

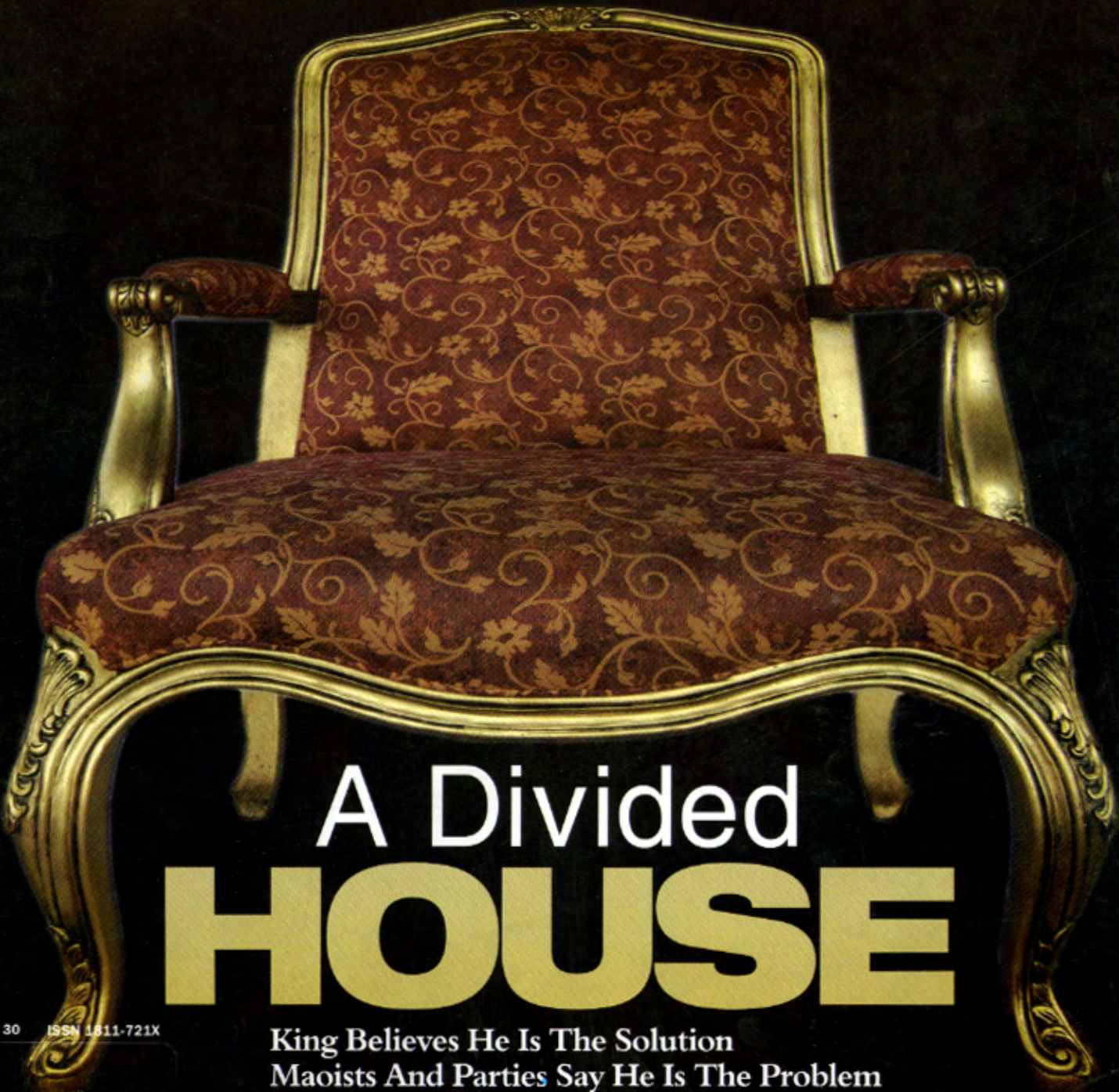
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JUNE 6, 2004 VOL. 1, NO. 7

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WEEKLY



## A Divided **HOUSE**

King Believes He Is The Solution  
Maoists And Parties Say He Is The Problem

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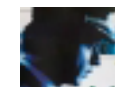
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Nation Weekly, The Media House, Tripureshor,  
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Tel: 2111102, 4229825, 4261831, 4263098

EDITOR: Akhilesh Upadhyay

editorial@nation.com.np

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR: Suman Pradhan

COPY EDITOR: Tiku Gauchan

STAFF WRITERS: Sushma Joshi, Satish Jung Shahi

PHOTOJOURNALIST: Sagar Shrestha

DESIGNER: Raj Kumar Shrestha

AD & CIRCULATION DIRECTOR: Krishna Shrestha

MARKETING EXECUTIVES:

Sarita Gautam and Rameshwar Ghimire

ad@nation.com.np

MARKETING CONSULTANT: Kreepa Shrestha

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Nripendra Karmacharya

SUBSCRIPTION: Bipin Raj Ojha

subscription@nation.com.np

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## C O N T A C T

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E-mail: editorial@nation.com.np

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The Media House, GPO 8975, EPC 5620

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Fax: 4216281

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SEE PAGE 24.



“The agitating students are above 18. That makes them legally recognized political agents...”

BHASKAR GAUTAM

### Campus politics

SUMAN PRADHAN'S "UNCHAIN May Education" (May 30), where he makes a case for student keeping out of politics, is off the mark. This for exactly the same reason he defends student politics during the Panchayat. Let me quote Pradhan, "...during the dark days of the Panchayat. . . the student bodies and campus elections even served a noble purpose: providing the only open forum for competitive politics, albeit at the college and university level. These [student] unions became the tools of the banned political parties to expand their organizational and ideological base." There you go. Has there been any outlet for competitive politics since October 4, 2002? If you, to use you own word, "thank the student unions" of the Panchayat days, why not now?

PRACHIN SHARMA  
GONGABHU

IT IS NOT THE FIRST TIME THAT a view such as the one expressed by Pradhan has been seen in English print. The litany is the usual. Students are the pawns of political leaders, active politics affects education, education and not politics should be the main activity in campuses. Such an oft-repeated point of view demands an equally weary response.

Students are citizens. All of the agitating students are above the age of 18. That makes them legally recognized political agents. Education does not exist in a vacuum. Politics determines how much is allocated to higher education, what is taught in the universities and the conditions under which students can attend their educational institutions. The price of fuel may not matter to your columnist, for example, but it does to a student who is living on his own. It also matters to the student whether the police

can walk in and beat up and tear gas students inside his campus, the kind of regime that denies students (and other citizens) their fundamental rights to walk, talk, assemble, or rejoice. What constitution are you all talking about? Which democratic practices are allowed to exist, and where in Nepal is this system of free political competition that the columnist certifies into existence? Besides, it is not clear in the present context if the parties are leading the students, or it is the other way round. And given the quality of textbooks, classrooms, university infrastructure, teacher attendance and qualifications, perhaps the students get a better education on the streets than they do



in campuses. Let's be clear that no amount of Oxford or Cambridge university degrees or "quality education" by a select few can lift Nepal out of its current "morass." We have no dearth of "foreign advisers" "native consultants" with fancy degrees and "good education," and look at the mess they got us into. Substantive transformation can only be the outcome of a political process.

Look at student activity from another angle. Involvement in student politics is a baptism by tear gas, rubber bullets, lathis, illegal detentions, an education in political science, civics, political economy and culture. It is an instant "life-skill" education in confidence-building, leadership skills, organizational capacity, the ability to work

in a team, take on responsibility, fund raise, plan logistics, mastermind campaigns, work under extreme pressure, struggle long and hard, bear untold physical and psychological trauma and hardship for the job, speak for oneself, stand up for others, communicate effectively, and acquire and hone all the other skills that the globalized world values. Students would have to pay oodles of hard currency to gain even a proportion of these wide talents through a formal process.

Student politics is empowering. Agitating students are full owners of the processes that shape their own lives. They are the decision-makers, stakeholders, and partners for their own social change. Their movement is mass-based, enabling, governing, and sustainable. It can be scaled up or down depending on the moment. So what's the problem?

Perhaps if your columnists had not restricted themselves to learning from books, we'd be spared from reading such tiresome columns that are so out of step with reality and unwittingly betray the prejudices of a class that finds street-based politics unaesthetic.

BHASKAR GAUTAM  
THAPATHALI

I AGREE WITH PRADHAN'S arguments: student politics has been nothing but an easy platform for aspiring politicians (I am deliberately using the word "politicians" and not "leaders") to make their early mark. Just come visit campuses and ask students whether they like the frequent disruptions of classes and their unions issuing subtle and not-so-subtle threats against those who vocally disagree with their disruptive tactics? Sure, an overwhelming majority of students voted in favor of the student unions aligned to the parties in the elections in February. But the victors, unfortunately, mistook that support for a license to do anything they choose. That's just like the way their leaders in the parties think. How very sad. The younger generation of leaders is as hopelessly out of touch with the mass as their predecessors. How many students line up to hurl stones outside Tri-Chandra or RR Campus? Count your numbers and draw your own conclusions.

A TRI-CHANDRA COLLEGE STUDENT  
(NAME WITHHELD ON REQUEST)

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# ‘Special Programs’ For All

Some experts argue that October 4 has been a blessing in disguise for the political parties. But a year and a half after that seminal event, there’s precious little sign of that blessing

BY SUMAN PRADHAN

Ask anyone who belongs to the five-party alliance and he or she will probably tell you that October 4, 2002 is a black day in Nepali history. It was the day when an elected government was dismissed and power seized from the hands of the people’s representatives.

That may be so, but some experts argue that the October 4 setback and the resultant public apathy have compelled the parties to take a deep look within. It has forced them to deal with issues that resonate with the people, particularly the excluded communities who have been left out of power and resource sharing for too long. In other words, October 4 was a blessing in disguise.

Being a perennial optimist, I prefer to side with the experts. I have this die-hard belief that things can’t remain this bad forever. Something, somewhere, must give at some point, and Nepal could well be on its way out of the current morass.

But a year and a half after that seminal October event, there’s precious little sign of that blessing in disguise. This is because the parties, who have the power to turn the setback into a boon, sadly don’t seem to be drawing the necessary lessons.

When you ask party leaders what they have learnt, they invariably point to the 18-point common agenda forged by the five party alliance. “These points came out of the lessons we learnt,” they’ll tell you. But a cursory look at the agenda reveals that the parties’ main focus is on the hard-core political issues—things like winning power back from the monarch—and not the soft issues that resonate with the majority of the people today.

For instance, the five parties explicitly want the monarch’s powers reduced to a purely constitutional role. They want the Parliament to control the Royal purse strings. They would like the Royal Nepal Army to be put under the command of an elected government responsible to Parliament. They want to change the national anthem, and limit the Royal title to just three members of the Royal family.

All well and good. In a constitutional democracy, these demands should not conflict with the role of a true constitutional monarch. But then again, take a look at the other points in the agenda. Nowhere do I see a specific plan to address the grievances of Nepal’s vast poor and excluded communities. In other words, the points dealing with exclusion is couched in vague language that can easily be abused, or worse, forgotten.

How do the parties aim to deal with women’s issues? By introducing “special laws and programs” to uplift women’s lot. How do they plan to uplift the lot of the dalits and other excluded and marginalized groups? By implementing a “special system.” What does the agenda say about addressing ethnic, regional and other grievances? By introducing “special laws and programs.”

Of the 18 points in the agenda, the ones dealing with the monarchy and the Royal Nepal Army are specific in their goals. But at least eight points which seek to address socio-economic issues such as exclusion, corruption control etc., are vaguely dealt with by “special programs.” If not special program then it is a special scheme, special plan, special policy, special law, effective policy etc., etc.,—nothing the parties haven’t said umpteen times before in their party documents and manifestoes.

Since this agenda was drawn nearly a year ago, it could be that the parties may have put the task of refining them for later. But not only that it hasn’t happened yet, there’s no talk about it at all. In my discussions with party stalwarts, I want to hear about the specifics. Most can’t tell. The ones who can seem to think it’s a pointless exercise because exclusion, per se, doesn’t exist. “It’s all the handiwork of social scientists and journalists,” one senior leader even accused.

With a mind-set like this, is there any guarantee that our politicians won’t forget the important issues that matter once they win back power? This is a troubling question because the parties have not given us reasons to think otherwise. Witness their public squabbles over who becomes prime minister. And that too, when they are supposedly united against a resurgent monarchy.

Thankfully, the vast majority of party workers in the lower ranks, those who are connected to their villages and communities, do realize the problems. In my travels to some districts in recent weeks, I have come across plenty of party functionaries who know exactly why voters today feel a disconnect with the parties. But unfortunately, these men and women are way down in the

pecking order, and they have next to no influence on the leadership.

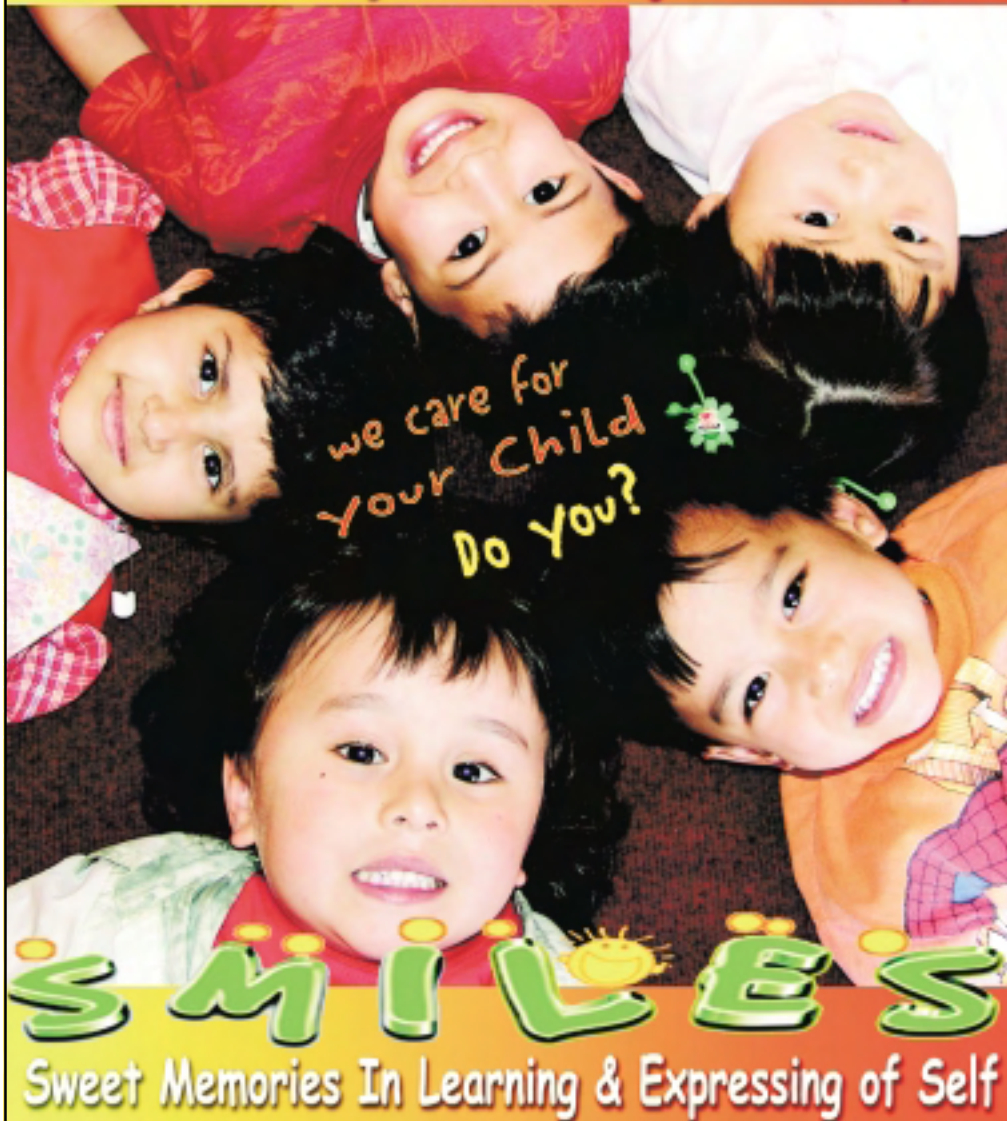
If the parties are serious about finding why there has not been an enthusiastic response to their anti-regression movement, they ought to listen to their own grassroots. And they will know why vague-sounding “special schemes” and “special programmes” emanating out of party offices in Kathmandu fail to cut ice with the people. **N**

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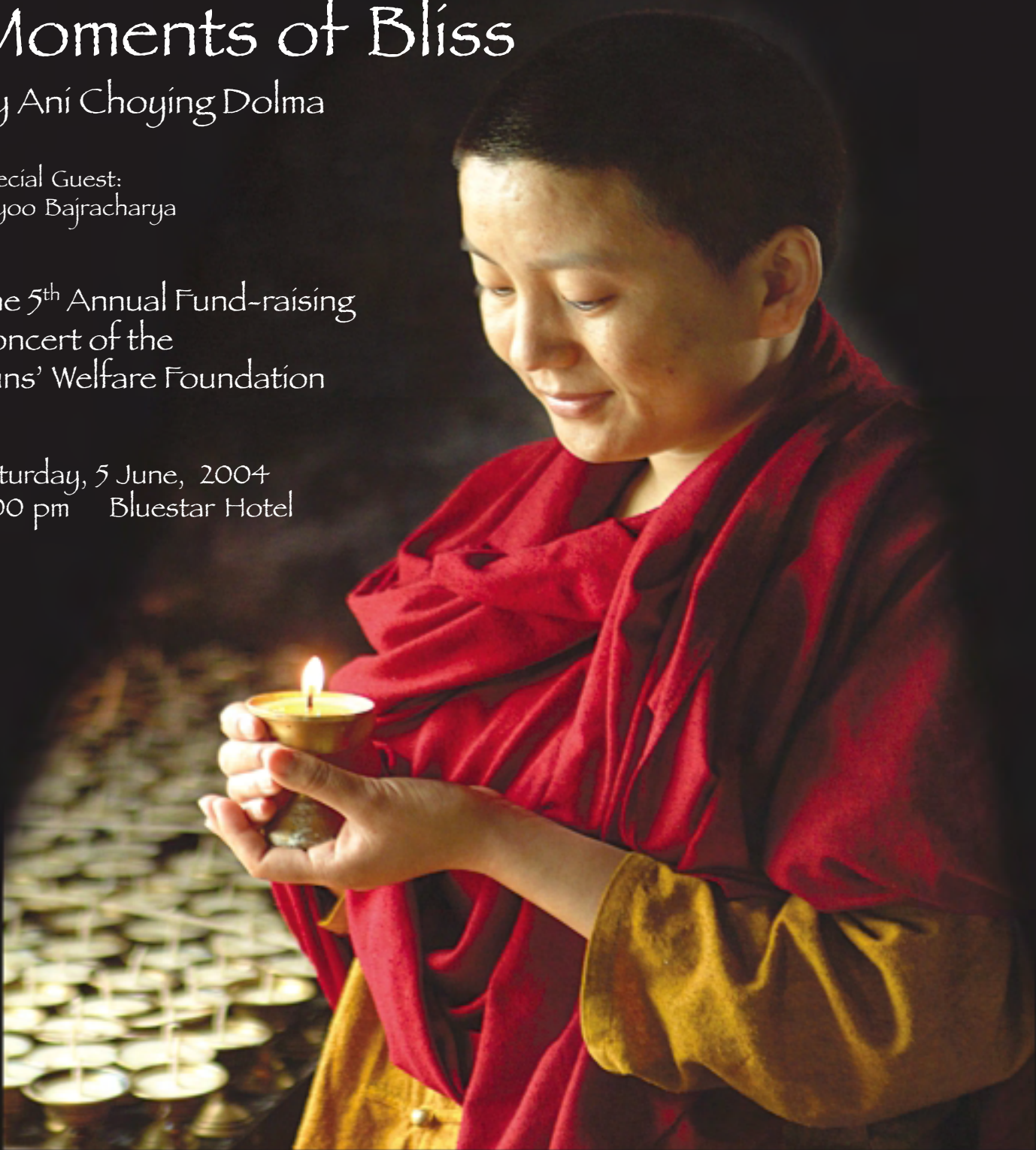
# Moments of Bliss

By Ani Choying Dolma

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## Mayor quits

After keeping everybody guessing, Mayor Keshav Sthapit finally resigned, and with him went 35 ward chairmen of the city. Sthapit said the city officials were repeatedly asked by the Maoist leaders to quit to make way for a “political solution.” The tough-talking mayor had for a long time defied the Maoist pressure tactics but his aides said the potential threat to his life took a toll on the Mayor’s determination. The Maoists have already made assassination bids on two high-profile city mayors. The Butwal city chief survived but the Birgunj Mayor, Gopal Giri, didn’t. Sthapit’s resignation came on the heels of that of Lalitpur Mayor Buddhiraj Bajracharya.

## Border security

Nepal and China agreed to spruce up border security but they are still some time away from an extradition agreement. It has been re-

ported that the Maoists have used Chinese pistols. The two governments also agreed that the criminals—whether Chinese and Nepali—would be under the legal purview of the country of arrest. A similar meeting was held in 2000.

## Plane crash

A Lukla-bound Yeti Airlines Twin Otter crashed on Tuesday. All three crew members died in the ill-fated cargo flight (9N-AFP). Bodies of captain Prakash Shrivastav, co-pilot Ravi Gurung and steward Nawang Sherpa were later recovered. Initial investigations showed that poor weather conditions caused the accident but the government has formed a fact-finding team to investigate the crash, Yeti Airlines’ first. It is the 25<sup>th</sup> Nepali plane to crash—13<sup>th</sup> to hit a mountain.

## Silver for Renuka

Nepal’s taekwondo star Renuka Thapa Magar won a



STARRY-EYED: Priyanka Basnet (L) took the crown at the Lux Beauty Star Contest. Suchitra Acharya was voted runner-up

silver at the 16<sup>th</sup> Asian Taekwondo Championship held in South Korea. A gold medalist at the South Asian Games in Islamabad in April, Renuka went on to beat China, Jordan and Australia before losing to Lebanon in the final round.

## Press ambush

Kanya Ras Gurung, the driver of the vehicle that was carrying Annapurna Post to Pokhara from Kathmandu, died when the vehicle fell into a Maoist ambush near Damauli. Another passenger was injured in the incident. The Maoists attack came on the second day of their two-day banda in the Gandak Region. They were protesting what they call the killing of their leader Rajbikram Bhurtel.

## It’s not regression

The Nepal Samata Youth Council, the youth wing of the Samata party headed by former minister Narayan Singh Pun, said the October 4 move is not regression as termed by the protesting parties. “It is just that the parties and the King have to come to an agreement,” said the Council’s president Sukumar Lopchan. Pun, formerly an Army colonel who went on to join the Nepali Congress be-

fore he started his own party, has claimed recently that he could resolve the Maoist insurgency if given another chance. Pun had brokered the last government-Maoist peace talks.

## Unfriendly fire

The Army shot at a police vehicle (of SSP Man Bahadur Rawal) when it entered the Kathmandu airport to drop off the police official’s luggage. The Army maintains it resorted to firing when the vehicle evaded security barricades. The police say the Army was informed of the vehicle’s arrival well in advance. An Army press release later said the driver was at large but Head Constable Som Bhujel said he was very much around and available to face questions, which he said hadn’t come his way. The Himalayan Times reported that another Armed Police Force officer’s vehicle was held at the airport by the Army for evading security checks.



## Leaving behind a legacy



Film director Prakash Thapa passed away at the age of 73, leaving behind a rich collection of his movies such as “Man Ko Baandh,” “Sindoor” and “Jiwanrekha.” Thapa also acted in a number of Hindi movies

with top Indian actors—Jitendra and Amitabh Bachchan. The last time he made a media appearance, Thapa had said he wanted to make a movie on Baadi women who are forced into prostitution by family traditions.

### Government's boycott

The faction within the Rastriya Prajatantra Party now in government under outgoing Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa decided to stay away from festivities organized by the RPP. The party's other luminaries, however, attended the function organized on May 28 to mark RPP's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which was held at the party office in Naxal. Also present at the function were leaders of the five-party alliance as well as Speaker Taranath Ranabhat, who is rumored to be a prime ministerial candidate. Relations between the government and its own party grew worse during the first week of May after the party central committee decided to take to the streets demanding the resignation of its own prime minister.

### Chinese interest

Chinese Ambassador Sun Heping hinted that China would not be averse to the idea of joining SAARC should the member-countries welcome the trans-Himalayan neighbor. Heping said China was interested in contributing to the economic development of the SAARC region. Already, the Chinese are said to have received a nod of approval from Nepal and Pakistan. It remains to be seen how India, the most powerful member in the regional grouping, reacts to the news.

### Maoists conduct

The National Human Rights Commission came out with a 13-point code-of-conduct for the Maoists, calling for immediate cessation of attacks on civilians, destructions of infrastructures and child recruitment. The Commission said it had to make the code of



conduct public through the press since it doesn't have contact with the Maoists. Commission Chairman Nayan Bahadur Khatri didn't spare the government either. He said the Royal Nepal Army hasn't been transparent in its probes of Army personnel guilty of abuses, and pointed out the case of Rajiv Shrestha, who was shot to death by an army personnel in a road rage. Khatri said the case should be handed over to a civilian court.

### Poor results

Despite all the talk about bringing Nepal's education standards up to a respectable standard, SLC results, the true litmus test to measure educational successes, have

again come up dismal. According to the Regional Education Directorate, the national average for students passing the SLC in government schools still stands at around 30 percent. As for accountability, the buck's being passed around in circles. The students blame the teachers, the teachers blame the management and the larger system, the educationists blames the government and the government is nowhere nearer to setting things right: over 200,000 government school students fail every year.

### Week in politics

May 23: Five-parties resume their consultations at NC President Girija Prasad

Koirala's residence; May 24: CPN (UML) renews call to name its chief Madhav Kumar Nepal as new prime minister; May 25: The King meets RPP President Pashupati Shumsher Rana for the second time after Prime Minister Thapa's resignation; Nepali Congress leader Ram Sharan Mahat goes public in saying five parties should reconsider Nepal's name as next prime minister; May 26: Parties, including UML, bury their differences over the question of new prime minister. UML says King Gyanendra should correct October 4 first; May 27: King meets Speaker Taranath Ranabhat at Narayanhiti; Ranabhat says he is ready to become prime minister if offered but would not give up his post as Speaker. He adds the parties do not have a "consensus," and that has given rise to this political stalemate; May 28: NC, UML Chiefs ask Ranabhat not to play spoilsport; May 29: Five-parties announce additional schedule for street protests.



Yeti Airlines pilots prepare for landing at Kathmandu airport last Tuesday, at about the same time when another Yeti Airliner crashed near Lukla

**More airlines**

Philippine Airlines and Bangkok-based Phuket Air want to start their operations in Kathmandu. They said as much to the visiting Nepali team comprising officials from Nepal Tourism Board and Ministry of Tourism who were touring South-East Asia. Philippine Airlines has proposed operations along the Manila-Delhi-Kathmandu route and Phuket Air the Bangkok-Kathmandu route, which has been served well by the more illustrious Thai Airways. "The initiative was taken because the national flag carrier, RNAC has failed to cater to a large number of tourists who want to visit Nepal," Kantipur quotes a government official as saying. According to a recent air service agreement between Nepal and Thailand, Thai airline companies can run up to 22 Bangkok-Kathmandu-Bangkok flights a week.

**Contribution for cancer**

Here's something for a social cause. Photo Concern and Kodak are setting examples: they have jointly donated Rs. 700,000 to the Nepal Cancer Relief Society, which was preceded by another



major contribution—of Rs. 500,000. Since early May, Photo Concern has levied Rs. 2 on every roll developed and printed there to contribute towards their efforts.

**Harvesting herbs**

Residents of Mugu stepped into their fields this season to collect the herbal plant, *yarsa gumba* that grows in abundance in the district. The harvest work will continue till mid-August. The residents of Karnali make up to Rs. 50,000-60,000 for each kilo of the herb, which is both exported and used inside the country for medicinal purposes, according to Nepal Samacharpatra.

**Income increase**

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal's per capita income is primed to go up from last year's Rs. 18,799 to Rs. 20,002 this year. It is said that the growth in foreign employment and the sharp decline of the dollar value are the main rea-

sons for this increase. Nepal gets more than \$1 billion every year from remittances—and that influx has been growing at an annual rate of 30 percent. The bureau also says that the economy will grow by 3.64 per cent this year, a scaled down figure from Nepal Rastra Bank's projections of 4.5 percent.

**Another round**

Himalayan Distillery Limited will soon be rolling out their latest product for the markets, a triple distilled grain gin—"Ultimate Nepal." The gin is made by distilling cereals together with juniper berries, coriander seeds, and orange and lemon peels.

**semiT nayalamiH ehT gnidaer evol I**

**Most people read their newspaper from the back**

**to the front. If you are one of them then don't**

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**end - front or back.**

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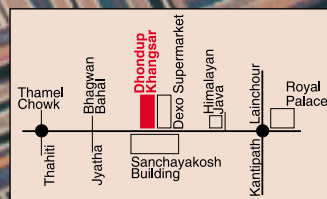
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Capt. Jim Gallagher



# THE UNKNOWN SOLDIERS

Britain's decision to compensate Gurkha veterans who suffered at the hands of the Japanese during World War II was long overdue. Still, the decision came a bit too late

**BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI**

**T**he British Embassy in Lazimpat is unusually busy at one end of its newly opened wing for the former Gurkhas. The office for the Far East Prisoners of War (FEPOW) is currently collecting applications from the veterans who were held prisoners by the Japanese during World War II.

"Many of the veterans, who are in their 80s and who survived the war, can be seen here mostly between 9 to 11 o'clock in the mornings," says Mitra Pariyar, political officer at the Embassy. The office, which opens at 9 a.m. and remains open till 4 p.m., has been distributing claim forms in person and through e-mails.

All successful applicants will receive 10,000 pounds in compensation the Tony Blair government promised for the war veterans in November 2000. Interestingly, the Nepali Gurkhas were included in the scheme only in November 2003, following a ruling by the British court that asked its government to compensate the deserving Nepalis.

It was a gesture that was long overdue. Most Gurkhas who were in Japanese captivity in Burma and Singapore had to put up with horrendous beating, starvation and even execution. Many others were pushed into forced labor.

Still, for many veterans, who are no more, and to many others who didn't survive the Japanese atrocities, the decision didn't do anything. The death rates in Japanese camps in World War II were as high as 27 percent as against four percent in the allied camps, according to an Associated Press report filed in 2000 after the compensation scheme was announced.



"This decision came a bit too late," says Mahendra Lal Rai, secretary of Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen Organization (GAESO), which filed a lawsuit against the British government in a London court in August 2002 on behalf of

three former Gurkhas—Pahalman Gurung, 82, Gaurisor Thapa, 83, and Hukumsing Pun, 85—who were held prisoners-of-war by the Japanese. The

GAESO lawsuit in 2002 was instrumental in getting the Gurkhas their dues through the 2003 court ruling.

Gurkha recruitment began in 1815 and peaked during the World Wars. In World War II, 255,000 Gurkhas fought for Britain, according to GAESO. The total number of Gurkha casualties in the two world wars stand at anywhere between 60,000 to 70,000.

“The war happened more than 57 years ago and many of those deserving Gurkhas have already died,” adds Rai. The GAESO claims when it filed the London suit in 2002, it listed over 900 contacts of those who had been held as captives during World War II. Its records show around 3,000 Gurkhas were held in prison by the Japanese and that nearly half of them had died in captivity.

The British Embassy, however, estimates the figure could be much lower—around 350.

“Gurkha Welfare Centers across the country are receiving applications,” says British Embassy official, Pariyar, in reference to the interest the scheme has generated among the Gurkha veterans. “In case the applicants are unable to travel, a living relative can make the registration on behalf of the applicant.”

## According to historians the total number of Gurkha casualties in the two world wars stand at anywhere between 60,000 to 70,000



BATTLE ROYALE: GAESO officials with their lawyer outside the London High Court

## All Work And No Pay

**M**aj. N. B. Chhetri, 83, is one of few surviving Gurkha soldiers who fought in the frontlines in Burma in World War II. But sadly, he says, his loyal service to the British Empire hasn't served him right after his retirement. After 24 years of service, Maj. Chhetri returned to Nepal in 1965. He says he hasn't been paid his pension till now—for 34 years.

The reason: he was part of the three Gurkha battalions that were left behind in newly independent Burma in 1947 to take over “internal security” from the al-



Maj. N. B. Chhetri

lied forces and to train Burmese soldiers. Though all his paper work was complete, he

was later to learn that the British had handed over Gurkhas like him to Burma.

“I regularly corresponded with Burmese authorities for 12 years after my retirement,” says Chhetri. “All they said was that as per existing rules they could not pay me in hard currency and that the money could not be paid outside their country. I was promised pension transfer during my retirement. Even the British and Indian authorities ignored the issue saying I was supposed to request my own government...” **N**

A committee under a British officer, and comprising both British officers and former Nepali Gurkhas, has been assigned to the Far Easter Prisoners of War office. The payments will be made directly to the applicant's bank account by the British government's Veteran's Agency on behalf of the Britain's Ministry of Defense after verification.

But there are strings attached to the compensation package.

The scheme is applicable only to those war veterans who were Nepali citizens when a peace treaty was signed between Japan and Britain in 1951. And even though a soldier's widow or an immediate successor can lay claim to the 2000 Ex-Gratia Far East Prisoner of War Scheme in case of the death of the war veteran, the veteran or the widow should have been living in 2000, the year Britain announced the compensation scheme.

“It (the compensation to Gurkhas) is another illustration of the high regard in which both the government and the people of the UK hold the Gurkha soldier,” said the British Ambassador in Kathmandu, Keith Bloomfield, through a statement after the 2002 court ruling that went in favor of the Gurkhas. Before that, Britain used to maintain that the Gurkhas were not eligible for compensations as their regiments were part of the Indian Army during World War II.

The British Army currently has nearly 3,600 Gurkhas who in recent years have served in Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Iraq.

In May 2002, GAESO filed another case of discrimination in the British High Court. But a February 2003 hearing didn't exactly turn out in favor of the 30,000 ex-servicemen the GAESO said were affected by what it calls Britain's discriminatory pension scheme.

“We are re-appealing the case,” says Rai of GAESO. “In case of the POWs, it took more than 50 years for the Court to decide in our favor. At least this (the demand for pension parity) should come early.” **N**

# A Divided HOUSE

Three years after his ascent to throne, King Gyanendra's supporters seem to harbor the belief that the monarchy is the only unifying force. But that is not how the Maoists and increasingly the parties view the situation



REACHING OUT: The King and the parties (below)

BY AKHILESH UPADHYAY

**A**T a press conference that marked its fourth anniversary last week, the National Human Rights Commission offered a laundry list of rights abuses committed by both the security forces and Maoists. It also issued a chilling reminder that the state presence in a number of districts is limited to the headquarters, and that the rights of those living outside urban centers are in peril.

This is nothing new to those who have traveled outside Kathmandu's relative safety, to the rural districts and hinterlands where the conflict has been raging for years. That Nepal is no longer a peaceful country is not in doubt any more, but it is only now that Nepalis have begun to realize the extent of the conflict's costs: Nepal is the most violent country in Asia. Amnesty International says Nepal in the last one year has recorded the most number of disappearances in the world.

How did it come to this? How did a low-intensity insurgency suddenly grip the nation's jugular? There is no clear answer to this question, but a cursory look at events over the last few years shows that rights abuses and violence grew exponentially after emergency rule was imposed in November 2001. It then jumped by leaps and bounds under two

governments appointed by King Gyanendra, though a surprise ceasefire last year led to near-cessation of hostilities for seven months. During that period, a two-way conflict turned into a three-way affair, with the government fighting on two fronts: with the Maoists and the parties.

Today, many view Nepal has a pariah state where a resurgent monarchy seemingly continues to focus single-mindedly on winning back most of the powers it lost in April 1990. That single-mindedness has come at a price for the nation. The impunity which has led to most rights abuses comes not just from our culture.

This brings us to a key issue: what is the standing of the monarchy today? The question is relevant, for this week marks the third anniversary of King Birendra's murder, along with that of his entire family, by the then Crown Prince Dipendra.

It is no secret how the monarch himself sees the monarchy, however. King Gyanendra and his supporters seem to harbor the belief that the monarchy is the only unifying force in this diverse land, and that it is the only institution that can right the present situation. But that is not how the Maoists

and increasingly the political parties approach the problem.

"As much as the monarchy sees itself as the saving grace of today's Nepal, the fact is it has lost much of its shine in the last three years precisely because it sees itself as the sole savior," says Hari Sharma, a Cornell graduate, who was the principal secretary at the prime minister's office (PMO) during Girija Prasad Koirala's tenure. "This has polarized society like never before. As much as the Maoist rebellion, it is the role of the monarchy that is being hotly debated today across Nepal."

The Royal Massacre, Sharma argues, forced Nepalis into revisiting the monarchy and question age-old text-book claims that the monarchy has been Nepal's most

stable political institution. If anything, since the days of the Great Prithvi Narayan Shah, monarchy has remained an extremely volatile institution marked by court intrigues and a number of massacres, he says. "The monarchy on the whole

doesn't have a particularly dazzling history of stability. The recent Royal Massacre is a case in point."

King Gyanendra's October 4 move and subsequent actions is an attempt to point at the monarchy's glorious past that

**Maoists brought the issue of the monarchy to the realm of public debate**



DOI

doesn't exist, he argues. "While such tactics worked well in the Panchayat days, they are looked at more and more skeptically now in Nepal which has changed drastically in the last 10 years or so."

There is a certain degree of truth in this observation.

The reason that the Maoists want a constituent assembly and the parties want to push their 18-point agenda (which basically wants to bring the monarchy under a set of guidelines) is because they view the role of the monarchy in its active form as anachronistic and that seems to resonate with the public. Right across the political spectrum (except with the pro-RPP groups), republicanism was the buzzword during the college elections in February.

But it may be unfair to pin the blame solely on King Gyanendra. Even before he ascended to the throne in June 2001, the Maoists had already brought the issue of the monarchy to the realm of public debate. But the political parties, the bulwark against creeping republicanism, stood firm in their belief in a constitutional monarchy. Things changed in a hurry after the King took over executive powers.

The combination of an ambitious King, a short-sighted prime minister (Sher Bahadur Deuba), and an over-eager Royal Nepal Army kicking its heels



SS/MI

to avenge defeat at the Maoist hands in Dang, opened the path to today's deep polarization. In the end, Deuba managed to dissolve the Parliament and split his own Nepali Congress party over the question of military action against the Maoists—before he was unceremoniously dumped by the monarch.

The slide since has been swift and precipitous. A constitutional monarch who is supposed to act only on the advice of the cabinet has assumed full powers. The parties, who once served as the monarchy's shield, have as a result become its most vociferous critics. The initial divide created by the Maoists was made complete when the King, in July 2003, refused to reconcile with the parties by putting in office yet another hand-picked government—of Surya Bahadur Thapa.

Whatever the daily spin in the media, the question of sovereignty lies at the heart of the current standoff between the King and the parties. That the King has refused to call the parties to form a new government three weeks after his last nominee resigned speaks

volumes. "The political parties will have to be brought into the fold," says Padmaratna Tuladhar, a left leaning intellectual and a former lawmaker. "Sooner the better."

Interestingly, the divide so evident in Nepal's polity today is not just limited to the political parties, the monarchy and the Maoists. Even the civil society seems polarized. The NGO sector and a large section of the private media are at loggerheads with the post-October 4 regime. Even during the emergency period in 2001-02, the polarization wasn't this deep: the political parties, human rights workers

and the media did look at each other skeptically but still enjoyed some kinship. With all its flaws, Sher Bahadur Deuba's government was still the people's government.

This polarization hasn't spared Nepal's powerful donors either. At the biennial Nepal Development Forum last month, the United States sided with the government while the Europeans and the United Nations came out openly in favor of the parties.

Does it all mean that Nepal is gradually turning into a failing state where the state has little legitimacy or control? Parallels can be drawn with Colombia, another deeply polarized country which has been wracked by insurgency. The South American nation has seen an average of more than 25,000 deaths each year and two million refugees have fled their homes. According to Latin American scholars, Eduardo Pizarro and Ana Maria Bjarano, massacres are carried out by both extreme left-wing groups or by criminal groups of the extreme right. Nepal isn't very far behind. In the last eight years, 10,000 people have died—2,500 of them since the ceasefire collapsed last year. One estimate puts the displaced population to close to half a million and Kathmandu's crowded streets tell a sad story.

"This downward spiral will continue as long as there is an attempt to undermine popular forces," says Sharma. "I fear things are going to get far worse before they start getting any better." **N**

IM/SS

After the imposition of Panchayat, media owned by the government were turned into the service of the regime. If today they are busy eulogizing the post-4 October 2002 'constructive dispensation' of our current leadership, then we need not be surprised

BY PRATYOUSH ONTA

When King Gyanendra's minister Kamal Thapa was admonishing our media not too long ago for being "too sympathetic towards the Maoists and too critical of the government," I was reading about how the Panchayat government had dealt with the media in the early 1960s.

After King Mahendra usurped all political control from the hands of the elected representatives of the people in 1960, he set out to control the available means of communication and establish offices that could be used to disseminate government messages favorable to his regime and censor items that could damage its interests. Private Nepali newspapers and their editors who were critical of the King's regime were variously punished. During 1961, several newspapers such as Dainik Nepal, Kalpana, Samaj, Halkhabar and Swatantra Samachar were banned for various periods of time. Correspondents from some foreign newspapers were thrown out of Nepal and foreign newspapers were subject to censorship (from November 1961) before they were allowed to be sold in Kathmandu. In 1962, two independent news agencies were nationalized and merged into one to form the government-controlled agency, Rastriya Samachar Samiti.

According to a study published by the political scientist Lok Raj Baral in Contributions to Nepalese Studies in 1975, King Mahendra's ministers asked the press to be "useful" and avoid "unhelpful" criticisms of the government (in

# THE PANCHAYAT MEDIA

other words, be “constructive”). Since too many small newspapers in existence purveyed “confusion and controversies,” Minister Vishwabandhu Thapa suggested in early 1961 that there was no need for many newspapers in Nepal. He invited the editors of the dailies published from Kathmandu and told them that the government wanted to start a “standard” newspaper. He told them that the government would own majority shares in this new newspaper and asked them to buy some percentage of the remaining ownership. The threat of closure of their newspapers was explicit but the editors refused to comply with the government’s request. Subsequently, private newspapers were subject to censorship by a government authority before being sold in the market.

In 1962, King Mahendra promulgated the constitution of what was called “Partyless Panchayat Democracy.” Arguing that multi-party politics was not “suited to the soil of Nepal,” the Panchayat system tried to project the monarchy as the sole institution that could ‘unify’ all Nepalis and rally them to the cause of the development of the country. Sovereignty of Nepal was vested not with the people of Nepal but with the monarch. The Panchayat Constitution conceived of a multi-tier political set-up. It put village communities (panchayats) at the bottom of this system, showcasing this feature as the proof of the decentralization of power, and deployed notions of community-led mobilization as being central to the system’s political logic.

The Panchayat Constitution committed itself “to end all forms of exploitation—social, political or economic—through class co-ordination and harmony.” It guaranteed freedom of speech and expression and the freedom to assemble peacefully and without arms but it did not guarantee the right to form unions and association (this was later included after the first amendment in 1967). Political parties were ruled out by the preamble of the constitution. Several restrictions were also placed on the exer-



cise of fundamental rights for the “sake of public good.”

A new Press and Publication Act was brought into existence in 1963. Its Article 30 stated: “His Majesty’s Government may issue an order directing the suspension of any news, criticism, or publication in case it is deemed reasonable to do so in the public interest. No appeal or complaint shall be entertained against such order.” According to Baral, this section was described by some sections of the oppositional press “as a screen for all evils, notably the growing list of power, anti-popular measures, corruption and so on.” As the relationship between the Panchayat government and journalists

working for oppositional newspapers became increasingly strained, the former tried to impose a “code of conduct” on the journalists to tame them and bring them “in line with the Principles of the Panchayat System.” According to late L.S. Baral, a political historian and critic who has published an article on the subject in

International Studies in 1974, many private sector newspapers survived by printing “monotonous eulogies of every official policy and every action of the King on every conceivable occasion.”

After the imposition of Panchayat System, media owned by the government such as the newspaper, Gorkhapatra and the only radio station in Nepal, Radio Nepal were turned into the service of the regime. Gorkhapatra (which was erstwhile being published only three

times a week) was converted into a big-size daily from February 1961. According to L.S. Baral, its bigger size and eight pages allowed more room for official propaganda. Since the state’s notices and advertisements were published mostly in this newspaper, its circulation was also artificially propped up.

To try to showcase to the international community both how ‘indigenously democratic’ the Panchayat System was and how much progress Nepal was

making under it, the government started two publications in English in the mid-1960s. In October 1964, the Panchayat government started a weekly magazine called The Nepalese Perspective, whose editors were some of the biggest apologists for the system. Its founding editor-in-chief was Dr Mohammad Mohsin, the foreign and economic editor was Mr Pashupati SJB Rana, and the copy editor was Mr T. R. Tuladhar. Mohsin and Rana used the pages of the weekly to elaborate on various aspects of the Panchayat system. After they graduated to become larger philosophers of the Panchayat System, The Nepalese Perspective was subsequently edited by Mr Tuladhar and later by Barun Shumsher Rana. In late 1965, the government started an English daily, The Rising Nepal. These two periodicals along with dozens of other booklets published in English by the publicity department of the Panchayat government sold the System’s ‘partyless’ and ‘exploitation-less’ image to the international community.

Given the high illiteracy rate of the population and the difficulties of transporting newspapers over an unforgiving terrain, Radio Nepal, was by far the more attractive among the media used by the Panchayat state for its own purposes. It was used to serve both the state’s ideological needs and its nation-building imperatives. On the one hand, gate-keeping practices that were consistent with the ideological underpinnings of the Panchayat regime meant that only programs consistent with the overall ideological cultural matrix of the Panchayat regime were broadcast and only Nepali language was allowed over Radio Nepal

**The government newspaper’s circulation was artificially propped up**

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after 1965 in its current affairs and educational programming. News broadcast in Hindi and Newari was stopped. The policing of the Panchayat-inspired Nepali identity also influenced its entertainment programs, where even though songs in other languages of Nepal, and in Hindi and English were broadcast, in the main only certain kinds of music and songs were promoted in the name of serving Nepalipani. On the other hand, as part of what the Panchayat propagandist T.B. Khatri has called its role in “arousing development consciousness among the masses,” Radio Nepal broadcast programs related to farming, education, family planning, health and a whole host of other development themes.

In the six-month period after the disbanding of multiparty democracy in December 1960, Radio Nepal dedicated much of its politically ‘educational’ airtime to rubbishing the multiparty democratic experiments of the 1950s and rationalizing King Mahendra’s coup. It broadcast many essays by well-known writers highlighting the failure of the many political experiments of the 1950s and justified the ending of multiparty democracy in the name of saving the country. Words used by King Mahendra to describe the characteristic of the incoming political system—*adharbhut prajatantra* (Basic Democracy) and *des suhaundo prajatantra* (democracy suitable to the country)—had already found their way into these writings. King Mahendra’s leadership in “every facet of Nepali life” was cherished in several items broadcast during this period. Others eulogized the poet Ma. Bi. Bi. Shah (pen name of King Mahendra) through a reading of poems published in his collection, “Usaiko Lagi.”

During 1961-62, many essays were broadcast on the theme of Nepali nationalism as expressed in the fields of literature, art and culture. Other essays were dedicated to elaborations of Panchayat democracy. During 1962-63, as can be expected following the promulgation of the Panchayat Constitu-

tion, much of the political broadcasting was dedicated to elaborations of different aspects of the Panchayat System. According to a report filed by the then director of Radio Nepal, during the one-year period after 20 Chait 1962 B.S. (mid-March 1962), Radio Nepal broadcast 558 interviews or discussions related to Panchayat Philosophy, Panchayat System, its class organizations and other contemporary topics. It also broadcast 46 radio plays related to Panchayat and 225 new *rastriya* (national) songs, among other items. To celebrate King Mahendra’s 43<sup>rd</sup>

birthday (29 Jeth 1919 B.S.), Radio Nepal put up a musical called *Nepalko Phulbari* (written and directed by Janardan Sama, son of the Balkrishna Sama) and a live seminar on the ‘Grand Personality of Shree 5 Mahendra.’ The proceedings of this seminar were later published as a book. To celebrate the Queen’s birthday, it broadcast a radio play called ‘The Commitment of the Pancha.’

During 1963-64, the trend to focus on elaborations of the Panchayat system, of the leadership and the benevolence of the monarch, and of nationalism continued. Indications of the more severe policing of the Nepali-language based national identity and culture are to be found in the items broadcast during this year and this particular trend seemed to get further emphasized in the later years of the decade. Direct elaborations of Panchayat philosophy seemed to decrease in number as the decade wore off, reflecting perhaps the gradual strengthening of the Panchayat state apparatus.

In the development front, in the two-year period after the demolition of multiparty democracy, the East-West Highway became one of the main *bikas* items of discussion and elaboration over Radio Nepal. Several commentators focused on this theme

## The East-West Highway became one of the main *bikas* items of discussion

as a proof of King Mahendra’s commitment toward improving the economic conditions of Nepalis, not forgetting to emphasize that elevated levels of intercourse between people from various parts of the country that the road will make possible will contribute to a robust feeling of Nepaliness and national integration. In the later years of the decade, community development, education, tourism, land reforms, and industries were some of the themes of programs broadcast over Radio Nepal. Some other programs focused on administrative decentralization and on Panchayat themes such as the Back-to-the-Village National Campaign.

To sum up then, the government-controlled media’s message in the 1960s was clear: developing Nepal is only possible via the Panchayat System and the Pancha as citizen was the ideal agent for the social transformation of Nepali society. And those Nepalis who refused to become Panchas were condemned as *arastriya tatyas*, anti-national elements. Oppositional media was continuously harassed with censorship, cancellation of registration of newspapers and the seizure of printed materials and press hardware.

If today’s Gorkhapatra, The Rising Nepal, and Radio Nepal are busy eulogizing the post-4 October 2002 ‘constructive dispensation’ of our current leadership, then we need not be surprised. As far as the independent media’s *ateripan* of the diktats emerging from this dispensation is concerned, I am sure its ministers wish they were ruling Nepal of the early 1960s. **N**



# THE CABLE GUYS

Four young entrepreneurs will be launching their dream business project—cable Internet service—the first of its kind in the country

**BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI**

**T**he front office at SUBISU Cable Television Network in Baluwater looks relatively busy in the evenings, when people elsewhere usually leave for home.

“What’s wrong, we haven’t received any complaints yet,” says a cable technician sitting beside the phone and channel surfing on the television set placed in the reception area. A few other technicians are sharing their day’s experiences in the garden outside, where rolls of cables are twined around huge spindles beside four dish antennas.

Upstairs in a room, SUBISU’s four big bosses, seated in between the computers and peripheral devices, discuss the launch of their dream business project—cable Internet service. If launched as planned this week, the service will be the first of its kind in the country. The cost for SUBISU’s net services will be Rs. 2,400 per month for a single-computer user, who’ll be able get TV channels and a connection to the Internet through the same cable. Along with SUBISU, there are two other cable operators, Space Time Network and another company in Pokhara, that have been granted licenses to relay the Internet over their cable lines. But SUBISU is expecting to be the first market entrant.

“It is four and a half years of research bearing fruit,” says Sudhir Parajuli, Chief Executive Officer of SUBISU Cablenet, who teamed up with his friends, Binaya Man Saud, Surendra Shrestha and Amit Thapa Chhetri

to start the company. All of them are in their early 30’s. Three of them, Saud, Shrestha and Chhetri are childhood buddies who have been together since their primary school days at St. Xavier’s, Godavari. Other than Shrestha, who opted for the commerce stream in his Bachelors level, the two others went on to study electrical engineering degrees in Bangalore, where they met Parajuli.

“We had never thought of starting up with cable television back in the first place,” says Binaya Saud, who along with

Parajuli looks after the company’s marketing and public relations. The company took up cable television in January 2001, only after Nepal Telecom Authority refused their first proposal, in 2000, to start a cable Internet service because the government did not have any policies outlined regarding cable Internet. Back then cable Internet was still finding its footing around the world, and one rarely heard of the technology in Nepal. The network finally obtained the license on its third attempt in 2003. By then cable Internet technology had already become a household name globally.

“Nepalis who would browse the Internet in their offices back in 1999 were mostly above the age of 25,” says Amit who looks after operations. “Now more





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and more people below that age are entering the job market and literally swearing by the Internet. Back in college when we were studying electronics, cable Internet was hi-fi technology. We hardly got to see it for real," he adds.

The time couldn't be better for the launch of this new venture: the company ranks in the top three among the 25-something cable television providers in the country, and the cables to relay Internet information to its customers already exists. The network's reach extends up to Dhapasi-Basundhara in the north, Jyatha-Thamel-Darbharmarg in the south, Baudha and Chahabhil in the east, and Maipi-Gongabu-Balaju in the west. The company's next plan is to penetrate New Road, Teku and Patan.

Although users will have to make a one-time investment of Rs. 8,800 for a cable modem, they will not be saddled with extra telephone bills as is the case with dial-up deals. And even at its minimum speed of 64 kbps, cable is still much faster than conventional dial-up. For cable-Internet users who need more speed, the modem's bandwidth can be increased.

"Cable Internet is a better option than the wireless broadband service that some Internet service providers have started," says Sudhir. "This is because the cable modem is much cheaper; a wireless modem costs between Rs. 40-80,000. Besides, since the frequency of 2.4 or 5.8 giga hertz used by the wireless services is also shared by most other electronic utilities such as cordless phones, and the interference can be bothersome."

Even though the company hasn't advertised much, word has got around and SUBISU's telephone lines these days are clogged by inquisitive calls asking about their yet to be launched service. A few trial installations have already been made and the response, the young entrepreneurs at SUBISU say, is extremely positive so far.

"Our focus right from the start has been on quality," says Binaya, "but given the present demand (for cable net), we are afraid we might not be able to fulfill all of them. And that's our only fear." **N**

# INNER VISION

BY SUSHMA JOSHI

**A**t a time when leaders in Nepal seem to be groping for direction, there is a leader out there who sees very clearly where he's heading. Narbahadur Limbu, chairman of the Nepal Association for the Blind (NAB),

has a smile on his face as he says: "When there's a will, there's a way." Limbu wants to be the first blind man in Nepal to get a PhD. He's attempting this challenge, he says, not just because it would be an individual achievement for him, but because it is a visible first step for an entire community of people who remain unable to access education at the higher level.

"I am one of the blind who should not have been blind," says Limbu, a charismatic man with a soft smile. Limbu was born in a village in Terhathum in 1963. At the age of 7, he caught typhoid. "We did not even have cetamol in the village." Due to the high fever, he lost his eyesight. Then, two years later, he lost his widowed mother and became an orphan.

Destiny came in the form of the Queen Mother, Ratna Rajya Laxmi Shah, who came to visit Tehrathum when Limbu was 13. After the Pradhan Pancha presented the blind orphan to her, she took him under her wing. He started to attend the Khagendra Navajeevan Kendra, after which he joined Laboratory School. "There were no braille books when I was in school," says Limbu. "We used to write the texts in braille ourselves, and then type it on typewriters and print it out in lithos." In 1983, Limbu passed the SLC exams in the first division.

Only seven days after passing his exams, he got a job as a teacher at a newly opened school in Dhangadi. "Luck favored me," he says. Even though he started to teach, Limbu's odyssey as a student was not over. He did his intermediate studies from Kailali Campus, and then he took his BA exams privately from Kathmandu. At the age of 30, he joined Tribhuvan University to get his masters degree. "I had financial constraints, but some friends helped me to get the funds together, and I was finally able to attend." His thesis was on "The Rebellion of Bhimsen Panta - 2010". The title refers to a movement very similar to the Maoist movement conducted in Doti and Dadeldhura half a century ago, he says.



SS/MU

**MISSION POSSIBLE:**  
Narbahadur Limbu  
envisions a better future  
for the blind

The idea to get a PhD occurred to Limbu after he started running into many blind “doctors”—individuals holding doctorates—in India and other foreign countries. Limbu, who has traveled extensively in foreign countries, including Sweden, Australia, Thailand, Japan, Bahrain, UAE and others, says that the educational system and services are far advanced in these places, allowing them to be much more productive. “Education for the blind is very advanced in Japan and Sweden,” he says. “They have free computers and printers for the blind. Everything from living expenses to a stipend is paid for by the government.”

And now, says Limbu, his dream of getting a PhD might be coming true. “There are no books or databases on the educational history of people with disabilities in Nepal,” he says. That’s why he chose this topic and submitted it to Tribhuvan University as a potential research topic. Suraj Dahal, former president of the Society of Ex-Budanilkantha Students (SEBS), arranged a meeting with an American friend who contacted Erik Weißenmayer, the first blind man to climb Everest. Weißenmayer was strongly supportive of Limbu’s project, and has agreed to fund 50 percent of the cost towards his PhD.

Not all blind people in Nepal are as lucky. Of the more than 3.5 lakh blind and partially sighted people in Nepal, only 350 of them have passed their SLC; 49 have their bachelors degrees, and 18 of them have masters degrees. Of the 47,000 blind children of school-going age, only 1,900 are currently getting an education.

The director of NAB, Amrit Rai, sits on the threshold, counting braille books recently published by their press. “The Ministry of Education put out that tender for 4,000 books. We won the tender to publish them,” he says, as he places the books, bound in blue, inside sacks. A group of men and women gather around, putting the books together in piles. The pitifully inadequate number of books will be distributed to schools across the country. Schools with more than one blind student will have to share their resources.

But even the blind with an education have found that a degree does not necessarily lead to employment. In 1990, they

protested by laying down their SLC certificates on the grounds of Ratna Park. This protest led to 21 teaching positions to be put aside for the blind. “Currently, there are 90 teachers, and approximately 45 other people working in the non-profit sector,” says Rai. “This still leaves the rest of the 282 people with SLC qualifications without a job.”

The NAB advocates and lobbies for the blind in all sectors: education, employment and human rights. They also run schools, savings and credit groups, and rehabilitation programs in Dang and Chitwan. NAB is also involved in promoting the productive re-integration of the blind into society. “The software we have,” says Chana Shrestha, one of the instructors at the computer lab where the blind are taught new digital technology, “allows files typed into a floppy to be printed out in braille.” Dhruba Gyawali, a sighted software engineer based in Butwal, has already developed a software that changes Nepali writing to Braille. He is now at work on a speech-recognition software that will allow computers to recognize the Nepali language.

Harisharan Bista, project manager of the donor organization, Norwegian Association of the Blind, says: “The Maoists have never stopped our work. We go all over the country, and hold camps in many districts. They know what we do. They only go after an organization if they are corrupt and are exploiting funds.”

Besides lobbying for people with different disabilities, NAB has also been able to affect national policies. But for an organization that does high-level national level advocacy, it still remains resource-poor: it does not, for instance, have its own building. Although the government granted it some land in the past, the land has been mired in legal disputes and not yet released. “A building would

help to consolidate our women’s hostel, music training building and publishing press,” says Limbu. “Also, lots of our branches don’t have offices. But our first priority is to work like a union, and to unify the blind.”

Without a doubt, Limbu’s PhD program would help towards this goal. Tribhuvan University, which has yet to include people with disabilities in its programs, would have to start thinking about new ways to include differently-abled people. Unlike many people who decide



**READY TO GO:**  
Binding braille  
books for  
Nepal’s blind

to leave Nepal after higher education, Limbu has different plans. He has never wanted to remain behind in a foreign country, he says. “If I stayed behind, it would just benefit me as an individual. I work for common and collective rights. There is too much to do here.” With such a leader at the helm, the path towards integrating the blind in Nepal is straighter than any roadmap out there. **N**



# A LETTER TO SONIA

BY SWARNIM WAGLÉ

Sonia M. Gandhi, MP  
10 Janapath, New Delhi  
31 May 2004.

Dear Sonia,

Let me just say, that was the week that was. Someone remarked on your gesture being “Mahatma Gandhian in scope.” No family has resorted to destiny as frequently as ours to explain the inexplicable, so I know that you think I know why you did what you did. In fact, I do, and I also understand the force of your conviction that you poignantly requested your peers to grasp. Good biographers who spend years researching their subject end up admitting a quaint form of paranoia, where they feel that their subject’s ghost is living with them all the time. Judith Brown has said this about me, William Duiker about Ho Chi Minh, Robert Skidelsky about Maynard Keynes, David McCullough about John Adams, the list goes on. You’ve edited and published hundreds of my letters, and that alone makes our bond intimate in emotion as well as intellect.

But we, of course, never met. When you first saw Rajiv at that Greek restaurant in Cambridge, I’d already been dead for one year. As a dead man, it’s hard to

forget when one died. It was 27 May 1964. Don’t read too much into this, but your finest hour in politics coincides with the week when both Rajiv and I celebrated our birthdays in Heaven — it was my fortieth, and Rajiv’s thirteenth. Indira, though, is surprisingly no longer interested in politics. I have a feeling that this is because she has finally accepted three truths: i) Heaven is not India, ii) God is a democrat, and iii) Churchill will never quit the Chair of the Heaven Debating Club, the closest thing we have here to a raucous Lok Sabha. She has turned 20, and has just re-united with Feroze. “I will make it work this time,” she says, “second marriages are a triumph of hope over experience.”

I know you are too mature to be fazed by those doubts on your being less of an Indian just because you were born in Orbassano, and not Orissa. You’ve already given them the perfect answer. If it’s any comfort, I too was never spared such slurs. They used to say I was the last Englishman to rule India — that I was English by education, Muslim by culture, and Hindu by accident. I went on to run the continent for 17 straight years anyway. At the Harrow Old Boys Society, Winston still repeats his claim about India being no more a single nation than the Equator. But what people forget is that our country has always been much more than geography. As I wrote in *The*



The start of a dynasty



Lessons at home



The show must go on

All photos: “Rajiv” By Sonia Gandhi, Viking Penguin India

Discovery of India, it is the idea and the myth of India that is more important – “some kind of a dream of unity has occupied our mind since the dawn of the



civilization. That unity was not conceived as something imposed from outside, but it was deeper, and within its fold, the widest tolerance of belief and custom was practiced and every variety acknowledged and even encouraged.” Thus, when newspapers note that a Roman Catholic gave way for a Muslim President to swear in a Sikh Prime Minister to lead a nation of 800 million Hindus, I feel secure about the secular foundation I laid for India, its absolute strength to withstand petty sectarian assaults.

In chronicling Manmohan’s ascent, much has been written about the reforms he initiated in 1991. Many also now say that I led India on the wrong economic path after Independence. People forget that the economic corollary of political independence was a protectionist model of self-sufficiency. As a socialist of the Fabian kind, not Marxist, that was the right thing to do for a Lefty. Sure, if I knew those benign intentions would create a hideous License Raj that shackled our prospects for three long decades, I’d have acted differently. Thankfully Rajiv saw what his mother didn’t, and it is a mark of Manmohan’s intellectual honesty to credit reforms of the 80s for placing India on a path of high growth, before he opened up the economy in the 90s. Speaking of reforms with a “human face,” Manmohan also connects with the toiling masses who have put faith in you and the Congress yet again, against all

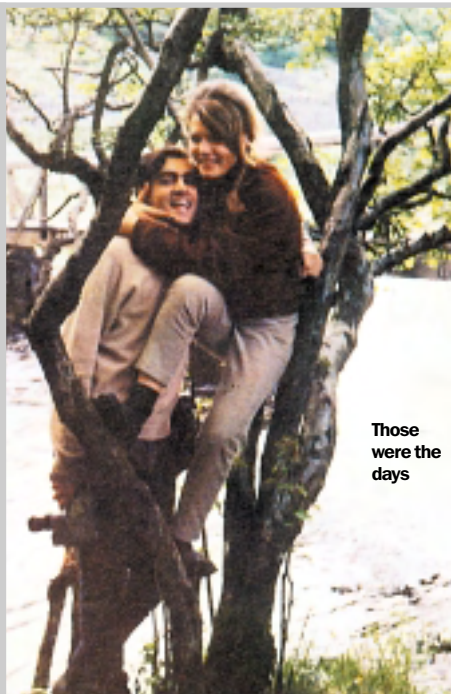
odds and punditry. You shall never let them down.

On our neighbours, the conflict with Pakistan must somehow be resolved within the life of the 14<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha. This can’t drag any longer. As you know, we actually have personal attachments to the Valley. We derive our cosmopolitan aura from our roots as Kashmiri Brahmins – the Kauls who read modern books and ate meat against convention. As India negotiates peace, we have to lend our full weight to the process. A smaller neighbor, Nepal, is also going through tough times. Especially after the tragic Royal Massacre of exactly three years ago. It’s a pity we have not done enough to help — a result, I believe, of our over zealous bureaucracy running amok in the absence of wise political signals. Foreign policies are too important to be left to the Foreign Ministry alone.

King Tribhuvan hosted a sombre evening here the other day to mark that tragic royal event of June 1. I’d read a curious note by Kuldip Nayar in the 1970s about the king having “offered” his kingdom to me. Sardar Patel, our self-styled Bismarck, would have loved to hear something as subversive as that, but I personally don’t recall the occasion. When I asked, Tribhuvan didn’t either, although he said he had fond memories of the time I hosted him at Hyderabad House after he fled his country. Anyway, I’d like you to take a sympathetic interest in helping solve Nepal’s woes that originate from our apathy. If we can’t make 24 million of our closest neighbors admire us, what right do we have to demand respect from the rest of the world?

That day in 1968, when you wore the cotton sari I’d woven with my own hands in prison, I thought you were not only getting married to my grandson, but also the Republic of India. I witness today that quiet thought maturing into dignified fact, and I couldn’t be prouder. All my love,  
Jawaharlal Nehru, Anand Heaven.

P. S. Two small requests, i) Tell Rahul to settle down soon, these things should not be delayed. And, ii) Try to rein in Laloo a little. Instead of the Railways Ministry, he could have been exiled to Washington. “Patna on the Potomac,” he’d fancy the idea, don’t you think? **N**



Those were the days



# COME FLY THE FRIENDLY SKIES

The good news is more and more airlines are eyeing the lucrative Kathmandu sector. Can RNAC keep up?

BY SURESH PRADHAN

The road leading to Tribhuvan airport, the country's only international airport, remains backed up with cars, jeeps, taxis and little tourist coaches these days. It's 12:30 p.m., time for Thai International to land. The parking lot outside the International Terminal is teeming with passengers who've just arrived, and passengers who are fast checking in. It's also time to check-in for the Thai flight to Bangkok, Jet Airways and Indian Airlines flights to New Delhi, and, occasionally flights to other destinations like Kolkata, Dhaka and Karachi.

From Kathmandu airport, there's no dearth of passengers or flights to South and East Asia, the Gulf and even China, Japan and Europe as another monsoon, considered the start of the tourist season, draws nearer.

The good news is this: more and more airlines are eyeing the lucrative Kathmandu sector as the Asia Pacific tourism market shows signs of recovery after the fallout from 9/11, SARS outbreak and Indo-Pak tensions. The airlines range from private Indian airlines like Jet Airways and Sahara, to Sri Lankan Airlines, China Eastern Airlines, Philippine Airlines and Phuket Air.

In Kathmandu, Pokhara and Chitwan, tourism entrepreneurs are upbeat. Tourism, the bread and butter for several hundred thousands, is showing signs of recovery.

Ironically, these airlines are eyeing Kathmandu because Nepal's national airline, the Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation (RNAC), has failed to cater to the rising demand for flights across the region and beyond. The airlines are aim-

ing to grab a bigger share of the the regional tourism market pie.

RNAC, thanks to years of government meddling, has been in a decline at a time when the aviation industry in the region has recorded a strong growth. Established in 1958 with only a Dakota (DC-3) aircraft, RNAC went on to expand its fleet of domestic planes to nearly a dozen, and international fleet of two Boeings 727s in the early 1970s.

Thirty years on, it looks like time has stood still for RNAC; today it's hardly got anything more than what it had when it started off. Of its two aging Boeing 757s, only one is currently up and running—the other has gone to East Asia for C-Check, meaning a complete overhaul that takes at least two months. Of its seven Twin Otters, ideal for Short-Take-Off-and-Landing, RNAC has plans to operate only four and sell the rest. "More private airlines and international airlines are eyeing Kathmandu because we have been weak," Mohan Khanal, Managing Director of RNAC told Nation



Weekly. “Naturally, unlike our national airline, they are on the lookout for greener pastures.”

Kathmandu is emerging as an attractive sector for two reasons: Nepal is a famous destination for East Asian holidaymakers as well as exclusive European and American tourists, and, equally important, it is the gateway to Tibet and Bhutan, the last remaining Shangri-Las. In the first quarter of 2004, tourism arrivals registered a growth of an impressive 42 percent, a far cry from 2002, considered the worst year for Nepal’s tourism. And that trend is continuing according to the Nepal Tourism Board. And post-9/11 there appears to have been a paradigm shift, says one NTB official. “We have more regional tourists now.” This new brand of tourists is mostly comprised of travelers and holidaymakers from East Asia and our two giant neighbors: India and China.

While RNAC is on the brink, its contemporary, Thai International Airways, has grown into one of the world’s leading airlines with more than 100 jets in its fleet. Thai, which has been operating its Bangkok-Kathmandu-Bangkok flights for two decades, is now considering doubling its regular flights between the two regional hubs (With SAARC Secretariat and many regional headquarters, Kathmandu is vaguely referred to as a South Asian regional center). Last year, Thai carried 80,000 passengers into Nepal, an impressive 33 percent rise from 2002.

Europe’s Martin Air, which connects Kathmandu with Vienna, is also considering doubling its flights between Europe and Kathmandu. For its part, RNAC is looking into the possibility of getting two wide-bodied jets on lease. That way, it can regularize its existing flights to nine destinations in seven countries—New Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai, Shanghai, Osaka, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur,

Bangkok and Hong Kong. “It will take a while for us to get new planes,” says Khanal, “after which we can regularize our flights and open new sectors”—such as RNAC’s old connections to Frankfurt and London. “We’ll buy a new Boeing within two years and everything will be alright. We can then also regain our lost international image.”

That looks like a good plan but with the competition hotting up, RNAC needs to shift gears fast. At least 12 international airlines fly in and out of Tribhuvan airport every day—despite the fact that Nepal’s civil aviation policy is not friendly to international carriers opting to use Kathmandu as a stopover destination; New Delhi in the neighbourhood is. One airline that has been able to make hay is Qatar Airways. It flies 15 flights a week to Kathmandu; 11 between Kathmandu and Doha and four between Kuala Lumpur and

Kathmandu. “The government is kind of broke and can’t afford to have its own planes,” said Jay Devan, Qatar Airways’ agent to Nepal. He is also associated with India’s Air Sahara which is set to start regular flights between Delhi and Kathmandu. “So, the more international flights we can have, the better for a landlocked country like ours.”

Optimists hope that RNAC can get over its “Royal-Nepal-Always-Cancelled” image and get on the bandwagon too. Last year, a committee recommended privatisation of the national flag carrier. Today, it seems to be heading in that direction. In June, a team of officials from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) are arriving in Nepal to study that possibility and make recommendations. “We’ll base our future actions on those recommendations,” Khanal retorts, arguing: “It is still not too late for RNAC, we have a ready market here, and we can bounce back. We still have an operating surplus.” **N**

## RNAC hopes to lease two wide-bodied jets



# The Timekeepers

As our nation's clock comes to a complete stop, two poor watch repairmen wage a courageous battle at the Old Baneshwore Chowk, defying the government, the Maoists and the political parties

BY SANJEEV UPRETY

Near the Old Baneshwore Chowk there are two tiny watch repair shops at a walking distance from each other. The first, occupying a small four-by-three-foot space is run by Arjun Lama. About 25 years of age and married recently, Arjun came to Kathmandu from Dhadhing seven years ago and trained to become a watch repairman by attending a crash course at Bhotahity. Arjun keeps his shop open even during *bandas*, when the strikes called by either the Maoists or the five agitating political parties brings Kathmandu's life to a grinding halt. Arjun has braved the wrath of the party cadres time and again, to open his shop. "I have no option but to open my shop," he says, "otherwise my wife and I will starve."

Wristwatches, lithium batteries and instruments of repair are scattered all over Arjun's tiny shop. A number of Indian and Chinese wall clocks with names like Xinxiu, Prince, Siok, and Quartz Faleda hang on the walls. Some of them show different hours of the day: some are stuck at 1 o'clock and some at 3:15, while others tick merrily at 12:30 and 9:00.

Arjun Lama and his uncle Raju Lama, the owner of the second shop on the other side of the chowk, talk about the obstacles that they face in their chosen profession. "Those who are rich prefer to buy expensive watches like Rolex and Rado, watches that we cannot afford to sell," says Arjun Lama. "And those who are poor like us only buy dirt cheap watches that you see here," he says, pointing to the Princes and Xixias in the shop. "These Indian and Chinese watches are so cheap that once they break down their owners simply throw them into trash bins and buy new

watches rather than repair them. Very few people come to our shops to repair their watches these days," Raju Lama, the uncle, explains. "I can't understand why I am destined to live such a wretched, unappreciated life." Raju Lama reflects further, "After coming to Kathmandu I worked extremely hard at a number of jobs. I painted houses, worked in a restaurant and then in a factory making kettles and pans. I even worked for a butcher at Chahabil cutting slabs of meat for him. I had hoped that the profession of a watch repairman would bring me riches, love, friendship. Once a chain smoker and a heavy drinker, I quit both cigarettes and

While Arjun Lama remains circumspect and restrained in criticizing the authorities, his more extrovert uncle is much more outspoken in his tirade against the municipality and the political forces. "The Maoists and the political parties force us to close our shops," he complains bitterly, "and when I try to spread my wares upon the street and try to get some business going, the *goondas* from the municipality threaten me and sometimes even manhandle me. Tell me how on earth are people like me and my newly married nephew to survive?"

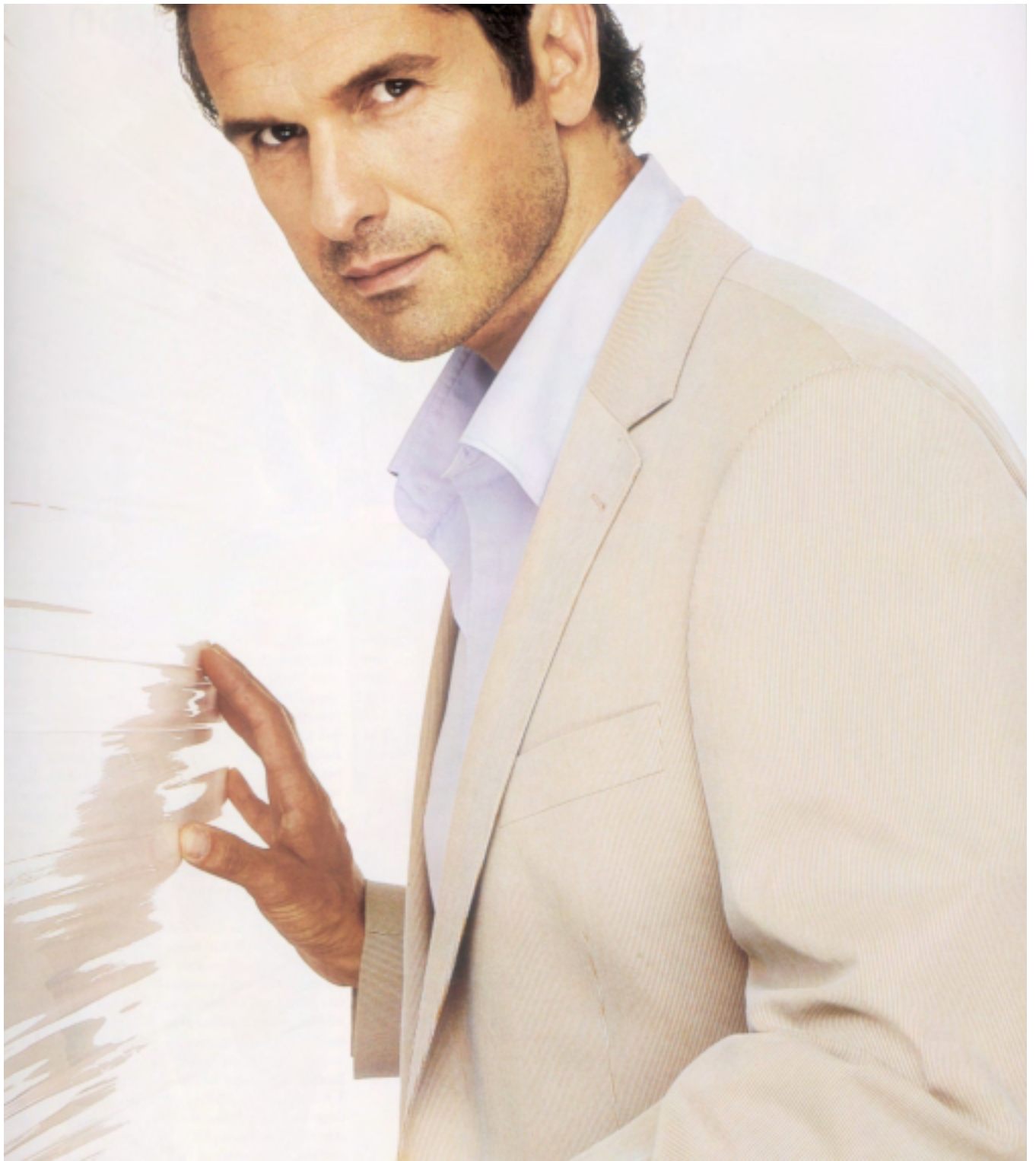
While the reserved, gentle nephew with added marital responsibility seems to have made peace with the pitfalls that come with his profession, Raju Lama's wrath is not easily dispelled. "See how the life in the city has come to a total stop," he says, pointing to the empty streets and closed shutters, "these are bad times." The nation's clock, like the broken clocks in Arjun and Raju Lama's shops too seems to be signifying different times to different people. The nation's clock has come to a complete stop—or in some cases, seem to be ticking backwards. But these two poor watch



alcohol to become a follower of the Buddha. What did I get back from life? I am as poor and as lonely and unloved as I was five years before. My nephew here was at least able to find a girl for himself and might soon begin having kids."

repairmen are waging a courageous battle at the Old Baneshwore Chowk, defying the government, the Maoists and the political parties. In their own little ways they seem to be trying to set right the time of this neurotic, uneasy period that has gone out of joint. **N**

Sanjeev Uprety



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# Formulaic Masala & Potent Spice

BY MEENA KAINI

## I'M ALL OVER

Shah Rukh Khan today is in a position to have movies built around him, just like Amitabh Bachchan and Dilip Kumar were in yesteryears. But choreographer-turned-director Farah Khan may have stretched the concept of a one-star movie a bit too far in her debut effort "Main Hoon Na."

Shah Rukh Khan, who plays the role of the omnipresent Maj. Ram, is there to link every important frame in the movie

sashaying down the college corridors in beautiful chiffon sarees, and enticing Shah Rukh Khan to break into outbursts of romantic songs every time he sees her.

"Main Hoon Na" is an out and out masala movie. If you are not exactly looking for an intense, crossover movie then "Main Hoon Na" is right up your alley.

## YOUNG BLOOD

Six years after "Dil Se," ace director Mani Ratnam is back with "Yuva," his new Hindi offering. "Yuva" is the story of two young men (Abhishekh

States because he wants to stay home and change the political system (or rather, politicians.) Bachchan pulls off a memorable performance as the rugged Lallan Singh, a henchman for a corrupt politician played by Om Puri. Arjun (Vivek Oberoi) is a man with a devil-may-care attitude who wants to go to the United States, even though his father would rather see him become an IAS officer.

Life changes drastically for Arjun after that collision on Howrah Bridge. The collision leads on to Michael and Arjun becoming friends, and inspired by Michael, Arjun dumps his dreams about the United States, and later goes on to contest the Assembly elections. The star-cast trio's love interests are played by Isha Deol, Rani Mukherjee and Kareena Kapoor. Of them, Rani stands out in her role as the battered wife of Bachchan. Despite minor quirks, like the fact that almost two-thirds of the movie is devoted to character sketching through flashbacks, there are plenty of reasons why this movie should be watched. Here are the top five:

**One:** Because it's a Mani Ratnam movie. Enough said on Ratnam.

**Two:** Abhishekh Bachchan—he has portrayed his scruffy character to perfection.

**Three:** Ajay Devgan in his role as Michael, though he sometimes looks



to every other. He is there to fulfill the last wishes of his dying dad, he is there to protect an army general's (Kabir Bedi) daughter, Sanjana, (Amrita Rao) and even get her a makeover; he is there to save his half-brother Laxman (Zayed Khan), when he is falling off the roof; he is the reason behind Laxman finally getting his graduation after failing for three years; and he is there to romance Chandani (Sushmita Sen). Most of all Maj. Ram is there to make sure that the army's mission "Milaap" is successful. Thankfully Shah Rukh Khan lightens up the overkill of seeing his face featured on every shot by carrying off his role with panache.

The only other character who manages some screen presence is former-armyman-turned-terrorist, Raghavan (Sunil Shetty). Viewers also might want more from Sushmita Sen than just her



Bachchan and Vivek Oberoi) and one not so young man (Ajay Devgan) whose lives collide on the famous Howrah Bridge in Kolkata, and then take totally new turns.

Ajay Devgan plays Michael Mukherjee, a brilliant student who forgoes an opportunity to study in the United

like our Nepali student leaders who get enrolled in college as a first step to the parliamentary elections, does a good job as a get-in-the-system-to-change-it character.

**Four:** Brilliant cinematography.  
**Five:** Great music (as usual) by AR Rahman. **N**



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# Much Ado About Nothing

By raising the issue of Sonia's foreign origins, BJP has shown that as a political party it peddles petty issues. When people voted for Congress Party they knew Sonia was a strong contender to be the prime minister and they were aware of her Italian origin

BY ARUNA UPRETY

**N**o one in India uttered a word about Mother Teresa's foreign origin when she was nominated for the Nobel Prize. Everyone kept repeating that she was a saint who had showed the world that "India was a great country." And everyone, including the media kept the accolades coming: "She has shown us that all the peoples are related to each other (*basudhaiva kutumbakam*.)"

But the day Sonia Gandhi was to become prime minister through popular vote, the Bharatiya Janata Party and people like Sushma Swaraj (the high-profile BJP spokesperson) raised the issue of Sonia's "foreign origin." They threatened to resign from the Raj Sabha and boycott the swearing-in session if Sonia became the prime minister. BJP leaders started talking about "sanskriti and values," arguing that Sonia's elevation to the country's most important position would mean a death knell to Indian values and traditions. While saying all this, BJP leaders had tears in their eyes, and some had their eyes swollen. Clearly, they had not been sleeping well for some time. This was especially evident on the face of Sushma Swaraj.

The day the election results were announced, I was at New Delhi airport. When I boarded a taxi, the first thing the driver told me (with a smile) was, "You know the Congress has won and Sonia Gandhi will be our next prime minister." I was surprised myself. During the whole trip from the airport to the city, the driver talked about nothing but Sonia and the Congress Party. "We will have a new Bharat in five years' time," he said.

On reaching my cousin's house, however, I got to see a different set of reactions brought about by the election results. My cousin's husband looked pale and, for a moment, I thought he was sick. I asked if he was.

"No, he has been in mourning for the last 24 hours," said my cousin. "He has not eaten anything and has refused to watch the news on TV because the BJP has lost." He had been so sure that the BJP would win that he had not even bothered to vote for his party.

Just like him, there had been many other BJP supporters who thought that the BJP would sweep the elections.

"Many of the officers have gone out of the city on a three-day holiday. They are mourning now," my cousin said. I suddenly had a flashback of the day when Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, the then prime minister, had lost the elections in Kathmandu. The talk then was that most of his supporters were overconfident and had spent their time feasting on "raksi and masu over paplu." And that they all cried when KP lost.

After the results of the Indian elections were out, the BJP thought about calling for a Kal Divas (Black Day) if Sonia was sworn in. That bit seemed a bit off. If the BJP really did not want a foreign-born as the prime minister, why did it not change the electoral laws while it was still in power? Why didn't it raise the issue with the Election Commission when Sonia filed her nomination to be a member of the Lok Sabha? It is very strange that her Italian origin became a hot issue only after the Congress triumphed.

The Hindutva says that "A wife is an inseparable part of her husband and as soon as she marries she is the member of his family and mingles as a river to an Ocean." But why was Sonia singled out? She has lived in India for more than 35 years—ever since her marriage.

These people who are now decrying her foreign origin are the same ones who make political capital every time an Indian-born is nominated to important positions, or for an award in the United States or Britain. They write long articles eulogizing the successes of the NRIs, saying "India is proud" of them. Why can't the BJP say with similar pride, "Look, we have embraced the idea of '*basudhaiva kutumbakam*' and we will continue to do so."

More importantly, now that Sonia has declined the power and become a "queen" what other agenda does the BJP have against her? By raising the issue of Sonia's foreign origins, the BJP has shown that as a political party it peddles petty issues. When people voted for Congress Party they knew Sonia was a strong contender to be the prime minister and they were well aware of her Italian origin as well. It is the same BJP that made much of the people's mandate in the 1999 elections, why did it then have such a hard time accepting the people's mandate in 2004? **N**



Sushma Swaraj

# CITY This Week

## EVENTS

### New Tourism Products Promotion

May 3-5 at Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikutimandap. For information: 4269768, 4269770

### Monsoon Wine Festival

June 1 to August. Kilroys of Kathmandu, Thamel. For information: 250440, 250441

### Blithe Spirit

Blithe Spirit: A dark comedy by Noel Coward, about an evening in the life of a middle aged writer who calls a seance only to invite more than he bargained for. Organized by Nepal-Britain society. Proceeds will go to educational charities. June 1 and 3. Time: 7 p.m. Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal. For information: 5534713, 4410583

### Moments of Bliss

Ani Choying Drolma's fifth annual fundraising concert featuring special guests Nhyoo Bajracharya and Christopher Masand. Choying is a renowned singer who has performed at festivals and benefit concerts in the United States and Europe. "Cho," an album that she produced with Madison-based guitarist Steve Tibbets in 1997, received rave reviews in magazines like Guitar Player, Pulse! and Musician. All proceeds from the Kathmandu concert will go to benefit Arya Tara School and the Nun's Welfare Foundation of Nepal.

6 p.m., June 5. Bluestar Hotel  
For information: 4354918



### Infinity's Journey

Collage, mixed-media and water color by Gaurav Shrestha, Suman Shrestha, Ramesh K.C. and Binod Gupta.  
At the Park Gallery, Lazimpat.  
Till June 10

Four young artists came together in 2001 to create the Infinity group. They held their first exhibition in 2002 and have subsequently participated in a number of national and international exhibitions. Their works primarily depict the Nepali culture through different perspectives on varied media. Suman, Ramesh and Binod are art students at the Lalitkala College while

Gaurav is a self-taught artist. Suman paints balanced spreads with enchanting colors. Ramesh's displays feature a series of bells to signify the need for peace. Binod captures traditional festivals like the Kumari Jatra and Samyak Puja in his watercolors. Gaurav creates collages patched together from found objects and magazine clippings.



### BOOK LAUNCHED

#### Birds in Nepal

A comprehensive book on birds of Nepal, published by RK Shrestha, Director of the Central Zoo, was recently released in Kathmandu. Originally written by Richard Grimmett, and Carol and Tim Inskipp the book was translated by Dr. Hem Sagar Baral. The book will be available free to various libraries, schools and colleges.

### ONGOING

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#### Fantastic Fridays

The Club, Bhatbhateni. Fridays 7 p.m. Entrance Free.

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## ART EXHIBITIONS

#### Secret Moments

An exhibition of paintings by Bhairaj Shrestha. Siddhartha Art Gallery. Till June 12. For information: 4414607

#### Finland in Nepal 1985-2004

Gallery Moksh. Till June 5. Photographs from Finland. For information: 2113339



# Matrix, The Showdown

BY UJOL SHERCHAN

**I**t is a growing truism that when the Palace issues a stick, political parties unite; when it offers the carrot, this unity tends to come apart, especially when leaders of the parties go it alone for dialogue with the King. The parties have so far been reacting to the Palace's actions: co-operating with one another when it comes to "regression" (stick) and competing in anticipation of the "carrot." Leaving aside the Maoist movement, geopolitics, and parties loyal to the Palace, allows for

a generalized matrix analysis of the great showdown between the five-party alliance and the Palace.

Under **B**, the situation in the early days of the alliance's protests against "regression" and which still continue, the heavy-handed behavior of the Palace-appointed government backfired for the reasons cited in cell **B**. Just as Christina Rocca, assistant U.S. secretary of state for South Asian affairs, advised there can be no military solution to the Maoist insurgency, there can be no police solution to the ongoing protest either.

How long the street protest will drag on without the mass support of the Newar communities of Kathmandu Valley—a potential clinching factor—remains to be seen. However, the King's summoning of the leaders of the alliance for consultations did offer a momentary respite, and set the stage for scenario **A**. The parties' agenda didn't figure in the two-and a half hour meeting. Clearly, the outcome of the Jana Andolan suits the King fine as the balance of power rests with him. The only sticking point for the political parties with this is: whenever he sneezes, they catch the cold.

How long the alliance will last is anybody's guess. Now that the King is looking for a "spotless" prime minister, the stage for scenario **C** is being set. Competition for the post may divide the alliance. Girija Prasad Koirala's statement (in cell **C**) doesn't bode well for the alliance. Amik Sherchan's rejoinder is telling (see cell **C**). Moreover, whoever becomes the PM under this scenario will have it tough since the other parties may not extend their cooperation. The next PM must therefore come from the alliance through consensus, which has also been the position of the coalition all along. Either way, if the all-party government headed by whoever from the coalition doesn't deliver (no guarantee it will), the Palace may be vindicated and its argument for a "constructive role" for the monarch strengthened. The alliance knows this, which explains the pre-condition: the King

must first restore people's sovereign rights before any talks of prime ministership or all-party government. With this one move the coalition has played its last hand: the 18-point agenda. It remains to be seen how this will be watered down in the protracted standoff.

As the standoff continues, everybody concerned would do well to remember the matrix: that the Palace is better off offering the carrot, and the alliance maintaining unity against all odds, if they both desire legitimate and durable outcomes.

Stepping out of the shadowy matrix world into broad daylight brings the relative positions into sharper focus:

- the Palace is keen to restore the status quo of the Jana Andolan but may be tempted to slide further back, if the last two hand-picked governments are any indication;
- the alliance wants to go beyond the status quo of the Jana Andolan

by trimming the powers of the constitutional monarch, which they think is the best way to restore people's sovereign rights for good.

Surely, such polar positions must in time polarize the country more visibly even more as the cost of standoff between the Palace and the coalition mounts. The question staring us is: are the polity and people prepared to make sacrifices—if it ever comes to that—for a more legitimate and durable outcome outlined in cell **A**, or will they settle for an outcome that may be no outcome at all? In short,

what price are they willing to pay for peace in the marketplace of politics? This is not an easy question to answer in a country that is increasingly ruled by guns and which is militarizing quickly. This is, however, a good question to ask, for what kind of peace is achievable depends very much on the earnestness of their replies to this question, for the ground reality is you only get what you pay for. This question must be asked, for who knows if the solution to both the current standoff and the Maoist problem is not already kicking in its womb. **N**

		PALACE	
		CARROT	STICK
POLITICAL PARTIES	COOPERATE	<p><b>Ideal Outcome:</b> Minimum understanding reached between the Palace and the alliance through a dialog on the parties' 18-point agenda and the King's roadmap as a basis for restoring democracy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Increasing support of the parties' demonstrations against 'regression'</li> <li>■ Increasing cries for a republic from student leaders and politicized youth</li> <li>■ Increasing international pressure on the government to respect human rights</li> </ul>
	COMPLETE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ "If His Majesty deems consultations for further clarification necessary, we are also prepared to come separately." <i>-Girija Prasad Koirala</i></li> <li>■ "It is possible that there is conspiracy to break the five parties by calling (us) separately." <i>-Amik Sherchan</i></li> </ul>	<p>Most unlikely scenario</p>





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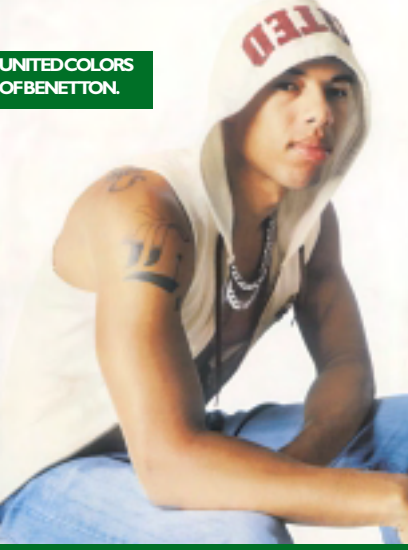
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# Beyond The Batons And The Barricades

**M**anjushree Thapa should have been a classic split-personality case. After all, she grew up mostly in America, while her books are about Nepal. She's primarily an English author, and yet she's known in media circles for her translations of Nepali



works. Brought up in an upper-middle-class family, she's documented the plight of working-class victims caught in the crossfire of Nepal's civil conflict. Born into a Hindu family, she's an avowed Buddhist. But the events in her life, last month, probably highlighted best the fault lines she constantly has to straddle. While her father, Bhek Bahadur Thapa, was traveling around the world defending the government's human rights record, Manjushree Thapa made headlines for a radically different reason. She had taken part in the five-party protest against "regression,"—against the government that included her father—and during the course of events she was beaten by the police. She later sued the government for the police's actions. The case has not yet been resolved. Tiku Gauchan of Nation Weekly talked with Thapa about her participation in the street protests, her political differences with her father and about her work as a writer.

**How has your anti-government stance affected your relation with your father?**

We are used to having different politics. We still have a very close personal relationship and we've always openly discussed our views.

**What are the reasons behind suing the government?**

I got hit on the head by the police during the demonstrations on April 4. After that, for a long time, I didn't think about doing anything about it. But when I talked to human rights lawyers, they wanted to see if the issue could be taken forward. We sued the

government because we wanted to set a precedent.

**What kind of a precedent?**

There's no law in place to address a situation like this. For example, in the Torture Compensation Act, they only define a fracture incurred as something that happens to people in custody. We are in the habit of accepting everything. We have to be more active in making the government accountable. We have to put an end to their acts of impunity.

**Do you feel that for public figures like you, getting hit and hospitalized, and now suing the government, are symbols for having "arrived" politically?**

If the crackdown on the protests hadn't been so violent, then maybe people could say that. I have been writing about human rights victims, many who have been raped etc. But this incident made me realize how vulnerable people really are. The same day that I got hit, another person got riddled with 14 rubber bullets. That person could have been me. It's easy to empathize with victims but that's not the same as living the experience.

**When did you become an activist?**

I don't consider myself an activist. My main interest is writing. And writing is an internal, isolated activity. Writers need some form of social engagement.

**What are you writing these days?**

I've just finished writing a non-fiction account based on a travel journal to Maoist areas—Kalikot, Jumla and Dailekh.

**How was it there?**

Most of the Maoists were very young, 12 to 17-year-olds. They seemed very idealistic and naïve. I could understand why they were involved in the movement but I could never understand the violence. But the people who make the decisions for them (the area secretaries), seemed smarter, politically savvy and calculating. It feels like these kids are being used. The overwhelming feeling I had was, how young these people are. The revolution seems to be literally fueled by young blood.

**You were mostly educated in the west but you translate Nepali works into English. How hard is that?**

I had to relearn Nepali when I came back to Nepal in 1989. I made a conscious effort to learn the language from 1995. I took lessons. I also wanted to learn to write in Nepali. The English-speaking world here is different from the Nepali speaking one. The Nepali-speaking world is more politically and intellectually engaged.

**How hard is it for sub-continental English writers to make their mark?**

The challenge for English writers is to be as good as the regional writers writing in the vernacular. A lot of times the English writing is fluffier. This may be because most of the writers writing in English here come from the comfortable class. There isn't the same kind of involvement with the community.

**Who are your favorite writers?**

JM Coetzee, Mahasweta Devi (a Bangladeshi writer), Don DeLillo, Toni Morrison, David Grossman and Amitav Ghosh (non-fiction only). **N**

# Love Changes Everything

BY MARK LIECHTY

**W**hy should anyone be interested in love letters written by young people in an out of the way village in the hills of Nepal? In "Invitations to Love: Literacy, Love Letters, and Social Change in Nepal," Laura M Ahearn conducts a unique study of literacy practices and love-letters in Junigau, a small Magar community in West Central Nepal. Ahearn makes it clear that these seemingly-trivial romantic missives in fact offer insights into fundamental changes not only in courtship and marriage practices, but also understandings of the self and agency. As the result of Nepali state and internationally-sponsored development initiatives most men in the village are literate but only recently has the same been true of women. Ahearn shows how female literacy rates have leaped from only about 5 percent for women born before 1951, to 91 percent for those born after 1963. Paralleling this shift is an equally dramatic trend away from arranged and "capture" marriages that accounted for almost 9 out of 10 unions before 1960, toward elopements that are the basis for more than half of the marriages in the village since the 1980s. Linking these two remarkable changes are new "development"-inspired values of self-sufficiency, progress, and romance.

Ahearn explains how literacy opens up new ways of looking at oneself and the role of people, groups, and "fate" in social processes. People come to understand themselves as dynamic individuals with the ability to transform themselves. As a result, young people increasingly interpret events, or express hopes for the future, through notions of individual choice, direct action, planning, and so on, rather than as matters of fate or karma.

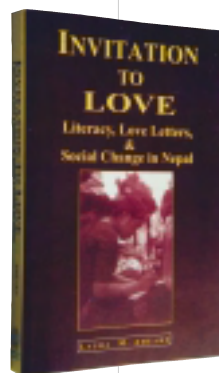
The combination of these new development-inspired values with ideals of romantic love is one of the unanticipated outcomes of this transformation

in ideas of self and agency. Ahearn shows how individual consent to marriage by both woman and man—often the result of lengthy negotiations via love letters—has come to be the expected norm even though until only recently arranged (and even "capture") marriages were unquestionably valid. Ahearn's analysis of hundreds of love letters allows her to demonstrate how young people increasingly premise the possibility of future "life success" on the basis of relationships between freely-consenting "life friends" united in marriage (following elopement). Young people understood romantic love in an ironic way: even while describing love as something that happens to people in uncontrollable, fate-driven ways, once established, this new love is experienced as an empowering force, one that gives them a sense of independence and the ability to actively overcome future obstacles.

As unusual as the topic of this study is the author's depth of research experience. Between stints as a Peace Corp volunteer and anthropology researcher, Ahearn lived in Junigau for 6 years over an 18-year period. The result is a study in which Ahearn was able to follow the lives of many people from elementary school through courtship and marriage.

Ahearn takes literacy and its outcomes—including exposure to development programs, reading film magazines and pulp novels, and writing love letters—and shows how these changes transform common sense. She describes how "development" is appropriated by people in unforeseen ways, producing unforeseen outcomes that in some ways transform social practices, and in other ways reinforce old ones. Ahearn's analysis of the social consequences of literacy is a valuable contribution to our understandings of the modernization of rural lives in Nepal, and elsewhere.

*(Liechty is an associate professor of anthropology and history at the University of Illinois at Chicago.)* **N**



## Book Mark



**T**wenty-nine-year-old television celebrity Santosh Silawal-Giri, popularly known as San-T among close friends, loves reading. Because of his job as a program presenter and producer for Kantipur Television, Giri spends most of his time learning the art of videography and working on the intricacies of film production, but he finds reading time nonetheless. Giri, the presenter and producer of Nepal's first car show, "License to Drive," is also known for his role in the UNICEF-sponsored television serial Catmando and as a model featured in the Peudora car ads and 2PM noodles' "Hunger, no longer" campaigns. This famous son of famous parents, (father: politician Pradip Giri, mother: Bharati Silwal Giri, Assistant Resident Representative at UNDP, Nepal) says his father instilled in him a love for books. Santosh's favorite book as a child was "The Count of Monte Cristo," by Alexandre Dumas; and the book that's had the most influence on him is Winston Groom's "Forest Gump." He likes "Forest Gump" because of its positive outlook on life. Giri's bookshelf is lined with John Grisham's fictional works. The book that he'd like to read but hasn't yet got his hands on, is Salman Rushdie's "The Ground Beneath her Feet." **N**



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# Drifting Dangerously

Not one to mince his words, Chief Secretary Bimal Koirala probably spoke for many of us when he said last week that the absence of national government should not continue anymore. “While this hasn’t necessarily affected the day to day functioning of the bureaucracy,” he told reporters, “the civil servants do not take decisions that may have far-reaching consequences.” For that, you need a government and hopefully a more representative government than the current one. We have already said this in the past but we want to say it again. Until a fresh mandate is possible, the logical step would be to give the parties in the last Parliament the right to decide who should become the new prime minister for the simple reason that they represented the sovereign people’s will the last time it was exercised.

It is not too difficult to grasp the gravity of Secretary Koirala’s plea for a government. The security situation has hit a new low. So much is evident. Even in the Valley. Last week, Army personnel shot at a police car heading for Kathmandu airport. What followed was typical of a country in chaos, a radarless state slowly drifting towards anarchy. The Army said the police vehicle had blatantly driven past the Army personnel at the Airport gate. For their part, the police claimed, the vehicle which was carrying a senior officer’s luggage, had been cleared well in advance. An ugly shouting match followed and we were not particularly enlightened as to who was the real culprit.

There are more ominous signs. Not for the first time has Amnesty said that Nepal is currently the world’s leading nation when it comes to “disappearances.” Since the ceasefire collapsed last

August, 225 individuals have disappeared and their whereabouts remain unknown. Both the security forces and Maoists are responsible for the disappearances. Every single day, networks and newspapers report stories of cold-blooded murders, abductions, bandas and economic blockades. Hapless parents rue over school days lost to bandas.

It wasn’t supposed to be this way. Three weeks ago, we welcomed Surya Bahadur Thapa’s resignation with cautious optimism. The thinking was that his departure, though belated, would finally pave the way for a representative government and that the country would make a fresh start. The brief spurt of

optimism that followed Thapa’s resignation has gradually been replaced by skepticism, suspicion and now anger.

With each passing day of inaction, Nepalis lose that much more hope. They deserve something more than three weeks of paralysis. There can be different



David Ho

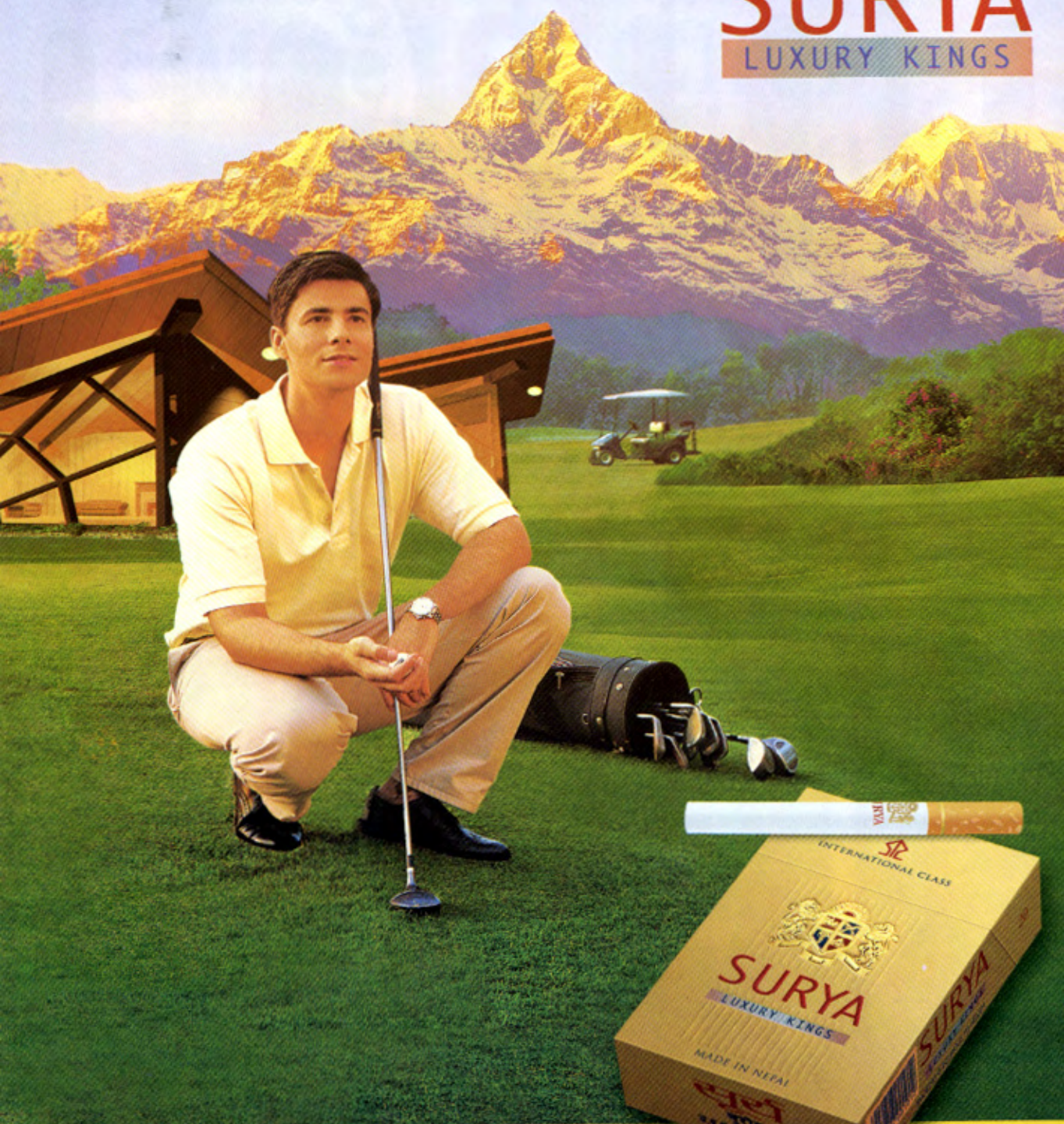
approaches and styles but the fact of the matter is, in the long run, there is no alternative to reviving the peace process. If the security situation continues to worsen, we fear that Nepal will join the ranks of failing states where the central government’s control doesn’t extend beyond a handful of urban centers. Every single thing—education, commercial activities, and development activities—is tied up with security. Since legitimacy remains the key for effective governance, making way for a representative government would at least mark a good beginning. We have lost enough time and a new government has to start, and start quickly.

Editor



# SURYA

LUXURY KINGS



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The Resort, Windy Hills,  
Nagarkot, Bhaktapur, Nepal  
Tel: 6680045 - 47/80/83 | Fax: 6680068  
E-mail: club@mos.com.np

Hotel Ambassador, Lazimpat,  
Kathmandu, Nepal  
Tel: 4414432, 4410432  
E-mail: ambassador@ambassador.com.np