

SCHOOLS CLOSED | THE GOLD RUSH | TEA GARDENS IN TROUBLE | O, DEUBA

JUNE 20, 2004 VOL. I, NO. 9

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WEEKLY

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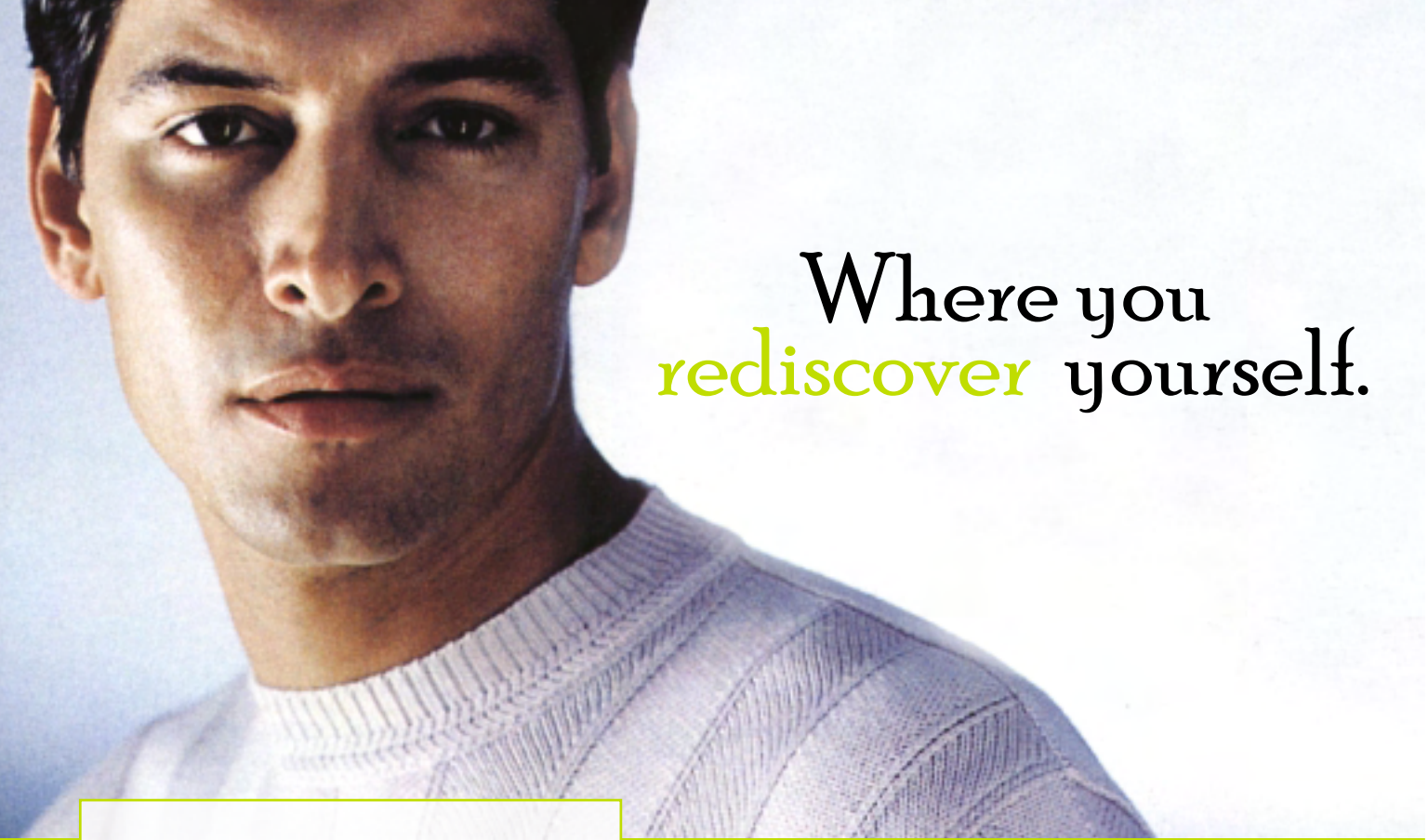
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COVER STORY

20 Muddle Over Middlemen

By Akhilesh Upadhyay and Suman Pradhan

Whatever the situation on the ground, Nepal's donors are getting increasingly jittery. And they want action—fast. If that means going for a third-party mediation, well and good, they say. But even they are divided

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By Dr. Gyanendra Sharma

With proper compilation of the information and analyses on the patterns of injuries on the roads, we would certainly be able to identify major risk factors and possible areas that require intervention.

38 A Collective Nightmare

By Vincent Androsiglio

They call it Aithan. Different people in different locations report in detail the same words, images, expressions and feelings of the same dream. It is an expression of a collective nightmare

40 O, Mr. Deuba

By Swarnim Wagle

With a relatively clean image, an army of able advisors, and awareness on key political and development issues, Deuba continues to stand out in a tiny pool of candidates who can credibly hold the job of Nepali PM.

18 Extra Dues

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Right to education is not a much celebrated idea among the student unions, who say that's a luxury many Nepali children can't afford.

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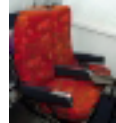
By John Narayan Parajuli in Bhadrapur

Hundreds of planters in Jhapa who took soft loans to cash in on the wave of "green prosperity" in the 90s are now saying they made bad investments.

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The Air Hostess Training Institute trains young students to become professional flight attendants. The institute's owner says his company's training has helped airlines cut down on both time and money

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publish**
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“ This was an independent film made from the filmmaker’s personal resources ”

ARPAN SHARMA

In defense of “Bhedako Oon”

THIS IS A REBUTTAL TO THE ATTACK on “Bhedako Oon Justo” (Sam Thomas, *As Long As You Film It*, April 26–May 1) where the columnist charges Nepathya of plagiarizing indigenous resources.

The scene in Gosaikunda—where Amrit Gurung and a group of girls have conversation (girl: “you understand ours but we do not understand yours”) was in reference to Tamang and Gurung languages. A well traveled Gurung, Amrit did catch some Tamang words from their song, but the girls could not understand the Gurung song. Amrit tries to teach them “Rangare...Rangare,” a Gurung folk song. That was an attempt at cultural exchange. Amrit says: “We learn from you...You learn from us...It should be like that...” The columnist seems to have misinterpreted the exchange.

Accusing Narayan Wagle, Editor of Kantipur, of using his social standing as a journalist for publicity of the film is baseless. Though a reputed media person, Wagle is media-shy. One can check that out with any local journalist. Indeed, Wagle is an added attraction in the film—because it catches him in his true colors, which is rare. Regarding the film reviews in the media, let me set the record straight: BOJ was promoted and managed by nepa~laya, and I have been responsible for the publicity. And I can firmly say this: The reviews were the result of spontaneous reaction from journalists. Nation’s Editor had a positive story on BOJ and Wagle in Inter Press Service himself.

When a writer writes a report/book on a place and its culture, he is widely appreciated for promoting them. Why not a filmmaker? It happened with the director of Caravan and now this. Let it

be known: this was an independent film made from the filmmaker’s personal resources. This film has helped promote the place. I have met people who have visited Gosaikunda after watching the film. It has also inspired young filmmakers and exposed young musicians to the rich world of folk culture of the nation. I say this because I am among the more than 10,000 viewers across the nation.



The above mentioned achievements are compiled from the long list of feedbacks we got during the public screenings. As part of our popularizing of documentaries campaign, Bhedako Oon Justo traveled to 10 places in the country. It was also used as a fundraiser for local schools and a social organization, and www.nepa-laya.com will offer anyone interested the details on the donations we have received. We also plan to use the proceeds collected from the film’s showing to fund a social welfare program in the Langtang Area. (The film ran seven evenings in Kathmandu at Jai Nepal, making it the first Nepali documentary to run in cinema halls. The last time it was publicly screened was on April 25 by ICFS at NTB Hall, where, reportedly, it had a full house and the audience received it very well.) I could not attend the screening as I was out with Nepathya



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on their nationwide tour—advocating peace.

One thing is for sure: the columnist has rightly raised issues of indigenous right, which has yet to make much of a dent in Nepal. Like-minded individuals need to get together and start working to protect indigenous rights. For me, it starts with identifying indigenous tunes and finally patenting its origins. Indeed, we do not have much time before WTO comes into effect. I dread to think of the day when Nepalis will have to pay western music companies for the use of our own Selo and Deuda beats. I on behalf of nepa~laya express my commitment to protect indigenous rights. The Gandharbha Festival organized by like-minded individuals earlier this year was the result of Amrit's voluntary research over Gainey from the Gandaki Area.

ARPAN SHARMA
DIRECTOR, PUBLIC RELATIONS
NEPA~LAYA

Race against time

I HAVE READ ALMOST ALL THE ISSUES (the web editions) so far and must commend you on your track record. Having worked in a newsmagazine for nearly a decade myself, I know very well that it is race against time to publish a weekly. You never know when the country's unpredictable politics start unfolding.

That said, every new issue of Nation Weekly offers a set of columnists whom we don't want to miss. I am sure Swarnim Wagle, Suman Pradhan and Ujol Sherchan will continue to offer different perspectives. As an aside, I hope, the new Indian Foreign Minister K Natwar Singh found time to read "A Letter to Sonia" by Wagle while he was in Kathmandu early this month.

With due respect to the job you have done, I would however like to see more in-depth and investigative reporting in the days to come. One of your reporters has quoted Dr. Ramsharan Mahat from a Kathmandu daily while Dr. Mahat would have been only a phone call away.

BHAGIRATHYOGI
LONDON

Unchain my education

READING THE 'LETTERS' COLUMN in the magazine provides me with an idea

of the varied views held by other readers. One such letter was that of Bhaskar Gautam (June 6) in response to an article by Suman Pradhan in an earlier issue ("Unchain My Education," Meanwhile, May 30). Gautam has the right to disagree with the author, but his suggestion that the current five-party movement provides the students with an education like no other comes as quite a surprise to me. Gautam's view that the street agitation is an education to the students is at best misguided and at worst absurd. To talk of such an agitation as being a complete education that not only provides students with life skills but also "globalized world values" (whatever that might mean) leads me to think that Gautam holds a very warped view on education and values. Surely Gautam is not talking about the education provided by hurling rocks, torching vehicles and the like. Random acts of violence and vandalism do not represent "education." Gautam, while sticking to such a claim, also derides the "university degrees" people have worked hard for. He claims that the "native consultants" with "fancy degrees" are to be blamed for the current mess we are in. The last time I checked the country was being run, or rather run to the ground, by the very politicians who are products of a political system that constitutes these very student unions. Many of our politicians today are products of these student unions. To suddenly blame people with an education for all that has gone wrong in the last 14 years of democracy, instead of the complete lack of vision, the unaccountability, the corruption that is characteristic of our leaders is to be prejudiced and biased.

Surely beneath all the satirical language ("fancy degrees" and the like), the argument presented is weak and baseless. To justify the disruption of the education system on the basis of its failings, to blame people with "degrees" for our country's situation, all this leads me to believe that Gautam betrays the prejudice of a class that finds it acceptable to take hostage other people's liberties, disrupt the everyday life of people and take whatever measure necessary to make its voice heard.

Y VAIDYA (ASTUDENT)
KUPONDOLE

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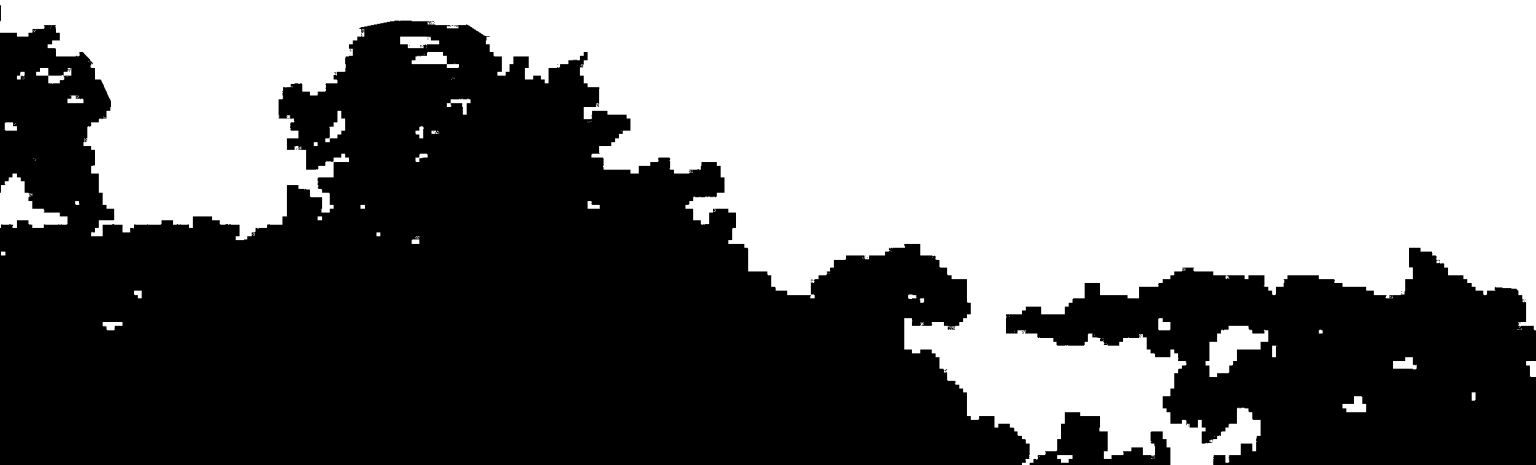
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SEE PAGE 16.

Did you, too, O friend, suppose
democracy was only for
elections, for politics, and for
party name? I say democracy is
only of use there that it may pass
on and come to its flower and
fruit in manners, in the highest
forms of interaction between
people and their beliefs—in
religion, literature, colleges and
schools—democracy in all
public and private life...

Walt Whitman



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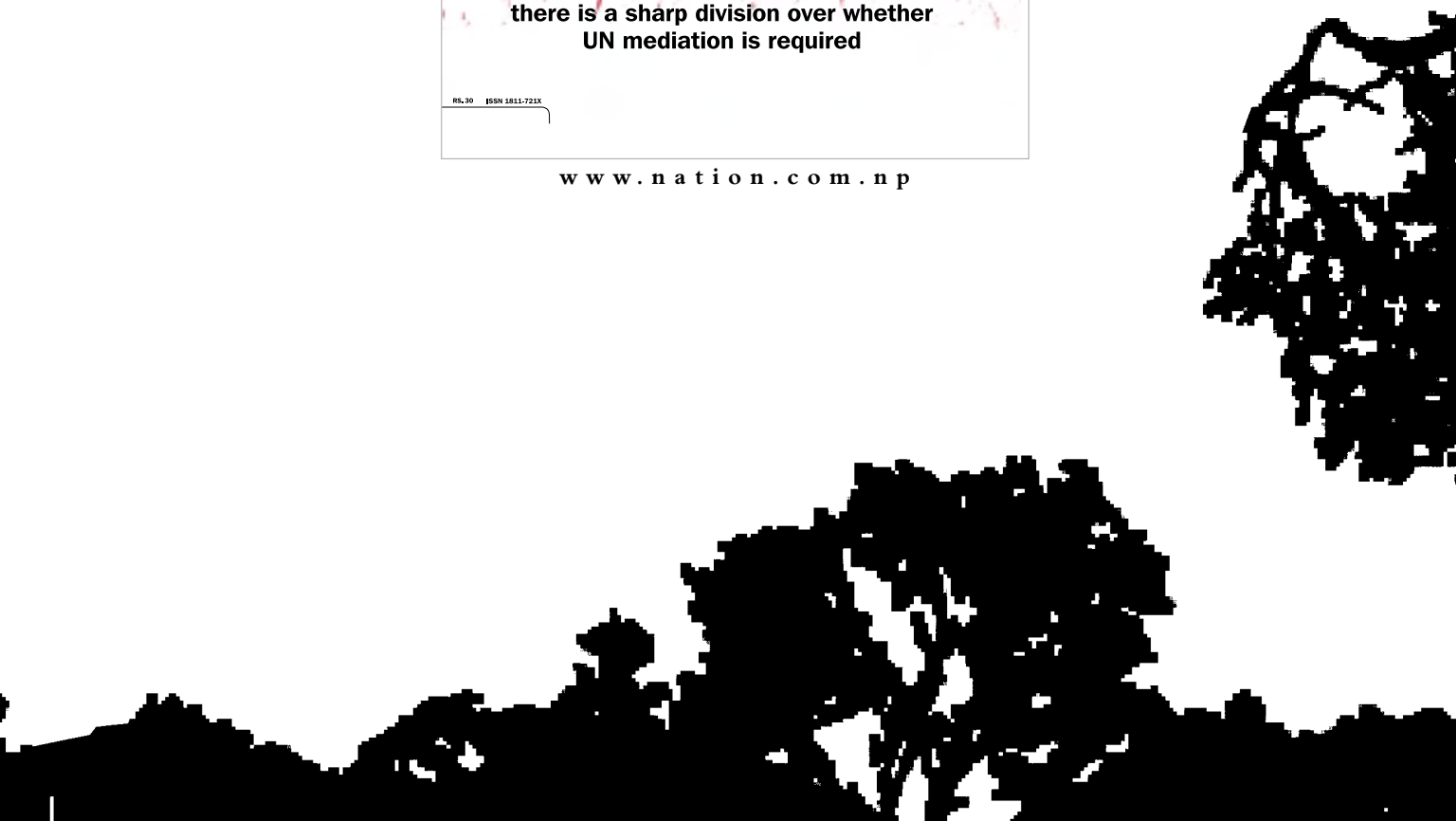
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Picture of the Week



A ONCE IN A LIFETIME SHOT:
Venus passing across the face
of the sun on June 8, as captured
by a telescope at Valmiki Campus
in Kathmandu. The next transit
will occur on June 6, 2012. The
last transit occurred in 1882.

nw/Sagar Shrestha



The Gold Rush

BY UJOL SHERCHAN

The sheer scale of yarsagumba collection in recent years raises a sustainability question: how long can the Himalayan ‘gold rush’ last at this rate?

Ever since the government lifted a ban on yarsagumba (*Cordyceps sinensis*) collection in 2001, there has been a rush of collectors, call it a yarsa phenomenon, from April to July each year. However, the scale of this rush is now a little worrying.

The closure of schools in Dolpa because kids have gone yarsa-hunting, the death of half a dozen or so collectors due to hypothermia, the unfair terms of barter (a kg of yarsagumba for a kg of rice in drought-hit Darchula when the same commands Rs 30,000-35,000 in India and Tibet, and around U.S.\$ 3,000 in the international market) owing to information asymmetry and desperation, increased use of fuel-wood in areas where few trees exist, and smuggling of other protected medicinal herbs are only bits of the story that are emerging. The picture of the swell of collectors and traders descending on an alpine meadow in Saikubari-Dolpa that made the front page of Kantipur’s May 29 issue is telling.

The sheer scale of yarsagumba collection in recent years raises a sustainability question: how long can the Himalayan ‘gold rush’ last at this rate? And, who is it benefiting?

Fortunately, yarsagumba, which commands a premium in international markets owing to its much sought-after use as an aphrodisiac or tonic, is a renewable bio-resource. A colleague from Bhutan says its reproduction is affected more by weather conditions than by the level of collection, which is good news. However, all that trampling around in the alpine meadows every summer by the rising tide of people must surely have some effect on the following year’s yields, since the germination period of yarsagumba coincides with the collection period. Moreover, not leaving a significant percentage of yarsagumbas undisturbed as seed plants for regeneration may likely unleash the workings of ‘the tragedy of the commons,’ resulting in falling yields per hectare in the future. This may force the government to reimpose the ban, which would be tragic, since yarsagumba’s potential to lift thousands of families in the food-insecure remote Farwest and Midwest out of poverty, those who need it most, would then go unrealized.

While the government should be commended for lifting the ban on yarsagumba collection, it can and should do more, for the chances of the locals escaping poverty or making fair income from yarsagumba are fast receding in the face of increasing competition from better-equipped and better-financed outsiders, cunning traders and foreigners. If the government is serious about the the main thrust of the current Five-Year Plan—poverty and hunger reduction—it can begin by restricting outsiders from collecting or purchasing yarsagumba. Local communities should have the preemptive right to yarsagumba in keeping with the best practice of community resource management, which has worked so well for Nepal, especially in the forestry

sector. This can be done by restricting open-access to yarsagumba, and handing over the yarsa-growing commons to local communities for managing.

The government can then arrange to provide training on sustainable harvesting techniques to collectors from the local communities before every collection season.

The government can, moreover, arrange to set up collection centers—much like the milk collection centers operated by the District Dairy Cooperative—in each yarsa-growing district in summer to buy yarsagumba at fair price (say at half the international market price) from the local communities for export to the international market. This can be a win-win situation for both the parties in terms of greater revenue generation made possible by weeding out the middlemen. Or alternatively, the government can authorize a national buyer or exporter with international reach but local presence in each yarsa-growing district on terms favorable to the local communities.

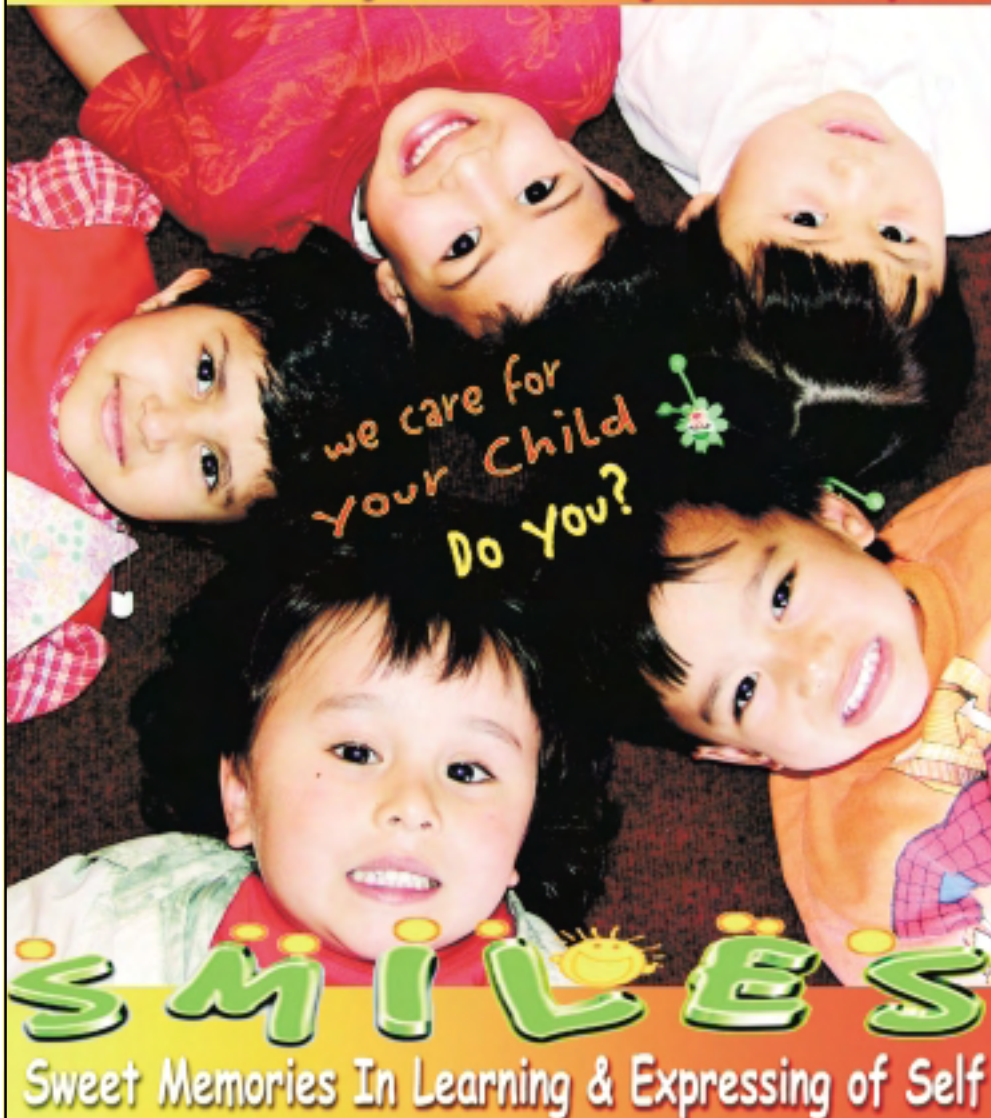


Photo courtesy: Kantipur

Of course, all this will not work unless the local communities themselves monitor collection, price, and presence of outsiders, but then they will only do so if the benefits from doing so accrue to them equitably.

Clearly the yarsa phenomenon is fast emerging as a litmus test of how well Nepal manages its bio-resources, as it rushes to Destination Unknown riding on the WTO bandwagon or on the thorny back of regional trading arrangements. True, we do not measure up to India and China in manufacturing and services, or even in agriculture, but by God, if we fail to manage our bio-resources in which we have comparative advantage and link international trade in them with rural development, we will have let Rural Nepal down once again. **N**

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Infected dairies

Integrated Biologists Research Group (IBRG) found germs causing diarrhea and dysentery in samples of milk produced by some private dairies and the government owned Dairy Development Corporation. Various species of bacteria were present in samples taken from 14 brands of pasteurized milk in Kathmandu Valley. The Food Act specifically states that pasteurized milk shall be germ-free.

SLC results

1600 is the number you must dial to get your SLC results. The Interactive Voice System facility has been provided by the Nepal Telecom in association with the SLC Examination Board. The system,



which will start functioning a day after the SLC results are announced, also provides such details as "passed," "failed," "division," "withheld" or "subject canceled." The 25-second call costs Rs. 3. 60.

Successful operation

BPKHS Hospital in Dharan successfully completed a throat cancer operation--a first in Nepal. Dr. Ishor Singh cut out 25 cm of malignant tissue from the pharynx of the patient, Indra Bahadur Kunwar. Kunwar, who is from Morang, was admitted to the hospital after Koshi Zonal Hospital and Bharatpur Cancer Hospital failed to make much headway on the afflicted throat. The operation took eight hours.

Airport fencing

Work on fencing the Kathmandu airport with barbed wire blade started last week. The fencing around the airport, which covers 10 square kilometers, is estimated to cost over Rs. 10 million. The work was initiated after the Defense Council asked airport authorities to tighten the security at Nepal's only international airport, according to Kantipur, which also says that the number of security posts around the airport would also be increased. At present the airport has nine Army posts providing 24-hour vigil.

Houses for Kamaiyas

Fifty-eight newly constructed concrete houses in Gularia



A GAME OF CHINESE WHISPERS: The PM listens to possible allies

were handed over to freed Kamaiyas. They were constructed jointly by Radha Krishna Tharu Jansewa Kendra and Action Aid Nepal, organizations that have been running empowerment programs for Kamaiyas. Of the construction cost of Rs. 45,000, Rs. 5,000 was raised by the Kamaiyas themselves.

Swiss offer

The Swiss government offered to mediate between the government and the Maoist rebels in an effort to end the eight-year-old insurgency. Earlier this year, the United Nations had offered its good offices to mediate the conflict if both the government and the rebels were open to the idea. While the NCP (Maoist) has accepted the UN proposal to work as a

mediator in the peace talks, the new government has already ruled out the possibility of third-party involvement.

Fossil found

In an excavation work carried out by Nepal Telecom in Kalimati, workers found remains of a prehistoric creature, possibly a mammoth, reports The Himalayan Times. Further study of the fossils is underway. The paper quotes Sukra Sagar Shrestha, the head of the Department of Archaeology as saying, "The whole body of the creature could be there. We must excavate to find it." He said it was a case of missed opportunity that the archaeologists did not get a chance to spot-study the fossils immediately after the excavation. The fossil suffered damage during the excavation.

School bombed

The Maoists bombed Modern Indian School at Chobhar last Wednesday, the fourth day of the indefinite education strike called by the pro-Maoist student union. The bomb damaged property worth over Rs. 5 million. Six school buses and 46 computers were also damaged. It is the third time the Maoists have attacked the school.



NHRC requests

The National Human Rights Commission asked Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to allow it access to those who are kept in the Royal Nepal Army custody. NHRC said that it was given access to visit ANNFSU-R vice president Krishna K.C. who is placed in Bhairabnath Gan in Maharajgunj. The Supreme Court had ordered the NHRC to report K.C.'s whereabouts.



LINEAGE: King Gyanendra unveils late King Birendra's statue at Birendra Sainik School, Bhaktapur

Brown sugar

The Birgunj police seized 182 kilogram of brown sugar which was on its way to India, reports Nepal Samacharpatra. Police seized the contraband and arrested the truck driver and an accomplice.

Highway one-way

The Valley Traffic Police made the Tribhuvan highway traffic one way. Vehicles running from Kathmandu to Hetauda must now use Palung-Shimbhanjyang-Bhaise route and those traveling to Kathmandu from Hetauda the Narayanghat route through the Prithvi Highway. The police said the arrangement will remain in effect until the Prithvi Highway comes to full operation.

Prohibitory orders

Sher Bahadur Deuba's government reintroduced prohibitory orders on street agitation in parts of Kathmandu. They were lifted a month ago by the Thapa government after intense pressure from agitating

parties. The orders were levied in a bid to maintain peace and order in the Valley, Kathmandu District Administration Office said.

Fake currency

Police arrested two Nepalis and two Pakistanis with fake Indian currency notes worth Rs 400,000. Mahamad Ejaj Hussain and Mahammad Rasid are Pakistan citizens and Samjan Haluwai and Jaya Prakash Adhikari are Nepalis. They were arrested from the Shree Baba Guest House at Sundhara.

European plea

The European Union requested the agitating political parties to join the Deuba government. A French Embassy release said that the appointment of Deuba as prime minister was a positive step towards the constitutional solution of the crisis.

UN concern

UN General Secretary Kofi Annan said Nepal is one of the nations where civilians, especially women and children, were the worst hit by internal conflict. In a

report on protection of civilians in armed conflict to the Security Council this week, Annan cited wars in Nepal, Iraq and Sudan as some of the worst examples where civilians have been suffering. Annan said there is "stark and disturbing evidence" of how much civilians are still suffering because of the war, with "too many instances" of civilians being either subjected to extreme violence or being denied humanitarian aid.

Soldiers to protest

More than 2,000 ex-Indian soldiers, who were not provided any pension by the Indian government, have decided to stage protests against the Indian government reported Nepal Samacharpatra. The ex-Army Welfare Association, a body of ex-Indian Nepali soldiers in Rupandehi, had asked the Indian government to meet their demands by May 2004. The association had earlier submitted two memorandums to the former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajapayee and prime minister, Surya Bahadur Thapa.

Week in politics

June 5: UML mulls over idea of joining government in its central committee meeting. Nepali Congress says Deuba surrendered to King with his appointment; June 6: Maoist aligned student union shuts down schools; NC debates over constituent assembly; June 7: Five party meet ends inconclusive; June 8: Debate over joining government continues in UML—majority says place terms and conditions to Deuba; June 9: PM Deuba addresses the nation, calls Maoists for talks and parties to join government. UML asks its standing committee to decide on joining government; June 10: PM Deuba inducts his own party members Bimalendra Nidhi and Prakashman Singh into his cabinet as ministers; UML puts forward proposal for constituent assembly. Alliance of parties minus UML decides to continue street protests; June 11: RPP decides to join government, gives power to party president to decide on berths.



THROUGH THE IRON GATE: The rush to see the SLC results

MOBILE BILLS DOWN

Nepal Telecom has slashed down its charges on mobile phones by 45 percent to 100 percent starting June 15. No charges will be made for pre-paid mobile bills on calls between 8 p.m. to 8 a.m., a facility that was already enjoyed by postpaid service users. The new rates include a rupee for postpaid and Rs. 1.20 for pre-paid mobiles on calls made from general telephones at other times. Likewise, the rate for mobile-to-mobile calls is 50 Paise for postpaid and 60 Paise for the pre-paid services. Nepal Telecom says it is currently providing services to a total 66,000 postpaid and 70,000 pre-paid mobile phone users.

KUMARI TIES UP WITH MUNCHA

Kumari Bank Ltd. has expanded its e-pay service by signing an agreement with muncha.com, the popular shopping portal. The agreement was signed by Bhusan Rana, assistant general manager of Kumari Bank Ltd. and Amrit Tuladhar, managing director of muncha.com

E-shoppers at muncha.com will now be able to make their payments through Kumari Bank Online at no additional cost on any online purchases.

NEW BIKES IN TOWN

Syakar Co. Ltd., the authorized distributor of Hero Honda motorcycles in Nepal, has launched the modified version of Hero Honda CBZ named CBZ*

In addition to the older features, the new CBZ now comes with an electric starter and a new body sticker design.

Syakar Co. Ltd., has also launched the new Ambition 135, a modified version of the earlier Hero Honda Ambition.

The new 135cc is equipped with an AMI carburetor, a trapezoidal headlamp, fitting visor and matching stickers giving the modified version a more attractive look than the earlier version.

QUAKE PROOF REINFORCEMENTS

Himal Iron and Steel Pvt. Ltd. (HISPL) has launched a new iron rod using "Tempcore," an internationally recognized technology under the close supervision of CRM Belgium.

According to the company, the rods are effective construction reinforcements in earthquake-prone zones like Nepal. The main features of the Himal Tempcore rods are its high tensile strength, weld-ability and duct-ability as well as corrosion resistance.

ZOOM WAFERS

Chaudhary Group has a new entry, Zoom Wafers, in the confectionary market. Zoom wafers come in two distinct flavors—orange and vanilla—and are priced at Rs. 2 each. Chaudhary Group plans to expand the prod-



uct base by adding a few more flavors in the near future.

NCCB TO ISSUE DEBIT CARDS

Nepal Credit and Commerce Bank (NCCB) recently signed an agreement with Smart Card/Choice Technologies (SCT). NCCB will now be able to provide network services of Automated Teller Machines (ATM) and Point-of-sale (PoS) terminals to its customers.

Mukunda Karmacharya, deputy general manager of NCCB, and Rabindra B Malla, managing director and CEO of SCT, signed the agreement. NCCB debit cards will now be accepted throughout the 15 SCT network ATMs and around 250 PoS terminals.



DCBL TO LAUNCH ATM

Development Credit Bank Limited (DCBL) has signed an agreement with Smart Card/Choice Technology (SCT) with an aim to provide ATM and PoS facilities to its customers.

DCBL also plans to extend its services to major cities like Banepa, Pokhara, Birgunj, Dhangadi, Bhairahawa, Butwal and Nepalgunj.

PMBFL BEGINS ITS OPERATION

Prudential Merchant Banking & Finance Ltd. (PMBFL), the first finance company registered after the implementation of 'Bank and Financial Institution Act 2003', started its operations recently.

The promoters of PMBFL are Former Governor Dr. Harihar Dev Pant, Yograj Rajbhandari and Raja Ram Baniya Chhetri among others. The bank's major activities will include investment, loans on installment to purchase vehicles, machinery, goods, technologies, housing, establish stores and project operation.

According to the acting general manager, Anju Pant, PMBFL plans to issue shares to the public within a year of operation.





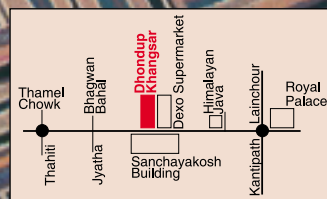
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EXTRA DUES

Right to education is not a much celebrated idea among the student unions, who say that's a luxury many Nepali children can't afford. But parents are going through the grind due to the school shutdown

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

In the past week, 35-year-old Ram Bhakta Maharjan had one additional responsibility at home: after the Maoist students forced schools to shut down, he needed to spare more time for his family. This in between his 9 a.m. to late-evening office hours.

As the Krantikaris called for an indefinite school shutdown starting June 6, accusing private schools for charging exorbitant fees, his 5-year-old son hasn't been able to attend his kindergarten classes at Saraswati Boarding High School in Chhetrapati. And the pressure is slowly mounting on the parents who are taking turns to watch over their "hyperactive" kid. They want to make sure that the child makes up for his missed lessons in school.

"There wouldn't be much to complain if only the strikes ended up forcing the schools to bring down their fees," says Maharjan, who works at the Human Rights and Good Governance Advisory Unit at Danida, the Danish aid agency. "Still, bringing politics into school is a violation of the children's right to education."

But the right to education is not a much celebrated idea these days among the Krantikaris and other student unions, who say that's a luxury many Nepali children can't afford. Even with a monthly income of Rs. 30,000, Maharjan admits he is paying much be-

yond his means and struggling to meet other household costs. The school's monthly bill adds up to Rs. 2,000—Rs. 750 as tuition fees, which goes as high as Rs. 4,000 and higher in other schools depending upon what says their "status and reputation."

While a number private schools are slapping fees on just about everything ("stationary," "swimming," "computer," "magazines,") it is the government that should take some of the responsibility for the shutdown: It failed to come up with consistent education policies that have been demanded by both the student unions and school owners. But the unions can't be given a thumbs-up too. They are not playing

by the rulebook and are forcing students out of their classrooms. The student unions have set a dangerous precedent and seem all too happy to carry on, regardless whether anyone likes their move or not.

"Since I took over the organization, there have been nine committees to amend the education policy," says

Umesh Shrestha, president of the Association of Private Boarding Schools Organization of Nepal (PABSON). "But none (of the recommendations) have been implemented so far."

In May 2001, the Krantikaris went on a similar strike with a 15-point demand that included banning Sanskrit from schools and changing the national anthem along with cutting down school fees in private schools by 50 percent and

Student unions have set a dangerous precedent and seem all too happy to carry on





providing free education in government schools till grade 10. They signed an agreement in December 2002 with PABSON and government officials to slash tuition fees by up to 25 percent, classifying private schools into a, b, c and d categories—depending on the tuition fees. A similar revision in the fee structure was to follow at higher secondary schools—with a slash of up to 29 percent. The government also agreed to provide issue. The current shutdown, the Maoist students say, is part of their demands, though the Krantikaris now also want the government to remove the “terrorist” tag put on them.

“The government doesn’t seem to be doing its homework properly,” says Gagan Thapa, general secretary of Nepal Student Union, who is part of the 11-member committee. “For their part, the private schools twist the rules to suit them.”

Private schools in turn are demanding that they be governed according to the Company Act that will turn schools into profit making businesses.

That is exactly what the student unions don’t want. “Our demands are the same as those of the Krantikaris,” says Thapa. “It is not necessary that the entire problem will be solved by the formation of another committee. Our union is already planning for another strike after the one by the Krantikaris is over.”

According to records, the schools held classes for less than 120 days last year, though their rulebooks say the number of school days should be at least 180. Most days were lost to student strikes and bandas called by political parties.

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba appointed Bimalendra Nidhi as the new education minister last Thursday but the new minister is unlikely to have a quick say over such matters as removal of the “terrorist” tag, which is a political issue.

“When are the schools going to open?” wonders Maharjan, like many other parents, who are at a loss to explain both to their young children and their employers how long the stalemate will continue. ■



Muddle Over MIDDLE

Whatever the situation on the ground, Nepal's donors are getting increasingly jittery. And they want action—and fast. If that means going for a third-party mediation, well and good, they say. But even they are divided

BY AKHILESH UPADHYAY
AND SUMAN PRADHAN

More than a week after his appointment, the only people Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has been able to induct in his cabinet were his own party colleagues, Bimalendra Nidhi and Prakashman Singh. Party insiders present a brave face, insisting that an all-party government should take shape in the next 10 days or so, and the talks with CPN(UML), RPP and NSP (Anandi) have been largely positive. It is no secret that the prime minister is particularly keen to woo the UML, and for good reasons too.

But in some ways, getting other parties to join, though crucial, can only be a side-

War, then, war Open or understood, must be resolved

MILTON, *Paradise Lost*



GOVERNMENT

show. Everyone knows, the success of the Deuba government hinges on whether or not it can bring the Maoists to the peace table. In this regard, the past week has been rife with rumors. While some have speculated about an immediate ceasefire and peace talks, many others are skeptical, especially given the Royal Nepal Army's reluctance to enter into peace negotiations.

Whatever the situation on the ground, Nepal's donors are getting increasingly jittery. And they want action—and fast. If that means going for a third-party mediation, well and good, they say. The clearest indication of this came early last week when a news agency quoted Swiss Foreign Ministry officials in Geneva of being keen to mediate between the government and Maoists. Though the report was sketchy

and raised more questions than it answered, it underscored the donor community's concerns regarding Nepal, a concern which has also been aired time and again by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, the European Union and others. It is no secret that the Maoists want peace negotiations. Messrs Prachanda and Baburam have repeatedly made it clear in recent weeks that they are ready for peace talks provided there is international mediation. But the government is steadfast against such mediation. Sources have told *Nation Weekly* that the Army is not too keen about a cease-fire, lest the rebels use it to regroup and re-strategize, as they did during the last two rounds of peace talks.

But that hasn't stopped some donors from trying. The thinking among the Europeans, Canadians and the United Na-

tions is that the civil conflict is getting out of control and it is time for international mediation. A number of major donors have already pulled out of large parts of Farwest and Midwest, the region that needs the aid most and there is imminent possibility that they may seriously consider pulling out of Nepal altogether if the security situation deteriorates further. Since the Maoists are hell-bent on bringing the state apparatus to a grinding halt, the argument is that bringing in a third party (the United Nations is the preferred choice) will change the equation. "There is a great deal of concern," said a western diplomat, whose government wants Nepal to use the good office of the UN Secretary General to defuse the situation. "The signs are ominous. Outside Kathmandu and the countryside, Nepal looks like a country without a government."

But even this diplomat admits, all donors do not think alike. There is a divide among the donor community over international mediation. India, clearly Nepal's most important ally in the fight against the Maoists, is against the UN mediation. "Nepal is a sovereign country," says Sanjay Verma, First Secretary at the Indian Embassy, when asked to comment on the Indian position on possible UN mediation. New Delhi believes that external mediation doesn't work in resolving conflicts, starting with the mother of all conflicts in the Middle East, the Palestine quagmire. The thinking is: whoever is part of the UN mediation team, they will be from individual countries and will have their own axes to grind in Nepal's conflict. New Delhi views that Nepal has both experience and expertise to deal with the conflict internally but also believes that both parties to the conflict will have to make compromises. India has categorically ruled out its mediation in the conflict.

Others say it is too early to talk about mediation without first laying the ground work for talks and systematic exercise to formulate the state policy. In the past, the failure to chalk up a well-defined framework and expectations meant that peace processes were dependent more on individual impulses rather than the painstaking homework that is required for the high-stake negotiations. "Maoists are a monolith but the Nepali

contd. on page 25

Talk Of UN Mediation Is Premature

Ram Sharan Mahat, central committee member of the Nepali Congress, is among a few leaders who can articulate a well-rounded thesis on why the talk of UN mediation is not a panacea for Nepal. He fears that UN mediation will help validate the theory that Nepal is almost a failed state, and that there exist two regime and two armies, a point the Maoists has been trying to make all along. And unlike a number of other conflict situations, where the insurgents have substantial defined areas of control, Mahat says, there are no such areas in Nepal which could be considered “militarily controlled” by the Maoists. Still, he conceded to Akhilesh Upadhyay of Nation Weekly the conflict situation is “very serious” and warrants immediate action.

What is the state of the conflict?

Maoists claim they are entering into the phase of strategic offensive. I don't buy that. It is true that that the government doesn't control most of the countryside. That the news of killings, extortions and intimidation is a daily occurrence. But Maoists owe much of the control to the strength of their terrorist tactics, rather than people's willing acceptance of their rule. They run the show by default in absence of government, civil and military administrations. But the fact remains that the situation is very serious.

Have we reached a point where third-party mediation is inevitable?

Before talking about the third party, we must be clear if we have given enough attention to resolving the problem internally. If anything, we are internally doubly divided—there is a fight over constitutional crisis and then there is another fight with the Maoists. Only after our united efforts fail will the talk of third-party mediation come up. No external party can force its wish on

the unwilling parties. Shifting our national responsibilities to external force could be easy but not a solution. Bringing in third parties would be acceptable when internal possibilities are exhausted.

What is your roadmap toward the negotiated settlement?

The present regime isn't even interested in activating the derailed constitution. How can it talk about restructuring the polity? Putting the constitution back on track will be a first big step toward the settlement.

What about suggestions that the UN should step in before opposing political forces run each other to the ground?

There's definitely a role for the UN to play—but not necessarily in

political mediation at the moment. The UN must use its moral authority to make the Maoists renounce violence. Unless the Maoists renounce their present methods—terrorist tactics even by UN definitions—the talk of UN mediation may be premature. Second, the UN must monitor the human rights violations. Third, it must play a role in relief and rehabilitation of the victims of the conflict. For this,

UN personnel must be guaranteed unrestricted access throughout the country.

Do you think the Maoists will come forward for talks again—UN mediation or not?

The two rounds of talks have shown that they have used the peace process for tactical advantage, rather than for a lasting peace. Having said that, I don't rule out the role of any third party, including the UN, working quietly toward that end without publicity and fanfare—either internally or externally.

Can you please elaborate?

Most successful negotiations are conducted outside the gaze of the public and media. There is no point revealing every single detail at the negotiating stage. Of course, in the long run public participation and confidence will hold the key to any successful peace process. But every single process need not be transparent. To me, the bottom line is: the Maoists should show



that they are sincere about the peace process. Their literature and claims made by their leaders Prachanda and Baburam state otherwise. In fact, they have been saying consistently peace initiatives are a step toward their ultimate objective of "People's Democracy."

Are you then implying that Maoists have never been sincere about the talks?

If you read their literature, they accept only two forms of negotiations, both modeled on classic communist strategies. First, the Brest-Litovsk Treaty of 1918 signed under Lenin with imperial Germany. Second, the Chungking Negotiations of 1938, which led to the establishment of "people's democracy" in China. In the first case, Russia ceded Baltic states and other territories for the time being in order to preserve the October Revolution, only to expand their sphere of influence right

The Maoists should show that they are sincere about the peace process. In fact, they have been saying consistently peace initiatives are a step toward their ultimate objective of "People's Democracy"

across Eastern Europe later. In the second case, the alliance with Chang Kaisek's troops helped them defeat the Japanese but it turned out to be only a temporary tactical alliance which led to communist takeover of China. Look at what Nepal's Maoists have done in the last two peace processes. They used them to consolidate and expand their organization. They set preconditions to talks and knew well they could strike a good deal with weak governments, who were desperately seeking legitimacy. On both occasions, they walked out of the talks when their

conditions were met. I hope it will not be the case in future. Maoists must be ready to work in a multi-party democracy without the use and show of force.

What is the way out?

The new government is hardly the best way out to resolve the crisis. It will try but I can't see it going far given its narrow popular base.

Aren't you pulling the gun too early?

By the look of it, this government will be much like the past two governments. If UML does come in,

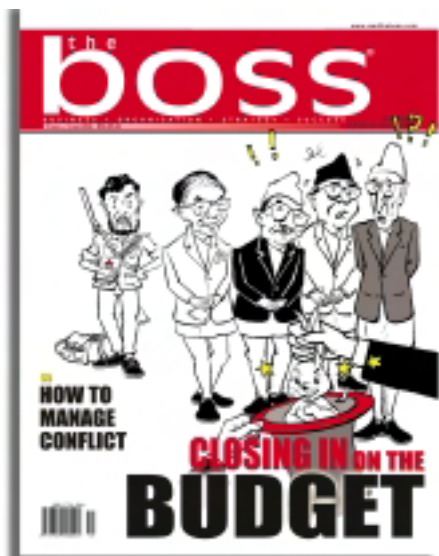
that will make some difference but without functioning democratic institutions like the Legislature, it is bound to fail.

The European countries, who have stood solidly behind the political parties, are now making a plea to the political parties to work together with the new government?

We appreciate the concerns shown by the European community about the deteriorating situation in Nepal, but we know our problems better. We are not asking for the moon. What we are saying is: let the Constitution prevail.

With the CPN(UML) keeping out of the five-party alliance, is the Nepali Congress getting isolated?

Restoration of the constitutional process hasn't even started. It is not a matter of who is with us and who is not. It is about standing up to our conviction. **N**



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निर्माण जगतमा युवावतकारी 'आयात'

हिमाल स्टील
TMT CORE

हिमालले प्राप्त गरेको छ नेपालमा टेम्पकोर प्रविधिको एकमात्र अधिकार

TMT स्टीलको अन्वेषक CRM बेल्जियमले टेम्पकोर प्रविधिको लागि हिमाल स्टीलसंग एकमात्र अनुबन्ध गरेको छ । अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय क्षेत्रमा समेत प्रशंसित टेम्पकोर प्रविधियुक्त हिमाल टेम्पकोरबाट बनाउनुहोस् हरेक निर्माण अझ बढी सुरक्षित ।

- अत्यधिक विश्वसनीयता : CRM बेल्जियमको अत्याधुनिक प्रयोगशालामा उपयुक्त साबित भएपछि मात्र बित्री गरिने भएकोले अन्यको तुलनामा अत्यधिक विश्वसनीय ।
- अत्यधिक शक्तिशाली : साधारण स्टील भन्दा १०% बढी शक्तिशाली ।
- पैसाको बचत : उच्चकोटीको स्टील भएकोले अन्य साधारण स्टीलको तुलनामा कम खपत हुन्छ र जोगीन्छ तपाईंको पैसा ।

थप विशेषता:

- मूल्यमा पारदर्शिता
- हरेक बण्डलमा सही तौल ट्याग
- उद्योगको भ्याट बिल

हिमाल स्टील

बढी
हिमालले/सुरक्षित घर बनाउँछ ।



हिमाल आयरन एण्ड स्टील (प्रा.) लि.

ज्योति भवन, १९१९ कान्तिपथ, पो.ब.नं. १३३, काठमाडौं, फोन: ४२२५२३०, ४२२६५३० (मार्केटिङ्ग), फ्याक्स: ४२२६३१४

UN Can Play A Key Role

In terms of volume, **Switzerland's** bilateral aid to Nepal may be smaller compared to some others but SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) is one of Nepal's first development agencies. Typical of the Swiss national character, SDC has strictly maintained its nonpartisan stand. In recent months, however, Switzerland has taken an active role in trying to make Nepal adhere to the international human rights regime. At the UN Human Rights Commission's meet in Geneva this year, it sponsored a proposal to bind Nepal into accepting international monitoring of its human rights situation. But the proposal was scuttled by India and the United States, who believe that putting the Nepali state under the rigor of the international human rights regime would affect counterinsurgency operations. **Jorg Frieden, Country Director of SDC** told **Nation Weekly** that the issue of mediation, which has been reported in the media and political circles, is no more an abstract one. Of the international agencies, UN, Frieden says, is the preferred choice among the donors.

Has Nepal's conflict reached the stage where third-party mediation is the only way out?

Development agencies like ours are today facing difficulties in delivering support to the rural people. The country's conflict is political in nature. It has nothing to do with the need of the people. The government can guarantee access and law and order only in a minimal part of the territory. The issue of mediation therefore is not an abstract anymore. We need some kind of understanding from the parties to the conflict on delivery of humanitarian and development aid.

How can that be done?

Given its history and experience in dealing with conflict, the UN can play a key role to ensure a peace corridor. This is an urgency.

Are you saying that basic services no longer reach a large chunk of the population and therefore the situation demands urgency?

We desperately need an agreement between the parties on the delivery of humanitarian aid, food, education, and a minimum development work. We think it is the first responsibility of the government, but

if the Maoists don't want to talk to the government, the United Nations can step in as key player—as they have done elsewhere in similar situations. Rural people need opportunities and support. The UN Secretary General has already offered his good offices to avoid what the international community fear is an impending catastrophe.

Many, certainly the government, would take such a move as acknowledging that the state powers have collapsed?

I can't comment on that (That becomes a very delicate issue).

One argument against bringing in the United Nations, or any other international party as either a mediator or facilitator in the peace process, is that it will give Maoists legitimacy as a political force.

I have a personal experience of having worked in a conflict—in Mozambique. The recognition of political and military strength of a group is not equivalent to giving them legitimacy. If you don't recognize them in any way, you are not taking their strength into account. First you have to recognize that an adversary exists and move on from there.

Is the state in denial then?

We hope the new government will recognize this reality and enter into a dialogue. Recognition of the demands made by the adversary can be a starting point to negotiations. Nepal's development needs are immense and urgent.

What are you referring to?

You recognize the fact that the Maoists have made certain demands. Then negotiate how the two parties can work out a peaceful solution. **N**

contd. from page 21

state is not," says former Foreign Minister Bhekh Bahadur Thapa. The implication is, whereas the Maoists could agree to peace talks and an eventual deal without having to justify everything to their support base, a democratic state cannot do so with as much ease.

There are just too many players here who have a stake in the outcome—the Palace, the parties, and indeed the people themselves. They all will want to have a say. But more than anything else, the fear among Nepali officials is that inviting third-party mediation will internationalize the conflict and lead to official recognition of the rebel Maoists. In essence, what this means is that the international

community will recognize that there are two states within Nepal, something the government does not want.

The fear is even more acute considering officials' belief that there appears to be no one who has a neutral status in Nepal's conflict, not even the Europeans.

"There is a difference between internal recognition and international recognition," says a foreign policy expert who has served in high-ranking official positions. "We can hold peace talks with the Maoists and give them some sort of recognition within our own borders, but doing the same thing through international players is a whole different ball game." This explains why successive governments have been reluctant to

agree to such mediation. But most are open to "facilitation," a term which vaguely means helping nudge negotiations along without being a party to it. "Maybe we could accept facilitation," says Thapa, but the government needs to know the modalities beforehand. But it could be awhile before the government, either this or future ones, realizes that "facilitation" is better than nothing. "Unfortunately, the history of all conflicts tell us that the bloodshed has to reach a certain level before all parties are serious about peace," says an official who declined to be named. "In Nepal's case, that point will come only when the death toll is much higher than the present." Cynical. But perhaps true? **N**

A group of orphans rescued from an abusive orphanage finally see better days. For residents of the Light for Nation children's home, this Dickensian scenario was not just stories out of a 19th century novel, but daily reality until now

BY SUSHMA JOSHI

What happens when a children's home becomes a place of abuse, where children get no food to eat and are beaten and kept in a state of acute fear? For residents of the Light for Nation children's home, this Dickensian scenario was not just stories out of a 19th century novel, but daily reality. "K.B. Khadga's (Light for Nation's founder) wife beat me and shut me in the bathroom," says Aarati Thapa, pointing to a scar on the side of her face. Aarati, a bouncy little girl in a pink frock,

Ram Prasad Pandey, 10, another rescued child, says Khadga's wife told him that if he left their home, the new folks would cut his heart out and sell it in a foreign country. Does he believe his new caretakers would do that? The question elicits a look of fear, as if the child doubts his own knowledge. But he is very definite when asked if he would like to return to his old orphanage. "No," he says promptly. "I don't like it there. They don't feed us there."

Food deprivation, say the children, was the norm at Khadga's Light for Nation. Silas Tamang, who also claims he's

10, says: "They only fed us once a day; chiura and sometimes rice. They would eat the meat, and only give us the bones." The children, who were not sent to school, were made to wash the dishes and do the laundry. They were also made to take care of chairman Khadga's four sons, including diaper changes for the infant. "If his son beat us, he would just beat us again," says Silas. The chairman's four sons, Peter, Paul, David and Jakob, received special treatment.

"The chairman even married his 13-year-old son to a 15-year-old orphan girl from the home," says Yograj Pandey, who also left the orphanage after seeing the abuse. Pandey, the 29-year-old general secretary of the new home, has two gold ear-studs and sunglasses worthy of a rock star. But his commitment to the children is clear. "I can't stay in my apartment even though I have my BBS Third Year ex-

OLIVER TWIST FINDS

insists she is 10 but looks about seven. She is one of the many children now rescued from the orphanage.

Salvation for the children at Light for Nation like Arati came in the form of nine staff members, who staged a wholesale walkout from the orphanage. Says Maiya Devi Pathak, who eventually started a new organization called Light for Nepal (not to be confused with Light for Nation) which now takes care of 35 children, "I would go from door to door to get donations, and then I would watch the chairman's family as they ate all the food. The children would get no meat or milk. After a while, I couldn't take it anymore. I wanted to start a better institution."

Pathak has a personal reason for starting an abuse-free home for children: her own children were raised in Bal Mandir, which she says did a good job. Pathak, who is epileptic, did not have access to medication in her twenties, and fell into the fire while living in her village. It took two years of hospital-stay and doctors to reconstruct her face. Her children, during this time, grew up in Bal Mandir.



ams," he says. "I have to come here and be with the children. When they go away to school, it feels very quiet and empty."

After the walkout, a showdown occurred. Ramila Gurung, 13, decided to run away from the Light of Nation to join her friends at Pathak's apartment, where 10 children who had left with their caretakers were being housed. K.B. Khadga lodged a complaint with the police, saying Yograj Pandey had stolen his children. "You keep on stealing children from that home. If you need children, we can bring you truckloads from the street," the police inspector reportedly said to Yograj, who was taken away in a van.

"The inspector didn't understand that we cared about these children, and they had a bond with us. I told him that we would return the children, if they wanted to go. They started to cry and began to tell their stories, and finally the

police gave us full guardianship," says Yograj, whose ordeal opened up one good networking opportunity: the police, seeing their good work, now bring rice and vegetables for the children.

Pathak's Light for Nepal, housed in a five storey building close to the green forest of Raniban, is now registered as an NGO with the Social Service Welfare Council. A busy hum of children playing greets visitors at the gate. The children say "Namaste!" and then dash off for their "stick game." The rooms, stacked with double-decker beds, have the relaxed feel of a home, rather than an institution. A dresser in each room fea-



FEELS LIKE HOME: The children's belongings at Light of Nepal

bring by rice, and vegetables that can be picked up for free from the wholesalers at Kalimati, mentions Sitaula. Even the Water Department co-operates by bringing by free tankers of water. Most importantly, BN Sharma, the vice-chairman of PABSON, has arranged to school all 35 children for free at CPS Godavari School. "We only have to pay the driver's salary. They even send us a bus," says Pandey.

Pathak says she would eventually like to have a building and a school which can house up to a 1,000 children. For the moment, however, they cannot add any more children due to lack of funding, despite requests.

Khadga's Light for Nation, which lost its status as a social service organization after CDO Kirtibahadur Chand deemed it was unsuitable for taking care of children, has shifted to another location. Khadga could not be reached for comment either. Light for Nation continues to operate outside of official scrutiny. The organization sustains itself on funds sent by Christian donors from abroad, and has added more children.

Says Deepak Sapkota of the Central Child Welfare Board, "It's not clear whose role it is to follow up on such cases. But when we hear of these cases, we do our best to follow it up with the Central District Office."

The Child Welfare Board, along with UNICEF and ILO, is working to create minimum standards and guidelines for care-giving organizations that work with children. "There's a Children Act, but there is no provision for law enforcement, and no capacity to implement them," says Alexander Kruger of UNICEF. When a case is brought to the police, they will favor the management over the children, he says. "The situation is pretty grim." **N**

A NEW HOME



tures personal photographs. Salman Khan rubs shoulders with photographs of the children's families, many of whom still live in Dhading and Nuwakot. "They don't know their past, or their parents. This is their home. They're happy here. They might be unhappier if they knew their past," says Narad Regmi, 30, a newly hired teacher who's been in the home for only a week.

The school patches together funding from Nepali donors and international friends. Bruce Moore, an Australian donor who originally used to fund Khadga's Light for Nation, now funds the new institution. He pays the rent for the new five-storey building, but the board remains worried that they may have to shift to a smaller place if he decides to discontinue his funding. Puruswattam Sitaula, the treasurer, says: "It's a constant battle to keep the orphanage afloat. You can't allow children to go hungry." Sitaula's job includes cajoling shopkeepers for credit when funds are low.

The home has been successful in garnering community support: local donors

STORM IN A TEA CUP

Hundreds of planters in Jhapa who took soft loans to cash in on the wave of “green prosperity” in the 90s are now saying they made bad investments. More than 1,200 planters are likely to default on their loans sooner than later. The global slump in tea market, domestic turbulence, and a sharp rise in domestic production are leaving their mark on the country’s fledgling tea industry.

**BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI
IN BHADRAPUR**

A young girl with a grin on her face hurriedly plucks tea leaves with her knotty fingers. She has her task cut out: by sunset, she has to make sure that her harvest meets the 25-kilogram quota to qualify for the plucking wage of Rs. 55. More than a dozen women and men, between the age of 14–35, are engrossed in the time-consuming chore alongside her, under the mid-day sun—some bare foot and others in flip-flop slippers. Last year one of them at the Kalika Tea Estate succumbed to a snake bite.

“We get Rs. 55 for a day’s labor,” replies a woman, who is too shy to give her name. She is more anxious to continue her plucking. “But our ‘malik’ has told us he would make an increment soon,” another adds with a touching sense of loyalty.

This is the scene from a tea garden of Dhanjuju Shrestha, a small farmer, in Bhadrapur, headquarters of Jhapa. Few of the pluckers seem to be aware that Shrestha’s company, which took soft loans from the Agriculture Development Bank (ADB) to set up the plantation, is on the verge of collapse. And so are workers’ hopes for better wages. Green leaves may be a symbol of hope and serenity elsewhere, but not in Jhapa. Rather, they could prove to be the epitome of the proverbial lull before the storm.

Like Shrestha, hundreds of other planters who took soft loans to cash in on the wave of “green prosperity” in the

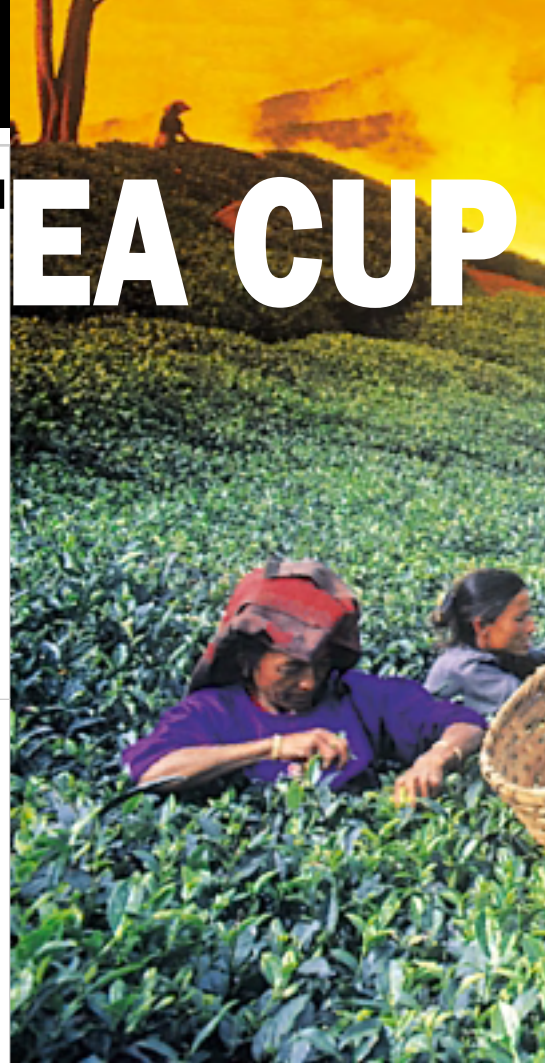
90s are now saying they made bad investments. More than 1,200 planters are likely to default on their loans sooner than later, according to the

Small Tea Farmers Association (STFA). The global slump in tea market, domestic turbulence, and a sharp rise in domestic production are leaving their mark on the country’s fledgling tea industry and nowhere is the effect more evident than in Jhapa, the new hub of Nepal’s tea industry.

“With the trouble in the mountains, most of our tea now doesn’t travel beyond the plains and a handful of urban centers,” says Kumar Giri of Nepal Tea Planters Association, a collective that represents big gardens and factory owners. “When I am under the grind myself, what price can I possibly offer to the farm owners?” There was a time some four or five years ago when he used to pay the farm owners as much as Rs. 16.50–17.50 for every kilogram of green leaves they would bring to his factory in Butabari. The price has now fallen to an all-time low of Rs. 8.

No wonder plantation owners like Bhadrapur’s Shrestha are rueing their decision which was influenced by the boom time in the 90s. And thanks to ADB, which would provide soft loans with a pay-back period of five years (it takes a maximum of five years for the tea plants to mature and start yielding profits.)

Still, many small plantation owners blame factory owners for the price crash. “Clearly, our main problem is adverse price carteling by factory owners,” says



Birtamode-based Gopal Giri, former secretary of Small Tea Farmers Association, “but there are other issues that needs to be sorted out as well—like extending the loan’s pay-back period from five years to seven years, lack of fertilizers, pesticides, and sprays, and the government apathy.”

The thin presence of pluckers itself symbolizes that all is not well in the tea gardens of Jhapa, whose eastern borders extend to the Indian tea basket of Darjeeling. Clearly, the tea euphoria that once swept the farmlands here is gradually getting buried under the mounting debris of loss and debts.

Many of the small farm owners say they have been able to save little. Here is their math: They sell green leaves for Rs 8.25 per kg (of which Rs 2.30 goes to the pluckers); the average investment requirement for producing a kilogram of tea is Rs. 7–9.50, excluding the irrigation costs. “The processors have pushed us too far in last five years,” says Purna Karki, President of the Small Tea Farmers’ Association. “I will soon be defaulting myself along with many other small planters under our association.” His plantation



covers eight bigha, and owes the Agriculture Development Bank Rs 800,000.

Isn't there a way out? What makes the farmers incur losses? A number of factors, says Karki.

One is surely the short shelf-life of the tea leaves and another is the declining quality of the leaves, at least in the eyes of the factory owners.

The best tea leaves—three leaves and a bud (famously called teen pate, ek suiro)—sprout in the first flush of spring. This is followed by a relatively lull period, when the leaves only

mature and harden. The second flush period begins with the pre-monsoon rain. While the leaves that come out now are not of top quality in flavor, they make for “good liquering tea.” And again the prices go up. But it is in the monsoon months that the prices really dip. While the flush is heavy, both the flavor and the “liquor” content of the leaves are poor.

The best tea leaves—three leaves and a bud (famously called teen pate, ek suiro)—sprout in the first flush of spring

“Farmers get very good prices for their leaves during the first and second flush seasons,” says Kumar, who runs the tea processing plant. “The best tea leaves are not more than three and half inch long, but the farmers come up with six inch long leaves. Any factory would give farmers a good price for teen pati suiro (three leaves and a bud).”

Small farmers say Nepal should follow the Indian example and introduce an auction system for price determination: proceeds are shared on a basis of 60:40 ratio by farmers and processors.

Experts at the Tea and Coffee Development Board say that the Indian model may be ideal for Nepal as well but they have had a hard time persuading the factory owners to sign up for the deal. The Board announced in 2002 that it would introduce the auction system in but has failed to enforce the decision.

Ishu Shanker Shrestha, regional head of the Tea and Coffee Development Board at Birtamode, acknowledges that “some people have monopolized the tea industry” but keeps short of naming names or pointing fingers. He finds it much safer to talk about a recommendation the board has made to the government and the National Planning Commission.

“A farmers’ cooperative tea processing factory may be in the pipeline in the next fiscal year,” he says, though he is not sure if his bosses up the bureaucratic hierarchy would ever act on his recommendation. This will avoid the bottleneck in processing.

“The market factor decides the pricing,” says Manoj Shrestha, owner of the Modern Tea Factory and Tea Estate. “The tea industry is undergoing a period of recession globally.” In Nepal, this recession is bound to exacerbate the problem: with each new flush season, new tea plants will mature and cross the five-year magic mark when the farmers start looking for their return. **N**

WITH TIKU GAUCHAN in Kathamndu

O, MR. DEUBA

With a relatively clean image, an army of able advisors, and awareness on key political and development issues both at home and abroad, Deuba continues to stand out in a tiny pool of candidates who can credibly hold the job of Nepali PM

BY SWARNIM WAGLE

If Sher Bahadur Deuba was nonplussed when George W. Bush greeted him at the White House in 2002 with the question, “Prime Minister, are the hippies still around in Nepal?” he didn’t show it. Beneath the flippancy and the chronic instinct to bungle, the rash judgments and incomprehensible utterances, Deuba’s sense of political purpose and a desire to prevail and do good build on a painful phase of protracted grooming. This includes 10 years in prison, and a sacrificial adulthood without money or wife. The qualities of sincerity and simplicity have nudged him far in life. But being a nice guy alone is not a sufficient qualification to run the kingdom—there’s a reason why we don’t have Samday Sherpa or Haribansha Acharya calling shots in Singha Durbar, but real politicians.

And because Deuba is both, you dismiss him at your peril. Baburam Bhattarai, the Maoist ideologue, when asked about Deuba last year, replied with contempt that he saw little point in talking about those who had been “swept aside by history” (itihaas baata pakha lageka). Implying that Deuba was irrelevant, if not finished, he almost endorsed with much irony, but not much subtlety, the King’s action of 4 October 2002. No former prime minister with 40 years of experience in poli-



tics, and an unchallenged leadership of at least a quarter of elected MPs from the last standing parliament, would exile himself to oblivion just because the King pronounced him “incompetent.” That the heavy adjective meant nothing because it came from a source not constitutionally authorized to make such judgments is now proven with his reappointment.

In my previous column, “Leaders Classified,” in the 17 May issue of *Nation Weekly*, I rated Deuba as one of Grade B leaders who “command popular constituencies, are educated and exposed to the outside world—but are ultimately mediocre in the art of wholesome leadership.” The word ‘wholesome’ was consciously chosen. While

Deuba himself has not been implicated in any serious impropriety during his numerous years in public life, he is surrounded by many who are, making him guilty by association. The dirty tactics he sanctioned to sustain the coalition politics of the mid-90s marked the beginnings of democratic decay. While he showed he could build alliances during tests of national will like the ratification of the Mahakali Treaty, he also readily equated ability to survive with ability to perform, gravely confusing means with end.

The traits that make him likeable have a flip side. His each success to woo and retain clean, competent colleagues, from Pradip Giri to Prakashman Singh, Bimalendra Nidhi to Narayan Saud, Prakash Mahat to Minendra Rijal, is



matched with failure to distance himself from the venal, proven liabilities like Chiranjivi Wagle and Bijay Gacchedaar. When Bal Bahadur K.C., another liability, erupts at a cabinet meeting, Deuba is helpless, too weak to assert himself by telling his peers that high offices require discipline and decorum. Loyalties inspired through principled deeds are different from those triggered by pity or fear. The careless and allegedly lazy Sher Bahadur Deuba needs to know when he is the private person happily in bed till 9 a.m., and when he is shouldering the burdens of a troubled nation as its Right Honorable Prime Minister. It is easy for others to respect him if he respects himself first.

Deuba once told the BBC that he doesn't really read much, although dur-

ing inter-continental flights, and other lonely jaunts, he is often spotted with books by Krishnamurti. Some of those readings in philosophy must have matured the man, allowing him to withstand the vicissitudes of politics better. But when a person with at least three graduate degrees defends his poor reading habits by saying many of Nepal's problems originate from people who read too much, there's a cause for mild alarm. Even his much-publicized stint at the London School of Economics (LSE) in the late 80s is not quite as illustrious as it appears on his Vitae. Enrolled in the "research fee" category, Deuba was expected to engage in independent research on parliamentary democracies by using the LSE's library

and a professorial guidance. Fred Halliday, a noted scholar in international relations, takes credit for having mentored Deuba, but when an LSE student alerted the alumni office about one of their former students becoming prime minister of Nepal in 1996, Halliday was quick to claim in the School's weekly newsletter that "Shah (sic) Bahadur" had indeed worked with him. If your proud guru misspells your first name in an official publication, then it is likely that the impressions you left behind were not exactly stellar. But when petty Kathmandu snobs murmured about his ability to converse in English, he rightly retorted, "I can't even speak Nepali properly, how can you expect me to be good in English?" That a farmer's son who grew up speaking a Farwestern dialect has risen to hold the country's top job on his own merits is a great Nepali story worth recognizing. How he delivers a 30-second sound bite on CNN is the last thing citizens need to worry about. Especially when the house is on fire.

So, third time round, will he actually put out the fire? Deuba knows he is all too human and is disarming about his shortcomings. No other politician in Nepal has the humility to admit as sincerely and frequently as he does about his mistakes. With a relatively clean image, an army of able advisors, and awareness on key political and development issues both at home and abroad, Deuba continues to stand out in a tiny pool of candidates who can credibly hold the job of Nepali PM. A sorry reflection perhaps of our national gene pool, but this is one job that can't be out-sourced for value and efficiency. As a keen Deuba watcher since 1990, this columnist has gone through a full circle of emotions seeing him work: from awe, dismay, pity, and despair, to resignation, acceptance, and grudging respect. As he begins his third reign in Singha Durbar, he should realize that, close to 60, he no longer is the evergreen "youth leader." Time is running out; and he should aim to rise to the occasion, make history, and then retire gracefully as an elder statesman to his mansion in Shivapuri. **N**

LEARNING TO FLY

The Air Hostess Training Institute trains young students to become professional flight attendants. The institute's owner, Prem Pandey, says his company's training has helped airlines cut down on both time and money

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

While on board a Nepali airline, 25-year-old Prem Pandey once heard a voice over the plane's communication system that could be called, according to him, unpolished English: "Ladies and Gentleman, we have now landed at... The time now is 32 degrees and the temperature outside is quarter to six..."

The passengers, including tourists, roared with laughter, embarrassing the airhostess who by now realized her mistake and apologized. In broken English again. For Pandey, it was this incident that gave him the idea that aspiring airhostesses could be trained to become professionals, and thus was born the inspiration for The Air Hostess Training Institute.

In August 23 last year, Pandey decided to collaborate with Air Hostess Training Institute in New Delhi and opened a similar center with the same name in Kathmandu. His mission: train young students between the ages of 18-25 before they apply for jobs as cabin crew in any of the airlines. Since then, two batches of 44 students have graduated from his school after a minimum of three months of training. Around 10 of them are already flying with one or the other of the existing 12-13 domestic airlines in the country.

"The response has been tremendous. We do not promise our trainees

job opportunities, but companies who have hired our graduates say that our training has saved them both time and money. Our graduates are already familiar with the basics of being a good flight attendant," says Pandey at his training center on the fourth floor of Neco Complex near Birendra International Convention Center. The institute hardly goes unnoticed with its huge signboard on the top of the building.

The Air Hostess Training Institute is one of a kind in the country and offers two courses, one basic and the other advanced. It trains students to become both air hostesses and flight stewards, but the number of males in its classes is much lower than the number of females. "The males are still too shy to take up this job and unfortunately think it's a woman's job though both of them undergo the same course," says Prem.

The institute has two classrooms with equipment such as oxygen masks and serving trays and another small room with a flight simulator where students are made familiar with real-time flying situations. The basic course lasts for three months compared to the one-year long advanced course, but both include training on personal grooming, public speaking, familiarization of the airport and aviation terminologies as well as classes on emergency procedures such as

firefighting and first aid. The basic course costs Rs. 30,000 while the advanced course costs Rs. 88,000. The last six months of the longer module is taught in New Delhi. It is mandatory for all trainees to behave like flight attendants inside the center and they are further groomed on personality enhancing skills during the course.



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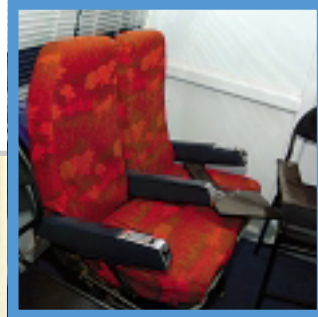
“You can see the difference on the trainees within weeks of their enrolment,” says Shanta Shrestha, the chief instructor at the institute, who has had at least 20 years of experience as chief airhostess at Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation and another 12 years with Necon Air. The admission criteria at the institute require applicants to be an intermediate graduate at the least. Girls have to be taller than 5 feet 2 inches and men above 5 feet 7 inches, all with sound vision. The criteria are the same as required by all airlines when hiring cabin crew. It does not mean the institute prefers tall people.

The training center has hired other professionals like Shrestha from the aviation business to run the classes, though Pandey himself never has had any first hand experiences with the industry.

“But I’ve always loved this field and was in search of doing something innovative and different in the business,” says Pandey, “and people in the aviation business have been very supportive towards our effort after realizing how much contribution we can make.”

The Air Hostess Training Institute has

recently expanded its operations to include foundation courses for pilots and aircraft maintenance training at the Allied Career Education located in the company’s premises. The institute has also started courses on media marketing and personality development. “We all hope that peace will be restored soon to bring that boom in the tourism industry again,” says Prem. “Otherwise, staying in business for a short while isn’t exactly the type of business the Air Hostess Training Institute is looking to establish.” **N**



Small Is Beautiful

Two Pokhrelis entrepreneurs with the same name prove that innovative ideas can keep small businesses running

BY BARSHA RANA

BUFFALO THRILLS

A year ago, a project proposal on running a buffalo ride company submitted by Amrit Gurung at Pokhara University became the talk of the faculty. His assignment on Small Business Management seemed unique and innovative but at the same time a tad too unusual. The faculty members themselves wondered whether such a venture could be feasible. Undaunted by their reviews, Gurung, early this year turned his assignment into a real business. “Nothing is impossible” says the confident young entrepreneur sitting in his small office at Buffalo Thrills in Lakeside, about his one-of-a-kind dream,



Buffalo Thrill's Amrit Gurung

Barsha Rana

Established just a few months ago, with money borrowed from his father, Gurung's Buffalo Thrills has already become popular for its unique services. He says that he got the idea for the business assignment after he saw clips TV clips of Tharu children riding on buffaloes. At Buffalo Thrills, trained buffaloes, brought in from Chitwan, take you for a thrilling ride on four different trails—Malepatan, Basundhara, Shedi and Barahi. The cost for the rides range from \$5 to \$25 for foreigners and Rs. 50 to Rs. 400 for Nepalis. Although he has yet to start turning a profit, Gurung believes that turnaround time is just around the corner.

Tourists are Buffalo Thrill's main customers but Gurung wants Nepalis to sample the rides as well. So far, there hasn't been much Nepali takers. “Many Nepalis find it awkward hopping on a buffalo,” he says. Such an attitude towards buffalo rides could probably stem from cultural reasons. “Hindus believe the buffalo to be Yamaraj's chosen mode

of transport, and that may be why the Nepali turnout has been low,” says Gurung. It could be a class issue too, where people don't want to be seen riding on an animal when they would rather be showboating in a fancy car.

But Gurung is not about to give up on his venture anytime soon. In spite of the comments he gets, like “Yamaraj ayo” and “Momo ayo,” he says “there's no looking back.” He's banking on the different experience provided by his company to lure customers in this tourist town already teeming with activities that range from boating and hiking to paragliding. And that striking out on a path less traveled may prove Buffalo Thrill's winning card in the long run.

TAMBOURINE MAN

Amrit Gurung, the owner of A²B in Lakeside, could be a walking logo for his shop. The Long-haired shop owner has a mala made from dried baldangro simi (green beans) and a coconut shell-pendant dangling on his chest and lots of bamboo-rings on his fingers. All the accessories are made by him. His alternative lifestyle get-up blends perfectly with the alternative-lifestyle-inspired shop that is A²B.

A²B's items for sale are anything but regular factory issued fare. On display are

hair pins, ashtrays, rings, incense burners, didgeridoos and even an *ektaray*, all made from either coconut shells or bamboo. The music collection does feature cds by top-of-the-chart artists, but A²B's treasure-trove of psychedelic trance cds by artists like Infected Mushroom and Skazi is perhaps unrivaled in Nepal.

Gurung uses both his own ideas and suggestions offered by customers who visit his shop to design his products. He gets his bamboo from the villages around Pokhara and recycles coconut shells from the nariwalwalas in town. The worktable in his workshop, couched snugly in a corner behind the shop's counter, is a smorgasbord of rings, ashtrays and pendants, all in various stages of completion. The products get crafted in the workshop and cross over the counter to get displayed for sale on the racks.

“I started working with bamboo as a hobby and now it's turning into a full-time job,” says Gurung. He views A²B as a good idea that keeps getting better rather than a well-planned business enterprise. “This is still a learning period. Business is so-so,” he says, “but what's more important to me is that the products I've designed and crafted are enabling me to make a livelihood.”

Gurung has other creative ideas up his sleeve as well, like his vision of a bamboo-theme bar where everything from the cutlery to the interiors will be made from bamboo, and where tama will feature prominently in various guises on the menu. But for now, this colorful artist selling his colorful wares in a colorful shop is happy enough embodying not just his shop's ethos but that of a wise old sage as well. After all, wasn't it Confucius who said, “Choose a job you love, and you'll never have to work a day in your life”? **N**



A2B: Get your alternative fix

Barsha Rana

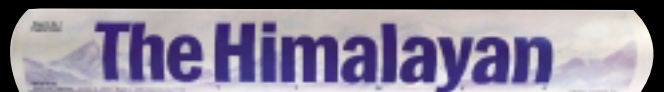


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A GREAT NEWSPAPER

Moon Or Six Pence

There isn't much demand for paintings. Why then are paintings by Nepali artists priced so high?

BY AJIT BARAL

Vincent van Gogh lived in penury throughout his life and died insane and unrecognized. But his works now sell in millions of dollars. When Van Gogh's "Portrait of Doctor Gachet" went under the hammer in 1990 at Christie's, it fetched \$ 82.5 million. Picasso's life was not as indigent as Van Gogh's, but his life was by no means financially comfortable and many times he had to beg from friends to survive. Today, a Picasso sells for millions of dollars. A few weeks ago, Picasso's "Boy with a Pipe" sold for a whopping \$104 million at a Sotheby's auction. That sale can serve as a context to determine how Nepali artists price their works.

Last year, Srijana Contemporary Art Gallery sold stacks of paintings in its collection at seemingly throwaway prices. Consequently, a Shashi Shah or a Kiran Manandhar was available at as low a price as Rs. 3,000. And the paintings were quickly lifted off the racks by Nepali buyers. But many artists and gallery managers didn't like the idea of selling paintings that cheap and were angry that the sale scuppered the going-prices marked up by the artists. Nevertheless, the sale could also be viewed in a more positive light: at least an attempt was being made to create an art market.

A gaggle of art galleries has popped up in Kathmandu in the last couple of years. But most of them are not doing well financially because of the absence of a local market for paintings. Ask any gallery manager for the buyers' profile and you will find that the bulk of them are expats and diplomats, and only very few are Nepalis.

The market creates demand, but since there is no real market for paintings here, there isn't much demand for paintings either. The economic sense, therefore, demands that we create a market first. And how would we do that?

Selling paintings as cheaply as Srijana Art Gallery did could be a start.

But such sales are exceptions rather than the rule. Artists here throw economic sense out the window, and slap unrealistically high price tags on their works. Even prints are priced high. The print, by preparing multiple copies of the same painting, was developed to provide art at a cheaper price. We have artists who put a minimum price of Rs. 30,000 on their prints, which seems outlandishly high in a country where a *sachib* earns a monthly salary of Rs. 10,000-12,000.

Till the 19th century there was no art market even in the west. And artists were dependent on feudal lords, aristocrats and the Church. But with industrialization, things began to change. It created a growing industrial class. This class started splurging money on paintings, creating a market for art.

Closer home, there was no art market in India till around 70 years ago. M. F. Husain, whose paintings now sell for lakhs, used to work on hoardings and signboards to make ends meet. One story goes like this. When the Indian art scene was still finding its feet, people from Austria were fleeing to India, fearing Hitler's

persecution. Many of the Austrians were artists themselves and some of them worked for the Times of India as art directors and art critics. They started encouraging the Indian artists. These developments were taking place at a time when industrialists like Tata and Birla were emerging, who later became great art patrons. Patrons and critics helped shape the Indian art world as we know it today.

Nepal is still a semi-feudal country, and doesn't have a substantial industrial class that actively patronizes artists. And the wider middle class cannot afford to buy paintings priced at Rs. 10,000, even occasionally.

In the west, and to a certain extent in India, art has become, like everything else, a commodity to be bought and sold for profit. But it isn't just any other commodity. It's a commodity with prestige value. This is why people in the west cough up astronomical sums to buy a Miro or a Pollock. Couple this with the tax exemption policy on the sale of paintings that most governments in the west have, and purchase of paintings becomes an attractive and safe investment. The buying of Picasso's "Boy with a Pipe" was, more than anything else, a safe investment.

Here in Kathmandu, by pricing beyond what our local buyers can afford, our artists are shooting themselves in their feet. It's time they realized the ground reality and start creating an indigenous art market. **N**





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A Collective Nightmare

They call it Aithan. Different people in different locations—who don't know each other, report in detail the same words, images, expressions and feelings of the same dream. Is this a coincidence? Not likely. It is an expression of a collective nightmare

BY VINCENT ANDROSIGLIO

I can't breathe, move, nor speak. I'm paralyzed. I try to push off this black, unseen figure. But, I can't. It bursts out of the dark; jumps on my body—pressing down hard on my chest. I feel like I'm going to die. I try to scream, but no words come out. As I push against it, it gets stronger. I give up and lie there—powerless and panic-stricken. This goes on from five to 20 minutes. Finally, it leaves.

This is a dream that thousands of Nepalis have been having for decades. They call it Aithan. Roughly translated: you get a nightmare when you sleep with your hands on your chest. Many wake up from the dream with green-blue marks on their legs. Different people in different locations—who don't know each other, report in detail the same words, images, expressions and feelings of the same dream. Is this a coincidence? Not likely. It is an expression of a collective nightmare.

If the dreamer happens to be sleeping with someone, they all report that if the other touches or rubs against them, the force leaves and they wake up. Or, if they struggle long enough (mostly young men say this), sometimes it goes away. Although they can't move their body, sometimes they can move their toes and fingers—just barely.

What is the Nepali psyche like that allows for the transmission of this dream from one mind to another? In a recent article I wrote, I got a glimpse of the "porousness" of their psyche regarding the war activities in Nepal. Many dreamt of being a Maoist, while the soldiers shot at them. Others were running away from the Maoists to save their lives. In any case they wake up in a panic, with a jolt. A most draining conflict!

Gradually, I realized that there is a complete mythology that explains this dream. It is believed that if a person sleeps on his back with hands lying flat on their chest, the witch will appear. Sleeping on your side prevents it. In fact, neither is true.

At the extreme opposite, some medical doctors say the paralysis is caused by the blood getting cut off because of the position the dreamers are lying in. The green-blue marks are understood to be ruptured blood vessels or symptomatic of a deficiency in Vitamin C. Other doctors say that these explanations make no medical sense. They are being used to calm down the dreamers and to discount the witch folklore. But, is a medical myth being created to take the place of the witch myth?

After interviewing a hundred people or more, I began to ask, "Why are you having this dream?" Here are some of my own explanations.

Dreams never tell us what we already know. This dream indicates that the dreamers are not consciously aware of their feelings of helplessness—the main ingredient of depression. We dream what we can't tolerate during the day. This temporarily keeps us in balance, till we are ready to face what we really feel.

When a dream repeats, it means that the message has not gotten across. An obstacle to understanding its meaning has been created because Nepalis have unquestioningly accepted witch folklore and uncertain medical explanations.

Dreams are a short summary of our life. They reflect the parts of us that are in the dark. Some examples: "What was going on in your life right before you had the dream?" I asked a university student. He's behind on his tuition and considering dropping out of school. Paralyzed by his life circumstances, that night he has the dream. An illiterate woman is barely surviving and traumatized by the war activities in her village. She repeatedly has the dream. Her only option in understanding its meaning is to scapegoat a woman—designated a witch. The witch folklore is destructive because it blames.

This collective nightmare is a sign of depression and the fear of losing control of our lives. Not difficult to understand—given the warped state of the world. The over-bearing figure reflects a part of us that inhibits our capacity to function fully. It sucks the very life out of us by suffocating our needs and aspirations. Subjected to its power, we can't breathe (breath symbolizes our spirit to live.) One figure in the dream is assaulting another; and we are over-identifying with the victim, and not identifying with the power of the attacker. Remember, the energy of this powerful force is *ours*, and can be used for the positive.

Dreams make us aware of our traumas, so that we can rearrange our way of dealing with them. We can talk to a sympathetic person (don't keep it a secret.) We can exercise and stick to our regular routine; we can view our problems as challenges and opportunities. By accepting our troubles as having meaning, we can experience peace.

Another way is to use inspirational slogans to counter negative thinking: Life seems

to always give us just the right task for learning what we need to learn. If we can use negative thoughts to keep us immobilized, we can also use positive ones to motivate us. Depression persists when we no longer see options.

This collective dream helps us see that we are one It's the world-soul expressing itself through individuals—making us realize that our personal minds are embedded in a deeper psychic unity—that cares. **N**

(**Vincent Androsiglio**, former Professor of Psychiatry, New York Medical College, New York, is currently living in Nepal. He's documenting Nepali dream experiences. Email: vandrosiglio@yahoo.com)



CITY This Week

EVENTS

Please Educate Us

A fund-raising show by the children of Jeevan Kalyan Kendra (a school for mentally challenged students.) Also featuring performances by Nima Rumba, Bimala Rai, Nalina Chitrakar, Samday Sherpa, Yogeshwar Amatya and Nirnay Shrestha. June 13. 3 p.m. at the City Hall. Tickets available at Shuvtara School, Nanglo's and at the City Hall gates. Price: Rs. 1,000, 500, 300

Make your own pizza

At the Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. June 19. For information: 4491234



Garage/Car boot sale

At the Sterling Club, British Embassy. June 15. Starts at 12 p.m. For information: 4218048

Hot Summer Dance Party

Venue: Yak Palace, Narayani Hotel, Pulchowk. Time: 3 p.m. Tickets: Rs. 200. Win free tickets at www.cybernepal.com.np

Self-help Techniques

A Young Adult Program for youngsters between the ages of 16 and 21. Organized by the Art of Living-Nepal, (techniques to help improve concentration, creativity and live a stress-free life.) June-15-19. 3 p.m.-6:30 p.m. at Dhamma Hall, DAV school, Dhobighat. For information: 9851024927

Business Fundas

Two-day training on "Business Correspondence for SMEs and Micro Enterprises." Organized by Fair Trade Group Nepal. June 19-20. For information: 5542608, 5549848.

Ultimate 1974 AD Rock Show

Celebrating 10 years of 1974 AD. June 19 and 20. 3 p.m. BICC, Baneshwore. Tickets: Rs. 500, 350, 250. The event is managed by Partynepal.com and is presented by Ultimate Triple Distilled Gin in association with City Post.



The Six Yogas of Naropa

Teachings by Glenn Mullin, an internationally renowned author and Tibetologist. June 13. For information: Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Center, Thamel, 4249270

ART EXHIBITIONS

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 15

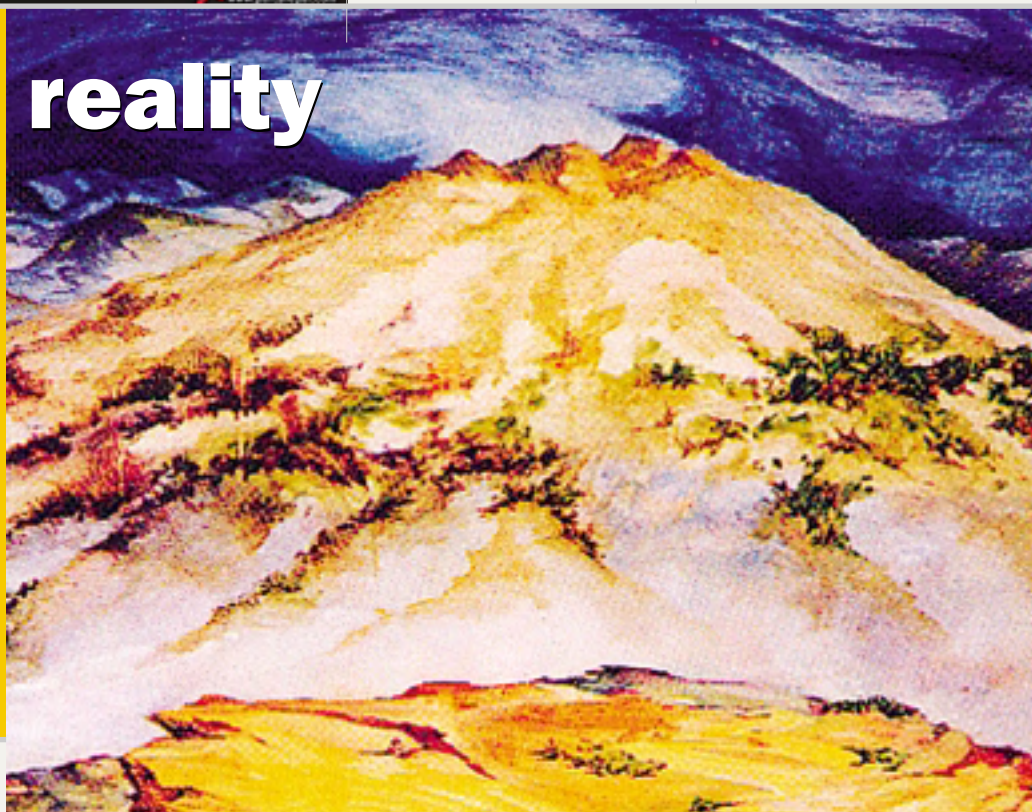
Faces & Aspects of Boudha

An exhibition of photographs by one of Nepal's best-known photographers, Mani Lama. At The Saturday Cafe & Gallery. Adjacent to the Boudhanath Stupa, the café occupies three floors and includes a boutique and gallery. For information: 4437888

Spirit's reality

Paintings by Armenian artist Armen Gregorvian. Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisted. June 15-21. For information: 4218048

The paintings of Armen Gevorgyan are marked by the use of extraordinary bright colors that are decisive, sonorous and unusual. The artist's task does not appear as a goal but as a way of expression. The red-yellow collection represents a kind of drama, an affirmation of spiritual conflict; a symbol of a different world where all existing planes of between reality and the surreal have been explored. According to the artist, mysticism does not mean an alienated, symbolic and abstract secret. Rather, it is a clear and real science that requires clarification and recognition. The paintings on display embody the artist's search for new inspiration.



'Accidents' Are Preventable

With proper compilation of the information and analyses on the patterns of injuries on the roads, we would certainly be able to identify major risk factors and possible areas that require intervention. We could, for example, find out how many motorcyclists survived accidents because they were wearing helmets, how drunk driving affects everyone, how pedestrians are protected by road barriers

BY DR. GYANENDRA SHARMA

A motorcycle rider in the capital dies on the spot as a result of collision. A bus kills a child on his way to school and injures three others; two of them are in critical condition. A Biratnagar-bound bus carrying 70 passengers falls in the Trisuli; all are feared dead. A bus collides with a speeding truck on Mahendra Highway at Narayanghat; 20 are severely injured and two die on the way to hospital.

These are everyday news in our newspapers. Mostly, they feature in obscure corners on the inside pages. Sometimes, they get featured on the front page. There is one common feature in all this news: they are referred to as "accidents." An accident is an unavoidable event that happens to an unlucky one. Our response to injury is fatalistic. We declare them as unavoidable, random, and therefore not preventable.

Around 500 people died on Kathmandu Valley's roads alone in the last five years, according to police reports. Some 7,300 others were also injured in that period—of whom several people were inflicted with a permanent disability. The numbers are probably higher. Our figures are based on the reported cases. We will never get the exact figures, given the poor system of record keeping. Police reports are also likely to under-report fatalities. One may assume that a health professional or a hospital will have the exact data since the first stop of an injured is a health professional. However, our health information system hardly compiles information or analyze them systematically.

In most central hospitals, road traffic injuries top the emergency admission tolls. However, further information on such accidents is not made available to the public as there is no system of reporting and making the figures known. Often, an amateur reviews the information and that report remains the documented version for years.

With proper compilation of the information and analyses on the patterns of injuries, we would certainly be able to identify major risk factors and possible areas that require intervention. We could find out how many motorcyclists survived accidents because they were wearing helmets, how drunk driving affects everyone, how pedestrians are protected by road barriers, how effective brakes could save lives, how improved road signals and road

conditions reduce accidents, how enforcing the law or regulation changes attitudes towards safety and so on.

This is exactly what developed countries started doing more than 50 years ago. The response from the police, public health workers, road engineers, vehicle manufacturers and several others helped minimize casualty figures. During the course of events, they found out that the notion of considering road injuries as "accidents" was the most difficult stumbling block they had to overcome. They also found out that injuries were largely preventable with better law enforcement, prioritizing safety during road construction and maintenance, installing mandatory safety features for vehicle, and educating the public on traffic laws. The study and was coordinated by authorities who developed and implemented policy and monitored the actions of partner agencies.

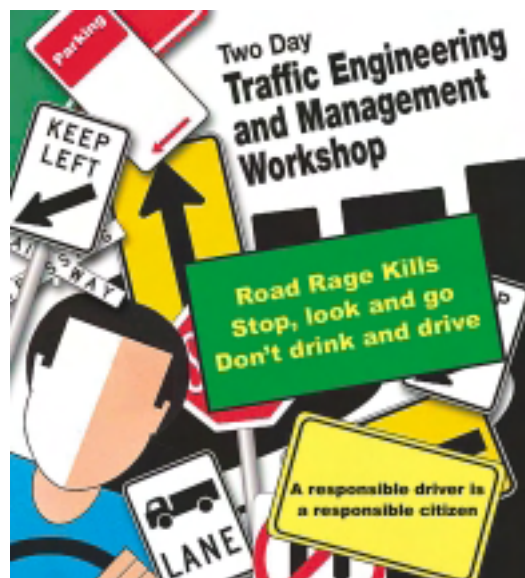
We need to learn from them. And just like them, we first need to change our mindset that road traffic injuries are "accidents." They are a public health problem. We can largely prevent these injuries just like we prevent any other disease by using a multidisciplinary response. The public health response may not be as easy as providing vitamin A capsules to patients with vitamin deficiency or distributing oral rehydration packets as a solution for diarrhea. However, there are enough agencies in Nepal that can respond to this challenge.

We have to get over the current complacency regarding road safety. We have to be better informed on the consequences of road injuries and improve the quality of information we obtain from health institutions as

well as the police. We have to explore the risk factors that lead to road injuries. We need a strong regulation for vehicle import, based not only on pollution and environmental considerations, but also as regards safety. To implement all this we need a strong and a well-coordinated national policy.

Safety is not a privilege or a luxury but a right of the people. Road traffic injuries need the urgent attention of responsible policy makers, professionals and the general public. There is a long way to go. But we must start now. The longer we wait, the more some of us or our loved ones will die, get disabled or hospitalized in these "accidents." ■

(Dr. Sharma is an expert on injury prevention
His email: niip@wlink.com.np)



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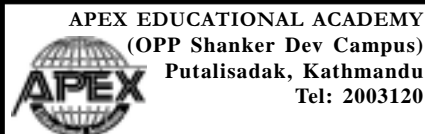
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The Dilemma Of Nepali Cinema

Numafung,” Nepal’s first independent film to go on the international film circuit, was a hit, both domestically and internationally, where it garnered critical acclaim from the European film festivals. It features the story of a Limbu girl caught in an unhappy

marriage, which she eventually leaves by running away. Her parents and sister, forced to pay back the bride price to the husband, find themselves landless and have to migrate to the hills. The first feature film to showcase the Limbu community, “Numafung” was a commercial hit in Nepal, despite initial pessimism from industry insiders about its mass appeal. Nabin Subba, the director, has just returned to Nepal after a two-month tour of Australia, Italy and Hong Kong, where he promoted “Numafung” as well as his new film. He talked with Nation Weekly’s Sushma Joshi about the need to create a Nepali film movement, and raise awareness about Nepali films on an international level.

What were you doing in Australia?

The Nepali community there invited me to be present during the showing of “Numafung” in Sydney and Melbourne. They had asked me to come a year ago, right after the film came out, but I had to be here for the launch, so I couldn’t give them the time.

Were you there to promote your upcoming project? What is it about?

It’s going to be a film about the impact of the civil conflict on people’s lives. I met with distribution companies while I was in Australia. They have asked me for the script, and they told me they will give me funding for pre-sale rights. It looks quite positive.

You received the Don Quixote Prize from the International Federation of Film Societies (IFFS) in Italy for “Numafung.” How did that go?

The IFFS gave prizes to 18 films selected from film festivals as diverse as Berlin

to the Bangladesh International Film Festival. My film was selected from the Bangladesh film festival. Three directors were invited—David Ferrario, who won the Berlin International film award for “After Midnight,” Alexander Zvyagintsev of Russia for “The Return,” and me. It was a networking opportunity for me—there were delegates from 31 film festivals, as well as delegates from national film federations of 37 countries.

Is “Numafung” still being shown in the international film festivals?

It’s scheduled for five more—Florence, Guangu (South Korea), Kolkata, Karachi and a smaller film festival in northern England.

The government has to realize that filmmaking is a national activity, one which can raise a country’s profile

What was your feedback from critics?

They told me the film was still “Oriental.” The western point of view wants to see the East as exotic. So should we take their feedback and make films their way, the way they want to see us? Our nuances are our own, as you saw in “Numafung.” They had a difficult time understanding that.

So which direction do you think you will take in your filmmaking?

That’s the dilemma I am facing right now. There’s a new term being coined: “Asian

Cinema.” All the Asians are getting together and promoting their films. Because Europeans can be so Eurocentric. So I am learning a lot of new things, and realizing we need to carve a new path.

What was your greatest obstacle during your trip?

Nepali film history is not well established, and also not something to be proud of. The Italians and French take their old films as heritage, and project it that way. Which Nepali film can we project that way? So it’s difficult for us to penetrate the market. People don’t know much about Nepal, either—a distributor told me outright that Nepal is an unknown entity, and that theatre distribution would be difficult.

How do you think we can overcome this?

There has to be a continuous effort from many people, and also the government. I’ve been showing “Numafung” around for two years, and still there are no other Nepali films. It’s a big joke. We need to create a buzz and start showing at least one film a year.

What can the government do in all this?

The government has to realize that filmmaking is a national activity, one which can raise a country’s profile. I met several people who told me they had come to visit Nepal after seeing my film. I also saw an Israeli-Palestinian conflict festival in Italy, and the people there really sympathized with the Palestinian cause. We also need to work to dilute the harsh and negative image of conflict that’s been coming out of Nepal, and to make it more human. **N**

The Waiting Game

BY ARUN GUPTO

There are many qualities that make Gopal Parajuli's epic, "Naya Ishwarko Ghoshana," a major literary work.

The theme is about searching for a new god in mythical narrative mode contextualized in contemporary realities. The literal translation of the epic is "The Declaration of a New God." The quest for a new god is not a new poetic or philosophical theme, but reestablishing the old god into a new form makes the content of the epic different from most Nepali literary works.

The quest for the new god is built on many premises and backgrounds. The work is a philosophical discourse on existential crises and the desire to summon a new lord due to the crisis. The penultimate verse declares the arrival of this god, in these lines:

To accept Krishna as god,

Despite everyone denying it

I would keep on saying that I'd say
Krishnaprasad God.

"I would keep on saying" is a refrain that stylistically binds the epic scale of the poem. The speaker is the agent who summons the new god for the people. The "you" in the poem are those who have compelled him to conceive the new deity. The speaker thus is a messenger.

The readers can also read the poem as a political discourse. Line after line, the poem laments the loss of values, beliefs, human sensibilities, religion and many other modes of existence. The speaker looks for a perfect authority, a supreme guide to bring peace in the world. The futuristic vision of a perfect goodness after the coming of the new god expresses the same grand narrative vision.

Grand narrative texts have a long history in Nepali literature. In the established critical tradition of the west, such utopian themes are the subject matters of grand narratives where such works of art look for a utopian world of peace. But locating the text as a modernist or

postmodernist work of art creates a critical problem in Nepali literary tradition. Nepali modernism does not have a defined critical category, except some loose time frames referred to in the critical discourse. If one takes modernism as a widespread phenomenon encompassing many aspects of culture and society, Nepali literary modernism is limited to some works of literature only. Many of the canonical writers of Nepali literature have a grand narrative vision in their poems, plays and fictions. In this context, Parajuli's epic is part of the tradition of modernism. Furthermore, seeking a god is seeking center or authority and the quest is thus an accepted modernist vision of the canonical literature of the 20th century. Thus it would be difficult to read it as a postmodern work.

One still would be tempted to call it a postmodern text. The reader may notice how myth is recycled to look at the problems of the society. The mythical hero is summoned repeatedly in a magical-realistic mode. Reading the poem is like chanting a mantra. Using myth as both form and content is a postmodernist writing style popularized in the western literary traditions. This may be true of a modernist work of art too. Myths are frequently used in modernist literary themes. What then is exclusively postmodern about the epic?

The answer may be that there is no ultimate sense of accomplishment. The poem does not end but is a prolonged middle. The speaker began with the proclamation and continues to "keep on saying" that the new god has come. There is no particular event where the new god is found, but merely a verbal proclamation of his desire to keep on saying that the new god has come.

The epic's dynamism comes from its ability to be a grand narrative and still "end" in the middle. Nepali literature needs such works so that the readers feel challenged and frustrated time and again by its language and seriousness of subject matter. **N**



Book Mark



Courtesy: www.rajbansawal.com

Twenty-two-year-old former Miss Nepal, Malvika Subba, is an avid reader who considers reading her favorite pastime. It's difficult for her to say what her favorite genre is. Her reading ranges from romance, fiction and mysteries to real-life accounts and family-oriented books. "I always find time for reading," says Subba, who's been pursuing a master's degree ever since she quit her job as a TV presenter. Subba believes that reading has helped her grow in many ways, so much so that she considers her reading habit as one of the best things to have happened to her.

Which is your favorite book?

"Atlas Shrugged" by Ayn Rand. It's a book about the undying human spirit that continues to overcome odds.

What do you have on your bookshelf?

There's a mixed lot there: from Nancy Drew stories to John Grisham's "Runaway Jury."

Which book has influenced you the most?

"Girl with a Pearl Earring" by Tracy Chevalier. It's the story of a poor helper girl struggling for survival.

Your first reading memories?

Enid Blyton's "Famous Five."

Who is your favorite Nepali writer?

I haven't read a lot of books written in Nepali but I have read all the fictional works by Samrat Upadhyay and Manjushree Thapa. I liked all of them. **N**



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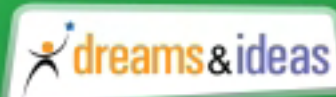
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A Generation Lost

Whether the aftermath of the 1990 Jana Andolan delivered the goods is open to debate. But it did usher in an era of private enterprise in such sectors as education, health, transport and media. The nation today boasts of hundreds of private schools and colleges, clinics and hospitals, transport companies and airlines and print and electronic media outlets. And not all of them are fleeing consumers as some would like us to believe.

This is not to argue that these sectors have provided efficient quality service at affordable prices, or that they have expanded beyond the narrow urban confines. Clearly, Nepal has some way to go before the gains made by these sectors trickle down to the villages—home to most Nepalis. Neither will it be an automatic development. A lot of planning and thought has to be put behind it.

The nationwide closure of schools and colleges by the Maoists once again forces us to ask: is the country's education system riddled with dangerous fault lines and that the dice is heavily loaded toward those who can afford expensive private schools? We are afraid, it is quite so. When the children's school fees add up to more than Dad's monthly salary, we can imagine where the parents would be forced to send their children: at worst, cheap government schools or at best, affordable private schools. When you see that your young children start well behind their counterparts who go to better schools, you as a parent are more than likely to rebel against the system. Especially, when you didn't get a particularly good education and see education as "the great leveller" for your children. We have seen a huge number of this disgruntled population and the numbers seem to be growing.

But the current standoff between the private schools and the Maoist student union goes far beyond the story of anxious parents. And that's where the dangers lie. It would be a folly to close one's eyes and say that private schools have failed. Though they are cleverly trying to couch their language, the Maoist stu-

dents who are agitating to force private schools to lower their fees in fact want the government to remove the "terrorist" tag it has put on them. Their forcing of schools to close is therefore dangerously demagogic.

Instead of building public opinion and mobilizing parents in support of improving the school system and forcing expensive schools to lower their fees, the ANNISU (Revolutionary) has decided that they know better. As a result, tens of thousands of students have been forced to stay home, accompanied by their parents who should have been out working.

The ANNISU first raised this issue a couple of years ago. The government at the time brokered a compromise between the schools and the agitating students to pare down fees. As a result, some schools quietly revised their fee structure while others used a portion of the fees collected for social causes, such as constructing libraries for poor school children and providing scholarships, etc. But many others chose to ignore the terms of the compromise.

Our question is: why did the government fail to enforce an agreement it helped draft? Why did the schools themselves neglect it? But what we also find worrying is that mainstream students groups such as Nepal Students Union and others have also jumped into the fray. Gagan Thapa, the NSU general secretary, recently said his group would keep pressing for reduction of school fees even if the ANNISU lets go of the demand. We hope he is not hinting at school closure. Outlawed groups like the Maoist student body seem to have only one aim: do anything, everything, to disrupt normal life. This, we are afraid, has continuously eroded the state authority. While we don't like the fee structure ourselves, we do not want people defying the existing authorities with aplomb.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor

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- And Many Many More

We believe that each child is a unique individual who has the potential to be the best that he or she can be.

A whole new concept in learning....



In Association with



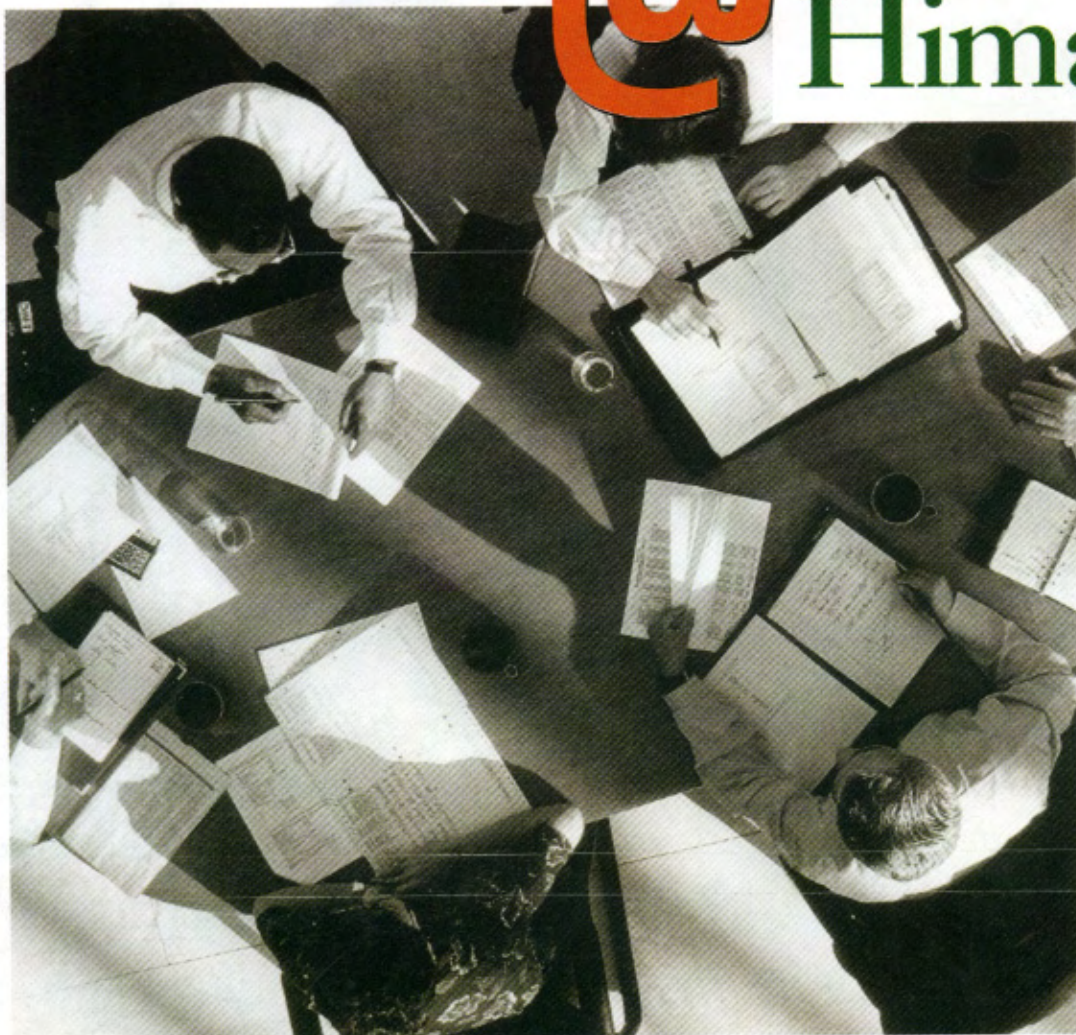
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"SHAH MAHAL" HOUSE NO-613, SAMA MARG, OPP-IGP HOUSE, GAIRIDHARA, NAXAL KATHMANDU, NEPAL PHONE: 4413928, 4416539

Board Meeting & More



Club Himalaya



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