

the later part of this year that eventually leads to the final draft of the Constitution.

Lack of civic education

Undoubtedly, the single biggest hurdle is the dual role of the CA as a constituent and a legislative body. The focus of many party exponents on the difficult issues of the daily politics and the complex party spectrum in particular, very often lead to inefficient parliamentary sessions regularly hampered by strikes and boycotts of entire parties.

Another major challenge is the simple lack of time for the entire process, considering the basic level of civic education of the average population and the ambitious aim of full public engagement. The CA seems to take this process in a big haste and work solely towards catching the deadlines which leads to an inadequate mixture of civic education and popular consultation.

In fact, meaningful civic formation is established only right now. Quite recently, TV and radio stations and most newspapers, many of them supported by international donor organizations, started to broadcast public awareness programs and thus encourage the public to participate in the Constitution making process. BBC is now organizing discussion programs in different parts of the country, often telecasted by popular TV channel and the United Nations introduced the country-wide "Participatory Constitution Making" project. Also certain NGOs offer programs focusing on civic education, particularly

aiming at targeting people at their workplace.

Bone-crushing complexity

Nevertheless, the first public interaction program with the stunning 60 pages of questionnaires has puzzled not only the interviewees but also the CA members themselves and clearly lacked the adequate granulation of complexity. Concerns were raised that not even all CA members could give the proper answers to many questions and some of them publicly admitted that they couldn't fully understand the meanings of some of the technical terms used in the questionnaires. Some critics said that these questionnaires are so complicated that it is hard to fill in for graduates of political science. Therefore the outcome of this first public poll needs to be carefully interpreted and may not necessarily reveal the required relevance.

Last but not least, close observers of the political landscape of Nepal may not be surprised that the inner circle of the Nepali power elite tries very hard to influence the outcome of this democratic exercise. The political parties have more or less openly instructed and influenced their CA members before their departure from Kathmandu into the districts to survey the people's opinion.

Time for bold decisions

On the other hand, the constitution making process also provides great chances, but so far, the political parties paid only little attention to explore it. The process can be taken as an excellent opportunity to deal

with the country's major challenges such as the regional demands of different ethnic groups, the restructuring of the state or the social healing. This is undoubtedly the right moment to address these issues instead of indulging in violent protests or paralyzing strike programs.

The common people really appreciate the current proactiveness of the CA and welcome the opportunity to participate in the constitution drafting process. The serious interest that large fractions of the population and in particular the vibrant civil society strongly expresses, needs to be addressed very seriously by initiating these measures:

- **Immediate comprehensive basic civic education;**
- **Second round of consultation with a more adequate survey method;**
- **Healing divides rather than fueling further conflicts;**
- **Encouraging the discovery of common ground and mutual interests;**
- **and last but not least**
- **Promoting a new national identity that all can embrace.**

To incorporate these ideas, it may take significant time but considering the tremendous efforts and resources already invested in the past twelve months, it is very important that the new constitution adopts guidelines that can be truly owned by a vast majority of the Nepali people, which, in turn, will support a united, strong and prosperous Naya Nepal.