leaders KB Mahara and Prabhakar Sharma were among those who attended the inaugural session in Tundikhel in the morning. The Swami in company of his colleague, Acharya Balkrishna, has also brought a strong contingent of Ayurvedic doctors (Baidyas) from the Patanjali Yogpeeth based in Haridwar.
Maoists' exit

Maoists quitting the GP Koirala led government did not happen all of a sudden. There is a method to this madness that Maoists have been doing. They have always been seeking an easy way to win. Like everyone’s politics here, honestly, fairness and sincerity do not seem to matter much for them as well. As a result, people no longer see them different from the existing political parties. And Maoists knew it well.

Therefore, it appears safe to assume that Maoists’ withdrawal from the government is their first move towards running away from the election, which will take away the legitimacy of the present government as well as of the entire political process. In their calculation, Koirala and the rest in the coalition government have to accept their dictations if they want to be seen and recognised as legitimately ruling this country by the world outside. The threat seems to be working out. Koirala and other coalition partners have moved a step closer towards pledging that constituent assembly will declare Nepal a republic. Koirala, as his past and present have shown, will go to any length to save his chair. And Maoists are exploiting that weakness to the hilt to extract what suits them. That is why, he chose not to sincerely implement the provisions of the comprehensive peace accord like: forming a commission for the disappeared, rehabilitating those displaced by the conflict, forming Truth and Reconciliation Commission and making sincere efforts to hold election in November.

Now there are clear indications that election in November is not at all possible, and Koirala might try to bring Maoists’ return to the government to legitimise further postponement of the election. Maoists’ withdrawal from the government is also an outcome of the intense differences among its top leaders with an emerging axis looking for replacement of Prachanda as the leader. At the same time, they have also initiated to oust Koirala as the prime minister. These developments might lead to a situation where the future of the ongoing peace process looks bleak. Visible lack of will on the part of the government to implement the provisions of the CPA only reflects lack of seriousness. Koirala’s leadership has not only failed, he has also proved to be utterly insensitive to the loss of lives and to the flare-up of communal situation in parts of the country.

While Koirala’s leadership should not be seen as something without an alternative, Maoists need to review their withdrawal from the government. Quitting government, disrupting election will lead to disruption of the peace process. That will be the end of their journey towards a credible nationalist democratic party. A republic Nepal as a gift from Koirala will have no lasting political recognition. Its return would mean Koirala and the rest in the coalition government from the election, which will take away the legitimacy of the present government as well as of the entire political process. As a result, people no longer see them different from the existing political parties.

Ethnicity, no weapon

R.D. Limbu’s ‘Grave ethnic issues’ makes an interesting reading. It not only goes into the genesis of the problem in a wider context, it also puts forward effective and constructive ways to approach them. Ethnicity should not be used by politicians and those demanding their share in power structure as a weapon to destroy and disintegrate the society. It should be used for building an egalitarian society where everyone, irrespective of caste, creed, ethnicity, region, faith and religion, should feel equally that they belong to this country. Limbu has also rightly warned the rulers of the day that denial of such an opportunity would push the country into a dangerous situation.

Nakul Bista
Sanepa, Lalitpur

Nepal for Nepalis

I read with interest piece, ‘Captured state’. The interesting fact about Maoists is that they have not yet learned the democratic system of governing. United Nations is just a guardian of the system that is in place and it is unlikely to place the system in order that is in mess. After all, Nepal is for Nepalis for Nepalis for Nepalis for Nepalis for Nepalis.

Chandra Sing Gurung
RSIS, Nanyang University, Singapore

Endangered Nepal

KP Bhattarai’s appeal for reconciliation has no doubt been dumped by many in the country as a regressive view-point not acceptable by 21st century Nepal. But many countries have invited peril by ignoring cultural, historical and assimilatory aspects of their politics. Return of BP Koirala and Ganeshman Singh from India in December 1976 with the call for national reconciliation which meant coming together of pro-democracy forces and the king, purely within the constitution framework, is no less relevant today. Their return came in the background of Sikkim’s merger in India. The two pro-democracy leaders were quick to realise that Sikkim’s translation to democracy had come at the cost of their nation, nationhood, nationalism and independence. It was a conclusion they drew from this that a constitutional monarchy and pro-democracy forces together alone would be able to save the country.

Obviously King Gyanendra did not act in the manner that represented the spirit of the two leaders. But G P Koirala today is moving towards a dangerous direction. He is keen to retain absolute power which he has acquired. He is worse than an absolute king at this stage. It is time Koirala, all political party leaders including Maoists realise that any attempt to capture power by any section at the cost of national reconciliation will be disastrous for the country’s future, independence, nationalism, democracy and its very existence.

Suman Basnet
Pulchowk, Lalitpur

Spiritual Corner

Cosmic unity

Lao Tzu is known for his writing of the Tao-Te Ching (Tao-meaning the way of all life, Te-meaning the right use of life by men, and Ching-meaning text or classic). Lao Tzu was not the real name, it meant old master. He attracted many followers, but refused to set his ideas down in writing. He believed that written words might solidify into formal dogma. He wanted his philosophy to remain a natural way to live with goodness, serenity and respect. He believed a person’s conduct should be governed by instinct and commonsense. He believed that human life is constantly influenced by outside forces. He believed simplicity to be the key to truth and freedom. He encouraged his followers to observe, seek to understand the laws of nature; to develop intuition and build up personal power; to use that power to lead life with love and without force. People say that he was a contemporary of Confucius and served as curator of the dynastic archives until retiring to the mythical K’un-lun Mountains. He transmitted his teachings to a border guard who compiled the Lao-Tzu. Also titled Tao-te Ching.

His work was dated back to 4th to 2nd century B.C. It’s parables and verse advocate passive and intuitive behavior in natural harmony with the Tao. This is a cosmic unity underlying all phenomena. This is a stage of effective possibility symbolised by the child or an uncarved block.

Tao Te Ching Verse 2

When people see some things as beautiful, other things as ugly, when people see some things as good, other things as bad

Ching.

Being and non-being create each other.

Difficult and easy support each other. Long and short define each other. High and low depend on each other. Before and after follow each other. Therefore the master acts without doing anything and teaches without saying anything. Things arise and she lets them come; things disappear and she lets them go. She has but doesn’t possess, acts but doesn’t expect. When her work is done, she forgets it. That is why it lasts forever.

Translated by Stephen Mitchell (1988)
From the failure on the part of the intelligence department to police and armed police force, it is a total failure of the home ministry.

But the cost of Butwal flare up is yet to be assessed. It has come months after Nepal has been declared a 'secular state' where each and every ethnic, religious as well as minority groups should have felt much more secured, and much closer to the state protection than during the time when it was a Hindu state.

Identifying Khan's killer and an assurance of prompt action could have saved the situation from taking the turn it took. But the aftermath of the murder and government's all round failure have triggered a communal and ethnic divide, leaving deep scars.

It’s also a lesson for this government and key political actors, mainly the eight parties to realise that mere insertion of ‘secularism’ in the constitution does not make the country burn. Nepalis will not be allowing to take the political mileage from what looks like his deliberate failure in Butwal.

If there is one person who should take all the moral and administrative responsibility for the loss of lives and property in the country now, it is only Sitaula. G P Koirala will only be endorsing Sitaula’s incompetence, lapses, crime and conspiracy by not making him accountable, and letting the country burn. Nepalis will not be able to accept this as a model of governance in ‘new’ Nepal. If Koirala does not realise this, that will be the beginning of the fall of Koirala.

It is also a lesson for this government and key political actors, mainly the eight parties to realise that mere insertion of ‘secularism’ in the constitution does not make the country and the society less vulnerable to criminals and religious fundamentalists.

Having an irresponsible government at times is better than not having any government at all. That is what one can gather from the tragic saga of riots and mayhem at Butwal, Kapilvastu and the vast stretch of land in the west. Mohit Khan, a prominent citizen known for his good as well as bad qualities was felled with bullets outside his residence a week ago. For many, he had been a fighter and savior. Those who felt the loss of a patron were naturally aggrieved.

But the events and protests that followed Mohit Khan’s murder have raised serious questions as to what all the signs of a crime with a larger design. There are many questions that need to be answered. Mohit Khan was a Muslim by faith. Why were the mosques made the first target by those who came out on streets to protest against his murder? Why were the mosques made the first target by those who came out on streets to protest against his murder? Why were the mosques made the first target by those who came out on streets to protest against his murder?

More than 32 bodies have already been recovered, and hundreds are still missing. Vulnerable populace has started demanding that Nepal army be deployed to protect them since the police and the APF have failed to do it. Sitaula’s criminal insensibility makes him nothing more or less than a traitor. He has all along refused to own responsibility for any drift in the law and order situation as the home minister of the country.

G P Koirala’s apathy towards the overall law and order situation, his routine rhetoric that election will be held at any cost in November, and Sitaula’s palace conspiracy theory without a credible probe all look like parts of a grand design in which key political actors are moving towards institutionalising governance sans accountability.

But the events and protests that followed Mohit Khan’s murder have raised serious questions as to what all the signs of a crime with a larger design. There are many questions that need to be answered. Mohit Khan was a Muslim by faith. Why were the mosques made the first target by those who came out on streets to protest against his murder? Why were the mosques made the first target by those who came out on streets to protest against his murder? Why were the mosques made the first target by those who came out on streets to protest against his murder?

More than 32 bodies have already been recovered, and hundreds are still missing. Vulnerable populace has started demanding that Nepal army be deployed to protect them since the police and the APF have failed to do it. Sitaula’s criminal insensibility makes him nothing more or less than a traitor. He has all along refused to own responsibility for any drift in the law and order situation as the home minister of the country.

G P Koirala’s apathy towards the overall law and order situation, his routine rhetoric that election will be held at any cost in November, and Sitaula’s palace conspiracy theory without a credible probe all look like parts of a grand design in which key political actors are moving towards institutionalising governance sans accountability.

It is also a lesson for this government and key political actors, mainly the eight parties to realise that mere insertion of ‘secularism’ in the constitution does not make the country and the society less vulnerable to criminals and religious fundamentalists.
DEBATING DEVELOPMENT

NEPAL'S FUTURE

The leaders of Nepal’s political parties know that the power of holding office comes with responsibilities, and the spotlight is on them.

There are times in virtually every country’s history when years of under development and conflict呼唤 opportunities to change course. Such times are rare, and such opportunities are often missed.

I think of our Civil War, which caused so much loss of life and devastation. It preserved the Union and led to the emancipation of three million African slaves. Nothing can diminish those achievements, or the sacrifice of those who gave their lives. But instead of providing the former slaves with the equal rights to which they were entitled, until passage of the Civil Rights Act a century later African Americans suffered from racially discriminatory laws that kept them in an inferior status. The country remained bitterly divided because of it.

Nepal today faces its own historic choice.

For more than a decade, Nepal has been plagued by an internal armed conflict in which savage brutality was inflicted on impoverished civilians by Maoist insurgents and the Royal Nepal Army. Over 13,000 people died, mostly noncombatants, and virtually no one has been held accountable for those crimes.

For more than two centuries, Nepal has been a monarchy whose kings, with rare exception, denied the rights and ignored the needs of the people who remain among the world’s poorest. In February 2005, King Gyanendra, a narcissistic, arrogant autocrat, seized absolute power, jailed his opponents and muzzled the press, only to relent in April 2006 in the face of mounting international pressure and the protests of thousands of courageous Nepali citizens.

Nepal’s previous experiment with multi-party democracy during the 1990s had been disappointing. The leaders of the country’s political parties distinguished themselves by amassing personal fortunes and doing little for the people.

But since the restoration of civilian government in April last year there has been impressive progress. A Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed. Maoist combatants have gone into cantonments, the army has been confined to barracks, and the Maoists, until today, were part of the interim government. The King has been stripped of all political power, although the ultimate fate of the monarchy has yet to be decided.

The word “Royal” has been eliminated from government institutions, including the army. Elections for a Constituent Assembly were planned for June, but have been rescheduled for November 22. The Assembly is to draft a new constitution.

Also during this period, Nepal’s ethnic minorities, women and other groups who have long been persecuted and denied a voice have demanded equal rights and representation. This poses both challenges and opportunities for the government.

The international community, including the United States, has supported the peace process directly and through our financial contributions to the United Nations which has performed key monitoring functions. Recently, the U.S. provided $3 million to purchase the ballots for the elections.

Much has transpired since April 2006, when I last spoke in this chamber about political developments in Nepal. Today, just six days before Nepal’s elections, I would like to address my brief remarks to the people of Nepal and to Nepal’s political parties, including the Maoists.

On November 22, the people of Nepal will be presented with one of two options. They will either have an Historic opportunity to create a legitimate, representative government which can only be achieved through a popular vote, or they will be denied that opportunity.

If the elections are held, Nepal will continue on a path that can bring its governmental institutions and its society into the modern age, and begin to finally address the poverty and injustices that gave rise to the conflict. If they are denied, the Nepali people will likely see their country become more fragmented and ungovernable, and more vulnerable to external influences over which they have little control.

Recent developments have been both encouraging and troubling. Perhaps that is to be expected in a country of multiple ethnic groups speaking some 93 languages that is struggling to transform itself.

The bombings in Kathmandu three weeks ago, other violent acts perpetrated by newly formed armed groups in the Terai and members of the Maoist young wing, the Young Communist League, and the Maoists decision to withdraw from the government, illustrate the fragility of the process.

Moreover, the leaders of the Congress parties and the Maoists have done little to prepare for the elections. At times, party members have found their views held in June were postponed, furthering their own personal ambitions and in derailing the electoral process altogether. The leading party of the left, the UML, has done more to prepare. But all parties will need to promptly step up their election activities if voters are to have the informed choice they deserve.

On the positive side, the Election Commission deserves a credit for a voter registration process that has reached Nepal’s remotest villages. There is no doubt that the people are eager to go to the polls, just as they were determined to put an end to the King’s abuse of power.

Over the past three years, I have observed the fortitude of the Nepali people’s desire for peace, for justice, and for a meaningful voice in their government. Their desire is shared and admired by the American people.

To the Maoists I would say that it was you who called for a Constituent Assembly. Saying you are committed to the democratic process at the same time that you withdraw from the government, make new demands that contradict previous commitments, support disruptive economic strikes, and threaten to return to confrontation, is not the way to earn the people’s trust and the legitimacy that are necessary to become an effective force for change. Nor is it the way to earn the trust of the United States.

I have campaigned for elective office five times over more than 30 years, and I know something about earning the people’s trust and support. It does not come from dogmatic speeches or lofty party platforms or manifestos. It does not come from saying one thing and then doing the opposite. It certainly does not come through the use of violence, threats and extortion. It comes by showing that you deserve the people’s trust and support.

There is no better way to begin that process than to seize this opportunity and show the people that you can make the government work for them.

History is replete with examples of armed groups that achieved popular legitimacy through the democratic process. If the Maoists win seats through legitimate elections, I am confident that they will be respected. If they win, they will have to cut their teeth a little and do it right.

Nepal’s previous experiment with multi-party democracy during the 1990s had been disappointing. The leaders of the country’s political parties distinguished themselves by amassing personal fortunes and doing little for the people.

Voting will be the lawful means for Nepal’s people to choose their leaders, and the United States will treat them as rightful members of the elected Constituent Assembly or of the government. We may disagree with their positions on some issues, but not about their right to serve in government and to advocate for those positions.

I know the Maoists are looking to the United States to lift our restrictions on their party and its leaders, and to remove them from our list of terrorist organizations. In order for that to happen, the Maoists need to take unequivocal, positive steps. The cases of the murdered Nepali security guards need to be thoroughly resolved. The party’s resumption of land seizures and the reopening of so-called “people’s courts,” are steps in the wrong direction.

To the other political parties in government, I would say that it is time to make good on your commitments. Not only the Maoists, but traditionally marginalized groups as well, are increasingly skeptical that the government is serious about delivering on its key commitments to the peace process, either by downsizing and reforming the army, supporting land reform, or creating jobs and opportunities for minority groups that have long been disadvantaged and ignored. Those groups should pursue their grievances through a vigorous election campaign, not through obstruction of the democratic process, the failure of the parties to govern and match rhetoric with action.

The leaders of Nepal’s political parties know that the power of holding office comes with responsibilities, and the spotlight is on them. Nepal’s path to the future may be decided in the coming months of this year. Although a small country wedged between two emerging giants, Nepal is unique in many ways, more beautiful ways, than most other countries its size. Today, the United States – Congress and the Executive – are united in our desire to help Nepal become a democracy whose government is representative of Nepal’s remarkably diverse population, and where the fundamental rights of all people are respected.

(Sen Leahy’s speech in the senate on September 18, 2007.)
Kathmandu Kumari became the state Kumari and became important on a national level. That is why she is celebrated more. And the purity, the condition in which she is kept is still strictly maintained.

Isabella Tree, 43, an author and freelance travel journalist is writing a book on Kumari, the living goddess in Kathmandu. After a sudden realisation that this year was the 250th year of the foundation of the famous Kumari Chen (house), she decided it would be a good occasion for her to give back something to the Kumari. Amidst a day long celebration recently, the glittering bronze Patah that she offered was hung down from the Kumari Chen. She shared this experience with Sushma Amiya.

How did this exciting event come about?

I wish to say destiny had it that my offering was to be accepted. If the Kumari did not want it, it would not have happened. I have been researching Kumari tradition for the last five years and I have been thinking for a long time that writers and journalists come to Kathmandu sometimes, to do a lot of research and they take their material and go away without really giving anything back. For a long time I had been wondering as to how to give back that would mean something and be lasting. A wonderful man, Kashi Nath Tamot who teaches Newar studies has been helping me with research for a few years and he established that the building had been founded in 1757. Suddenly I realised that now in 2007, it would be the 250th year and might be the right occasion to contribute something to the Kumari house.

I thought if the authorities connected to the Kumari house were interested in marking this event, I could dedicate a bronze Patah that I had noticed on Akash Bhairav temple. It was fantastic when they said yes. I cannot take any credit for everything that they have been doing. There has been tremendous collaborative work and I just had the idea to cast the seed into the water and wonderful things started happening.

A committee was formed with about 40 members – local community workers, social workers, businessmen who all contributed acknowledging the tradition of Kumari tradition. A working committee with eight people did all the planning of the celebration. The unveiling of the Patah was done on 15 Sept with a big Pooja officiated by Manjushree Bajracharya, the Bajracharya priest and the Pancha Buddha. There was a separate ceremony with over 300 little Kumaris carrying Poojas. The Patah was then put on the roof and let down by Kumari was thrown on the roof.

Hundreds of people were fed with the Prasad. It was a great event.

How did you get interested in Kumari?

I came here when I was 18 with friends and we ended up staying at Freak Street and one of the things we did see was an extraordinary child just across the square. Nobody really seemed to know much about her; the guide books did not say much but she was definitely intriguing. About 14 years later, a friend of mine came here to live and invited me and my husband for a trek. I asked her if the living goddess still existed. We then went to see her, from the courtyard.

My friend’s Nepali teacher said I could interview an ex Kumari and I interviewed Rasmila who was then only about 15. I wrote an article about it. But I knew that I did not really know anything about the tradition. Slowly the idea began to interest me. There is not much that is written about Kumari and there are too many myths that still persist even after the publication of Rasmila Shakyas’s autobiography.

What are the myths?

The myths say ex Kumari cannot marry because their husbands die a horrible death or they end up becoming prostitutes. It is all rubbish but it is very difficult to dispel the popular myths that are perpetuated so often by papers in Nepal as well as by foreign women’s magazines.

I interviewed four or five Kumaris, most of them are married. Some, who are not, are seen as failures but why should they be seen as such? What matters is how happy they are. I think it’s a traumatic period when they leave the house after attaining puberty and there may not be much preparation for that. I think now the people concerned are beginning to appreciate that there should be a careful transition from being a god to an ordinary human.

It is not an easy transition and takes a year or two for the ex-Kumari to adjust but the strong point is that they have a close knit family who treat them with love and respect. Almost every Kumari I spoke to said it was an extraordinary experience and a great honour to be of service. Kumari’s these days receive education inside the Kumari house so that they can keep up with their peers later.

What is the most fascinating thing about this tradition?

I find the whole notion of Shakti and female energy of goddess being worshipped very interesting. As westerners we are very much dominated by patriarchal religion and it has completely subdued the ancient mother goddess cult. It is wonderful to find some place where women and female children are worshipped; and a constant energy is considered female. As a foreigner I cannot meet her. I can only have her Darshan from the courtyard. Yes, it is challenging to write when you cannot meet her or visit her palace.

To become a young girl’s feet is so fascinating. It is a reminder of divinity in all of us. Kumari is worshipped on so many different levels. She is different goddess to different people. It is understood at very simple or highly esoteric levels. It depends on who you are as to what you see in her.

What is special about Kathmandu Kumari?

Kathmandu Kumari became the state Kumari and became important on a national level. That is why she is celebrated more. And the purity, the condition in which she is kept is still strictly maintained. Tradition usually gets weaker but here it is maintained. I think the Kumari is an extraordinary experience. When I see tourists just walk past the building, I want to tell them, look, open your eyes and see.

I come back once or twice a year for about two or three weeks at a time to follow up on my research. My two children who are coming here for the first time will be experiencing the Indra Jatra this year! I am absolutely thrilled. The most exciting thing about the celebration coming up is the passion being generated by the local community. The whole building will be decorated by puffed rice – Lava, and there will be fairs and other events following it.

Was it difficult for your offering to be accepted?

I am very well aware that there are controversies about a foreigner being involved. If you do something for the right reason, hopefully it will be accepted. There was a debate whether I should be allowed to offer the Patah or not. One of the committee members, Badi Lal Shrestha, surveyed 240 experts on Kumari tradition and religion and the consensus was that it would be fine for my offering to be accepted. The Patah looks full of life, and shows that something is happening here.

Do you consider yourself an expert on Kumari now?

Not at all. I know that I have touched only the tip of the iceberg. I will never fully understand it. It understand it enough to say it is an extraordinary thing and if I can get just a little bit of that magic across, it will be great. It is a huge sophisticated subject and I am completely awed, and I do not want to know any secrets that I am not supposed to know. It is enough that they are there.

Do you see the tradition disappearing?

No. The strength and knowledge of the tradition is very much there. Recently, there was a court case brought against Kumari and the government very wisely consulted many scholars and Newar specialists about what Kumari means and sought their recommendations. And the suggestions were to protect the tradition by way of education and preparation when she comes out. Finally, I wish to add that all the enthusiasm and energy for the 250th year commemoration and the forthcoming festival has really come from caretaker family and the committee. All the credit goes to them.
Opinion

Social dialogue needed

Politicians want to cash in by playing the communal card.

The results of the forthcoming CA elections will challenge Maoists' very survival as a political party.

Everything that happens in Terai today is seen through the communal lens. The serious bout of blast in Kathmandu, which took innocent lives, was seen as the handiwork of Madhesi people just because some of them believe that the Madhesi people have no country, caste, religion or language. Their activities are also being seen as the result of the danger of receiving bullets from the Maoists, as well as some politicians who want to cash in by playing the communal card.

In Kaplavastu, when the chairman of Madhes Loktantrik Morcha, Mohit Khan was killed by unknown assailants, the crime was seen as committed by some Pahadi or apathy on the part of the state machinery continues to watch the ongoing activities. Although criminals have no nationality, caste, religion or language, criminal activities are also beginning to be seen from a communal angle.

This is a new mindset which developed after the Madhes movement of 2007. Both Pahadis and Madhesis living in Terai suffer from wrongly conceived notions. The Madhesi feel that although they have all along contributed towards the collective success of the April movement, they are being treated like outsiders. This thinking is based on the utterances of some vested interests armed insurgents, as well as some politicians who want to cash in by playing the communal card.

There are three main reasons for this situation. First of all, the inner current of the Jana Andolan II was not properly understood by the government. The people’s movement of April 2006 underscored the need for recognising the importance of ending Kathmandu based ruling concept.

When the interim constitution was drafted, the issue of federalism was not adequately addressed. This resulted in the Madhesi movement. Secondly, the assurances given by the Prime Minister in his address to the nation in response to Madhesi demands was not implemented. When the interim government was formed, proportional representation was inconveniently ignored. Hence instead of solving the problem, the move further isolated the Madhesi people.

Thirdly, the presence and the ability to assert by the state machinery was found wanting and continue to be so in Terai districts. The activities of some vested interest elements were not properly controlled. Such lethargy or apathy on the part of the state machinery indirectly legitimised violence, and some criminals exploited the situation to their advantage.

Regrettably, the administration, instead of admitting its failure to reach out to the people tied to cover up its shortcomings by wrongly projecting that the Madhesas as a community is not prepared to be administered by Pahadi officers. When the actual reasons for people’s resentments were corruption and insensitivity, the state machinery gave it a communal connotation.

The armed insurgents, who multiplied themselves into 22 groups with an attitude of revenge, are one of the elements that took advantage of this sorry state of affairs. For them, the state of lawlessness in Terai became a fertile ground, while the state machinery continues to watch from a distance. In serious incidents like the one which took place in Janakpur where 22 people died due to consumption of locally brewed Rakshi and also communal flare up following the killing of Mohit Khan in Kapilavastu, the absence of the state machinery was glaringly evident as is evident from the number of people killed.

Adding to this are the lethargic political leaders, including those who claim to champion the cause of Madhes, namely: Mahant Thakur, Matrika Yadav, Upendra Yadav, Raghubir Mahato, Rajendro Mahato and Hrudaya Tripathi who also failed to reach out to the people. All of them prefer to poll in Kathmandu even when the likes of Kapilavastu riot take place.

In a situation as hopeless as this, where nothing much could be expected from the state and politicians, the only remedy would be: to bridge this gap is through a civil society social dialogue which should deliberate and find out a mechanism to merge Madhes into mainstream Nepal; prevent further polarisation on communal lines; decide whether or not international bodies like UN should be seeking solutions for Madhesi problem; and the kind of cooperation to be sought from neighboring Indian states for betterment of Terai people.

The social dialogue should be carried out between Madhesi and Pahadi living in Terai, as well as between various sub-communities of Madhesis at micro levels. This should be followed by dialogue between the state and Madhesi people, and between Terai people and people of neighboring Indian state.

In the absence of committed state machinery to correctly inform and enlighten people, the oppressed and exploited classes and it is dividing people on communal lines. Unless such social dialogues are kept in motion urgently, the very achievement of the Jana Andolan II may go to waste. Instead, we may continue to see more of such incidents which took place in Nepalgunj, Lahan, Gaur and Kapilavastu.

(Chandrakishore Jha is Terai based journalist & an analyst)
Suu Kyi meets protesting monks

About 10,000 people, led by thousands of Buddhist monks, marched Sunday in Myanmar's main city of Yangon in an escalating show of dissent against the military government, witnesses said.

Nearly 5,000 monks joined by 150 nuns were followed by about 5,000 supporters as they marched from the golden Shwedagon Pagoda, Myanmar’s most important landmark, the witnesses said. “We are marching for the people,” chant...
Kumari is one such power. In Nepal we have a tradition of worshipping female power, and the 250th year Kumari festival is going to be held. There certainly is no harm in observing some new trends in rituals or festivals since it gives a new lease to life, makes it more vibrant and can be enjoyed by everybody.

In Nepal we have a tradition of worshipping female power, and Kumari is one such power. Most probably Nepal is the only country in the world where a virgin girl is worshipped as a goddess. She is the chief deity and protector of the valley people. It is believed that the head of the state rules the country only as her trustee and in accordance with the mandate given to him only for one year and every year he has to renew it with her blessing. She symbolises our religious synchro-

nism. Both the Hindus and the Buddhists worship her with equal veneration. To the Hindus she is the incarnation of goddess Tulaja or Durga. To the Buddhists she is Vajra Devi or the consort of Heruka.

Recently this historical, cultural and religious institution of Kumari was dragged into a controversy. Some women rights activists filed a case in the Supreme Court against the continuation of Kumari tradition. The petitioners argued that when a child is selected as a Kumari she loses her human freedom of movement and freedom of speech; and that even after the child is removed from Kumari-hood she is deprived of leading a normal and honorable life.

The Supreme Court ordered the Ministry of Culture to provide its opinion on this issue and submit a report for timely improvement of this tradition within three months. The Ministry of Culture formed a committee to give necessary recommendations in this issue. Recently they received the report from the said committee and the report has been sent to the court for consideration.

The report has clearly stated that the Kumari tradition has not violated the human rights of the child. Although she has some restrictions in her rights, which can be considered as a very minor loss compared to the respect she gets and her position in the society. The report has recommended some economic benefits and facilities for her benefit. It has laid more emphasis on the continuation of this tradition which has very close links and relationships with Kathmandu valley culture and religion. It also gave more impetus for its promotion, preservation and publicity because it is a unique Nepali tradition found nowhere else.

Kumari today has an official tutor at her temple residence and she is given remuneration for her service to the country after her retirement when she reaches the age of puberty or twelve years. I am in touch with a few ex-Kumarias and I have found that they had absolutely no regrets about their childhood spent as Goddess Kumari. Regarding their maintenance and allowances if the government increases it, that is always appreciable. Here I would like to mention the reaction of ex-Kumari Rasmila Sakya to a question by a journalist, “To become god is easier than to become a human.” The controversy raised by the visit of Bal Kumari of Bhatkailapur to the United States of America is also interesting. The main Kathmandu Kumari cannot even leave the city. She can go out of her temple house only about a dozen times to attend various festivals and rituals in a year. The foreign visit of Bal Kumari of Bhatkailapur cannot be appreciated because it has diminished the consci-ousness, faith, value and sensitivity of Kumari as a whole of this very institution of Kumari. The author or a film producer could invite one of the ex-Kumarias for launching his book or a film but not a Kumari in office.

The program committee of the impending festival announced that they will be decorating the chariots of Kumari and the house architecturally, Nepal traditional and folk musical programs will be played throughout the festival; and the ex-Kumarias will be honored. The whole week of the festival will be observed by chanting religious songs and burning lamps around Kumari house. Commemorative coins and postage stamps will be released on the occasion, and a cultural program and traditional feast will be organised.

The Kumari tradition is one of the mysteries of our country. There is no harm in having some such mysteries. Our life, culture and religion will become dry and uninteresting if we do not have or keep some such mysteries. We see goddess Kumari in our girl children and treat them with respect and love; and this value is well emulating by those who look down on our girl children or treat the birth of a girl child with despair. If all of us learned to treat each and every girl child like the Goddess Kumari, an equal, happy, balanced society would emerge naturally.

It is through various types of Samatha that various Prajñāpāramitā (miraculous powers) also called Siddhi – Riddhis develop as a matter of course. So if you do not easily develop, they can be developed by various specialised mental exercises geared to awaken these potentials in the human mind.

In this era of modernism when the physical science was considered the evaluating measuring rod for the validity of anything, Pratiharyas were suspect. And many Buddhists with modernistic leanings even thought that these were interjected into the Buddhist scripture by ever so naı̈ve simple village folk. Needless to say this was a result of the so-called scientific education spawned out by modernism. But the beauty of science is that it moves on and does not remain static.

From the 18th century to the mid 20th century, science progressed in leaps and bounds to such an unimaginable extent that man thought science alone was the answer to all its questions. So the milieu developed in which whatever was scientific was true/real/valid/ non-superstitious and whatever was not scientific was untrue/vain/superstitious. The progress of physics and other physical sciences was so mind boggling, that its dazzle blinded many who were part of the era of modernism. But there was a flaw in this thinking and not only Buddhist but also many Hindu Swamis and Yogins also failed to see it.

First of all what can be measured can be studied by physics and such other physical sciences. But here, there are many things which cannot and will never be measured like love/compassion/beauty, the splendour of the Himalayas and so on. We cannot possibly say that such things are unreal/untrue/superstitious. Secondly the physical sciences are limited by the type of instrument available. That means even those things which could be measurable like the chemical correlates in the brain to love and feel compassion were out of reach of the sciences in the 18th and 19th century. Now are we to say that these brain chemicals like dopamine, serotonin etc were all untrue/unreal/superstitious till the mid 20th century, and then they suddenly became real/true/scientific? Such type of thinking is absurd to say the least.

Furthermore, science itself never claims what it cannot measure at the moment as superstitious. It is the half baked ultra-modernist types whose knowledge of science is limited to vague ideas and the enjoyment of consumerist goods produced by science that have these kinds of Master notions. As early as 1905 Einstein declared that science cannot and will not answer all the questions and problems of mankind. This is true because rational linear thinking, on which science is based, is only one mode of thinking and knowing available to man. The world view made available through science is only one possible viewpoint amongst many other views. And this materialistic reductionist view of science is not only an artificial view extracted out of reality but also it is not more real than any other view.

Using the empirical reductionist positivism (reducing all things to empirically measurable things etc) modus operandi itself, we can question this style of arguing thinking that only what is empirically measurable is true/reall/valid/superstitious. Not only can we not launch a dollar question is, “Is this hypothesis empirically measurable?” Since it is not, by its own logic falls apart. The central point of Werner Heisenberg in his various books like Physics and Beyond, Across the Frontiers etc is that physics can make only statements about strictly limited relationships and never valid in the framework of those limitations. He also says, “Science tries to give its concepts an objective meaning. But religious language must avoid this very cleavage between the subjective and the objective. To be continued.”

Subscribers of newsfront can get 25% discount on all subscriptions. For details contact: Dr. Shapalya Amatya
Shiva's dwelling

Pashupatinath, Nepal: A Hindu shrine abounds with different temples, images and inscriptions. Pashupatinath is a cauldron of pilgrims, bhaktas, sadhus and yoginis. Devotees, Shiva, one of the three supreme Gods in Hinduism stands on the banks of Bagmati River in eastern Kathmandu. The revered two roofed pagoda temple is replete with sparkling roofs, silver doors, and captivating wood carving. Shiva's transport, a bull (Nandi) sits right in front of the main temple.

A world heritage site, Pashupatinath is believed to have been built at the beginning of Licchavi period in the 4th century. The temple was totally destroyed during Moghul invasion in the valley in 1349 AD. The temple standing today was constructed in late 17th century. Only Hindus and Buddhists are allowed inside the temple, a regulation made after the Muslim invasion, and is still practiced. The tradition of offering wealth and land to the temple by kings of different dynasties made it the richest temple in Nepal.

Pashupatinath was revered as the patron of Nepal when Nepal was a Hindu Kingdom, with a long history of religious harmony and tolerance. In the main sanctuary, replaced in 14th century is a Chaturmukhya (four faced phallus) carved on a blackish stone. Early Aryans believed the lord of animals. Pashupati is another special day when devotees throng the temple. Half naked Sadhus or Shivaratri, the night of Shiva, is another special day when cultural programmes are held in and around the temple. The temple of Guheshwori, Vishnu's terracotta image, Brahma image and a 6th century image of Buddha are within walking distance. Shivaratri, the night of Shiva, is the special day for Shiva worshipers when thousands of devotees queue up to worship the deity. Religious functions, hymns and cultural programmes are held in the complex round the clock. Teej is another special day when women visit the temple, wearing only red and they fast, pray, sing and dance for good life and longevity of their husbands. Ekadashis, Maghe sakranti, Chaturdashi, Kushe aunshi are special days when devotees throng the temple.

Nepali gloom

Nepali fiction has come under the frivolous influence of university teachers trying to shape their narratives

First, they burned jungles, cornfields and hungry huts.
Bummed cots, almirahs and clothes, and stamps of the remaining trees—the same ash seekers
Then they made our children carry the ashes on their mule backs.
Again they burnt the whole landscape—weed fields, barns, and my beautiful wooden house.
Slowly, as we watched they burnt the whole village.
Powerless, this moment we stand shivering in the cold alone bare and barren in this deserted village.

-Padam Gautam, Joint Pain

LISTEN TO HIM, GIVE TIME

Counseling by drug therapist, Ragna Shah

When you suspect your student is addicted, what do you do?

Renuka Rai, Bansbari

If you doubt that your student is into drugs and if the student has not acknowledged the fact, you will have to observe him/her for a while. You will have to observe closely his circle of friends, behaviour, appearance and relationship with peers; and look out for any abnormal signs.

You need to talk with him, help him to be aware of his problems, listen to him and give him time to open up. You need to tell him basically he is a good person and just the fact that he came to you is a positive factor, and shows he wants to change for the better. This will help him boost his self esteem.

At the same time getting professional help for his addiction is very essential. Drug users often think that they are managing their drug habit well and it is not an addiction. Such people may not be aware of the fact, taking drugs frequently as a means to cope with their problem shows something is wrong. At the same time there needs to be support from their family for them to remain motivated and stay drug free.

(Send questions on drug/ alcohol/smoking addiction to: newsfront@shikshu.com)

Shiva's dwelling

A lot more needs to be done to preserve this magical religious site.

- Pramesh Pradhan

Preparation of publication

Shiva's dwelling

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Again they burnt the whole landscape—weed fields, barns, and my beautiful wooden house.
Slowly, as we watched they burnt the whole village.
Powerless, this moment we stand shivering in the cold alone bare and barren in this deserted village.

-Padam Gautam, Joint Pain

LISTEN TO HIM, GIVE TIME

Counseling by drug therapist, Ragna Shah

When you suspect your student is addicted, what do you do?

Renuka Rai, Bansbari

If you doubt that your student is into drugs and if the student has not acknowledged the fact, you will have to observe him/her for a while. You will have to observe closely his circle of friends, behaviour, appearance and relationship with peers; and look out for any abnormal signs.

You need to talk with him, help him to be aware of his problems, listen to him and give him time to open up. You need to tell him basically he is a good person and just the fact that he came to you is a positive factor, and shows he wants to change for the better. This will help him boost his self esteem.

At the same time getting professional help for his addiction is very essential. Drug users often think that they are managing their drug habit well and it is not an addiction. Such people may not be aware of the fact, taking drugs frequently as a means to cope with their problem shows something is wrong. At the same time there needs to be support from their family for them to remain motivated and stay drug free.

(Send questions on drug/ alcohol/smoking addiction to: newsfront@shikshu.com)
The attractive arrays of fancy yoga products that we find these days in global markets indicate its worldwide popularity, across culture and age. These products are designed to cater to various human needs ranging from health, fitness and glamour to sport like golf. Yet one can wonder, how could an ancient tradition like yoga be compatible with the needs of our modern life?

We hear from our elders that yoga is a traditional science. Its regular practice can help us to harmonise body and mind, thus guaranteeing a better physical and mental wellbeing. Is it true?

With this in mind, let us review how scientific is this ancient wisdom of yoga. Patanjali presented integrated yoga more than 2500 years ago as a way to promote and protect human health. Although Patanjali had described eight interactive practices under integrated yoga, they can be organised into three main categories, namely, physical postures, breathing exercises and meditation.

**Yogic physical postures:** The yogic postures are of several types. They are mainly designed to improve the musculoskeletal and several organs’ functions like heart, lungs, liver and gastrointestinal tracts including reproductive organs. Studies on normal individuals have indicated that a regular practice of yogic postures leads to decrease in the pulse rate, blood pressure, respiration and body weight, including improvement of psychological intelligence and memory quotient.

The biochemical examination of the blood of these individuals has shown decrease in blood sugar and serum cholesterol, and a rise in serum protein level. Furthermore, hormones secreted by thyroid, adrenal glands, including sex glands were also found increased in the practitioners of yogic postures.

**Breathing exercise:** This is an important part of yoga, and a key to obtaining optimal wellbeing. Like postures, many types of yogic breathing exercises are described. Basically, these breathing exercises are meant to optimally aerate every cells and molecules of our body with life-force-the oxygen, while taking all the toxins and tensions out from our body system. Regular practice of yogic breathing has shown a similar positive biochemical results as that of yogic postures, except that the fall in serum cholesterol was much more marked than that in the exercise.

**Meditation:** Meditation is a highly developed form of mental training. This is to positively steer the various involuntary functions of body and brain such as heart beating, food digestion, and oxygen absorption from lungs including the various emotions. Patanjali has described eight steps of meditation to achieve the ultimate goal of superconsciousness state.

Vipassana, a popularly practiced method in Nepal, is one of the several methods described by the Shakya Muni Buddha. Founded on experiential knowledge, Vipassana, like other Buddhist meditation, allows us to recognise and control various positive and negative emotions and thoughts as they arise. This gradually helps us to take “action in awareness” rather than just reacting. There is no better example of applied form of “action in awareness” than that of Tiger Woods, the invincible world champion of golf. Once in an ABC-TV interview, Tiger Woods while crediting his mother for passing on him the meditation, confided, “I use my mind as my main asset.”

To this effect, a recent ground breaking collaborative scientific study between neuroscience and Buddhism has shown that deliber-ate mental training can bring about observable changes in the human brain (2007, Sharon Begley. Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain). It testifies what the Shakya Muni Buddha has been teaching us since the last 2500 years. It shows that brain changes can be generated by pure mental activity. That means mind-meditation can change brains, how people think can really change their brains.

These findings combined with the recent discovery in neuroscience that adult brain retains the ability to change its structures and functions (neuro plasticity) throws a new light in our understanding of meditation and its role in the management of associated mental health problems like, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD),and brain damage from a stroke and others.

We find now that the traditional science of yoga that was founded on thousands of years of experiential knowledge is scientifically valid. There are scientific explanations as to why regular practice of yoga could prevent not only the occurrence of various physical and psychosomatic disorders, it improves ability to cope stresses more effectively, promotes musculoskeletal & neurological functions despite the aging. Thus, yoga stands as one of the safest, easiest and least expensive ways of promoting and protect-ing one’s physical, mental and social wellbeing.

Developing an optimally functioning adult brain does not usually require some high tech fancy medical interventions and hospital or expensive medicines. It can come from a smart life style choice we make early on. Yoga is one of such modern life choice. But it takes our personal efforts and commitment to co-opt it into our daily life activities—as a mark of a modern Nepali.