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Still Remain Stranded







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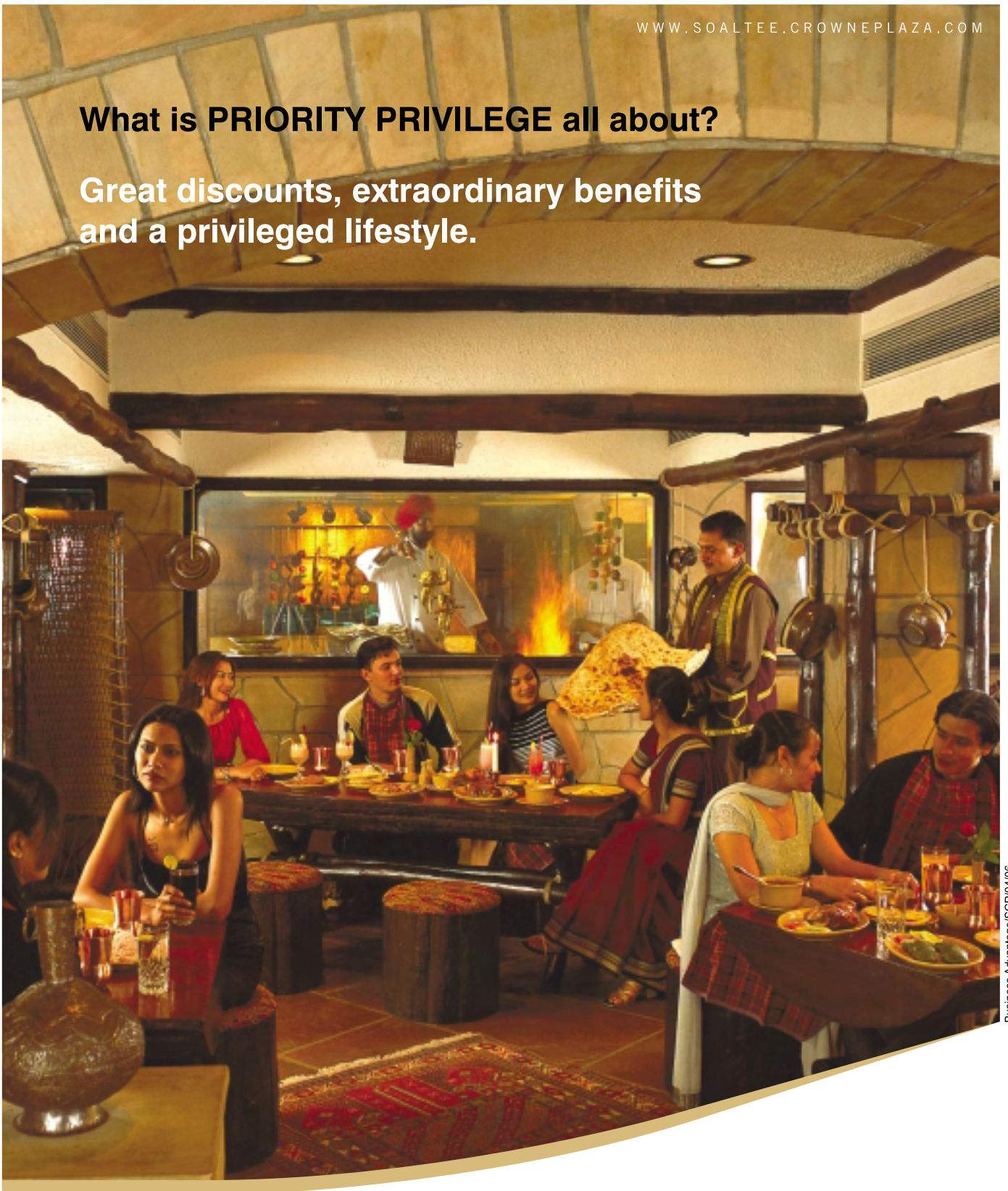
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# Letters



“ Do we wish to emulate Sudan where the conflict has already claimed two million lives? ”

SHUSHMA SHRESTHA

### Deuba's problems

IF ANYONE WAS HOPING THAT Sher Bahadur Deuba's appointment as prime minister would clear up the current political mess, well, that was not to be. Your cover story (re: "Muddle Over Middlemen," June 20, by Akhilesh Upadhyay and Suman Pradhan) did hint at Deuba's bagful of problems but few were expecting the new government to struggle for two weeks just to cobble an all-party coalition. While CPN(UML) has now given a clear hint that it is ready to join the government, it's not the first time it has done so since Deuba's appointment as prime minister. And it is not too difficult to understand the confusion in the UML ranks. Its problems are very similar to Deuba's, only larger in scale. With a very narrow popular base, Deuba at least can keep his Nepali Congress (D) workers in control by saying that the Palace's continued support remains vital to his survival as prime minister. UML workers, whose political future depends more on the connection with their political base at the grassroots, are far less likely to buy top-down mantras handed down by their netas. Therein lies the current dilemma of the party. It was able to energize its ranks against regression in earnest only in April with anti-republican rallying cries. Now it doesn't know which way to go.

ROJAN SHRESTHA  
GWARDHU

### Mahat got it wrong

RAM SHRAN MAHAT MAKES A strong case against UN mediation in the peace process (re: "Talk of UN Mediation Is Premature," Cover Story, June 20). His arguments, very well put, rest on a single thesis: this will give the Maoists

the legitimacy in the eyes of the international community. But let's turn the arguments round. Let the two sides to the conflict—security forces and the Maoists—keep on fighting and let the death toll mount from the current 10,000-plus to 20,000. Then maybe 40,000 and then 100,000. Meanwhile, there is still no election and the law and order situation resembles that of a country caught in a full-blown war. Teen-age boys and girls run amok on the streets of Kathmandu with assault rifles—all of this, mind you, not entirely impossible given the current state of affairs and history of countries in conflict. Will then Dr. Mahat review his "well-rounded thesis on why the talk of UN mediation is not a panacea for Nepal" and that it is premature? Just when is it not prema-



ture for international mediation? Do we wish to emulate Sudan where the conflict that started in the 50s has already claimed two million lives.

SHUSHMA SHRESTHA  
NEW ROAD

IMPRESSIVE THOUGH IT MAY SOUND, Dr. Mahat's insistence that the conflict must be resolved internally has a missing link. If he bothers to look back at the dynamics of two previous rounds of peace processes, the internal forces were



unable to salvage peace when the posturing between the warring parties reached a critical point. An international third party, seen by both sides as impartial, would perhaps have successfully scaled back the bellicosity and given the peace process a much needed impetus. Peace in Sri Lanka, brokered by the Norwegians, has seen highs and lows but it still holds. I am more inclined to side with Jorg Frieden, the SDC country director, who says aid has to reach the needy if we are to avoid an impending catastrophe. Why not use the UN Secretary General's good office to ensure a peace corridor so that aid reaches all of Nepal and not just a few cities and people like Dr. Mahat and I? It's an urgent situation. We have little time to lose.

SUNIL GURUNG  
BANESHWOR

MAHAT BELIEVES THAT THIRD-PARTY intervention will only be needed once "we have given enough attention to resolving the problem internally," and "only after our united efforts fail will the talk of third-party mediation come up." Pray, tell, hasn't 12,000 lives lost and eight years of insurgency, during which time every single government failed to broker peace, proved that enough time has been wasted in trying to solve the problem "internally?" What united effort against the Maoists are these politicians with petty squabbles to settle amongst themselves talking about? Wasn't it Girija Prasad Koirala himself, Mahat's mentor and the Nepali Congress president, who scuttled K P Bhattarai's government in March 2000, just when Bhattarai was on the verge of starting negotiations with the Maoists? And when in power, didn't Koirala promptly proceed to run the Maoists to the ground? Wasn't it his actions, and initial mishandling of the Maoist situation that led the Maoists to further up their ante? Mahat talks about his party as a party with "convictions." Does a party that keeps waffling on its stance as regards the Maoists—depending on whether it is in power, in the running for power, or totally out of the race—qualify as a party with convictions? Perhaps, Mahat thinks that by quoting the Brest-Litovsk Treaty of 1918 and drawing parallels to the Maoist revolution in China he comes off as an erudite intellectual who has a handle

on the situation. But he seems to have missed the bottom line: with an average of 12 people getting killed everyday how much more lives must be lost until Nepali intellectuals realize the country can't take it anymore?

RAMESH BOMJON  
SITA PAULA

### Poorly kept children's homes

SUSHMA JOSHI'S "OLIVER TWIST Finds A New Home" (Spotlight, June 20) is just one story of the proverbial tip of the iceberg. I have a gut feeling that there are many more children's homes where living conditions are as bad as England's 19<sup>th</sup> century foster homes best described by the novelist Charles Dickens. The good news is that we can draw lessons from the horrors documented in the industrialized world and avoid similar mistakes. The bad news is that we don't seem to be making any progress in that direction. Kathmandu's mushrooming, and expensive, but poorly run private schools are perhaps the prime examples.

MANOHAR BABU  
EKANTA KUNA

### Overpriced art works

AJIT BARAL'S "MOON OR SIX PENCE (Arts & Society, June 20) will hopefully start a debate that was long due. Are paintings of some of our famous artists overestimated in an art market that is next to non-existent? A much wiser thing for our artists to do perhaps would be to lower their price, let more and more middleclass Nepalis feel "art" need not be the exclusive territory for the rich.

SAMA KARKI  
GAYANESHWOR

### Troubled tea industry

THANKS FOR POINTING AT THE plight of Jhapa's tea industry ( John Narayan Parajuli, "Storm In A Cup," June 20). I hope you will in future be able to look at the deeper malaise and connect various strands that have brought down the prices of tea leaves. The fact is that the tea gardens are here to stay and it is in everybody's interest to make sure that they keep on contributing productively to the national economy.

BINOD PARAJULI  
BIR TAMODE, JHAPA

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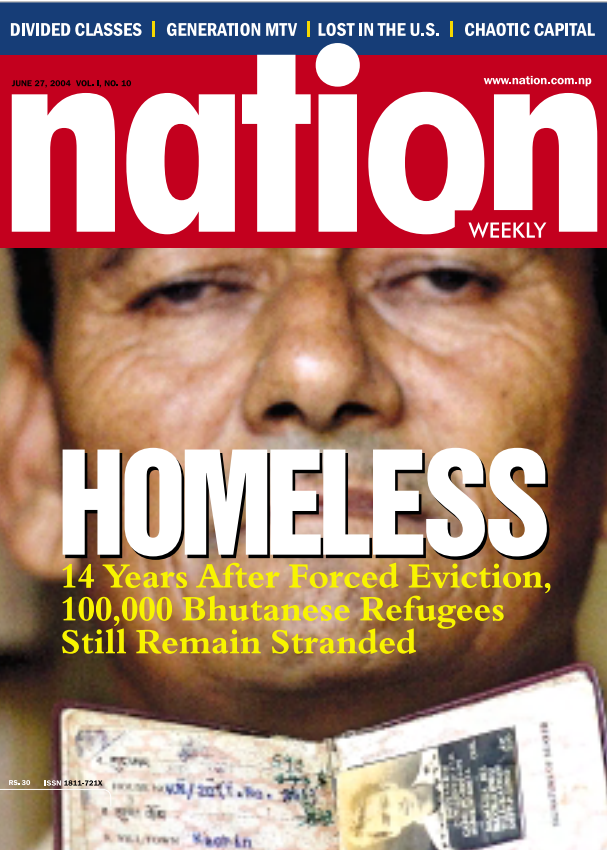
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Did you, too, O friend, suppose  
democracy was only for  
elections, for politics, and for  
party name? I say democracy is  
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on and come to its flower and  
fruit in manners, in the highest  
forms of interaction between  
people and their beliefs—in  
religion, literature, colleges and  
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*Walt Whitman*







# HOMELESS

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## Picture of the Week



**A PRAYER FOR PEACE:** Schools in the Valley reopened on Thursday, after the Maoist student union called off its banda  
nw/Sagar Shrestha





# Secret Service

Last week's episode showed that Deuba has not yet shed that tendency for secrecy. The only people outside the Royal Palace who knew of the cabinet's decision were the three members in the cabinet and the chief secretary

BY SUMAN PRADHAN

It is interesting to note how the media covered last week's cabinet decision on annulling the work performance regulations—the piece of law that granted King Gyanendra huge powers on appointments and transfers of senior government officials.

We now know that on Thursday, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba convened the cabinet which formally decided to annul the regulations and send the decision to the Royal Palace for approval.

But Friday's headlines had wildly differing stories about the cabinet meeting. Many mainstream newspapers reported that the three-member cabinet had failed to arrive at a decision on annulling the working regulations. Some said that the cabinet had not even met that day. A few reported that the cabinet did meet but the issue was not discussed. All these reports cited "high level sources close to the Prime Minister," or "Prime Ministers' advisors."

Now that the facts are known, it is fair to wonder how the newspapers reacted to the truth. The indications so far are not good. None of them acknowledged their short-comings in the next day's issues. All newspapers blared, without a hint of irony, the big news as if their mis-reporting a day earlier had never occurred.

What does this tell us about Nepal's mainstream press? It tells us that either they don't check the facts or, worse, they are susceptible to propaganda. Having worked in the press for a long time, I know this is a gross generalization and not all media outlets are similar. But unfortunately, the recent gaffe only reinforces the perception that our media is unreliable and unprofessional.

Listen to what a regular reader had to say about the episode: "It is difficult to know what's happening in Nepal by just reading the papers. You have to have other sources of information." In other words, we don't trust what is being reported because it misrepresents the facts, misquotes or blows a remark out of context. "There is clearly a lack of professionalism," says another reader who also has to work regularly with the media. "This is why we always fax written statements knowing there is little chance of misquoting or misrepresenting. The newspapers simply print our statements."

While last week's gaffe may have exposed the media's shortcomings, it also gave us a glimpse of how this new government works. In his earlier innings as prime minister, Deuba was known to be a compromiser. His jumbo 48-member cabinet was an attempt at compromise with the various parties and personalities who could have brought his government down if not given the perks of power.

But the prime minister was also known to be a secretive person, someone who played his cards close to the chest. Very few people

around him knew what his real thinking was on a given issue, and when the thinking did come to light eventually, the decisions had already been made or the acts were already done. This style of governance does not work in a democracy, a system based on openness and transparency.

Last week's episode showed that Deuba has not yet shed that tendency for secrecy. The only people outside the Royal Palace who knew of the cabinet's decision were the three members in the cabinet and the chief secretary. Deuba's advisors and aides were either as much in the dark as the newspapers or they deliberately chose to play it coy lest the secret be out.

While this tendency for secrecy is generally unhealthy in a democratic politician who claims to be a man of the people, it does have its merits. What would have happened if the press had gotten wind of the cabinet decision and blared it in the next day's papers? It is fair to say that the Palace could have reacted in a different way because the news would have pushed it to the wall. The important job was to get the decision approved, and the news blackout helped by keeping the pressure off a proud Palace.

Another area where this tendency for secrecy could have its merits is when the government eventually decides to hold peace talks with the



Maoists. There is a general consensus now that the last two peace talks failed because they were both conducted in the media glare. That led to posturing and grand-standing on both sides, pushing the rival parties to take ever more hardening positions until it all collapsed.

The next round of peace talks, at least the pre-talks talks which could pave the way for a formal dialogue, will have to be conducted in secret if it is to survive. Might Deuba's penchant for secrecy come in handy then? **N**

# 16

GREAT TEAMS

# 1

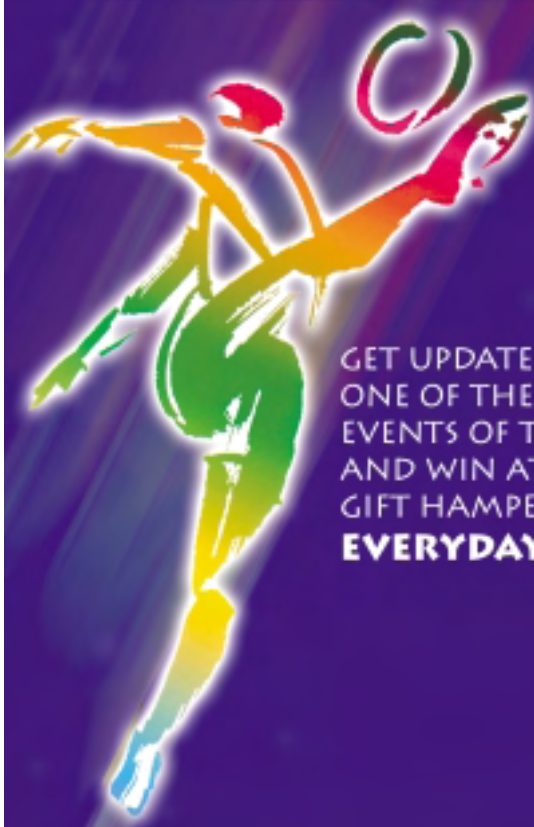
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## Schools resume

After 12 days of shutdown, schools and colleges opened on Friday when the government agreed to remove the "terrorist" tag slapped on the Maoist student wing, ANNISU(R). By the time we went to press, some schools however were still not sure whether the ANNISU had withdrawn the indefinite shutdown. The school authorities said they would continue to shut down their schools unless they hear anything definite from the Maoists themselves.



## Office resumed

Deputy Mayor Raja Ram Shrestha of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) and other 18 ward members who had resigned from their

posts in May returned to office. Through a press release, they apologized for the inconvenience they caused to the city residents. However, Mayor Keshav Sthapit, who made it known after he quit that the Maoist threat had led to this resignation, didn't join the bandwagon. Maoists have asked all local body officials appointed by the Thapa government to quit. Two city mayors who defied the Maoists were shot at, one of them fatally. Birgunj Mayor Gopal Giri was killed by the Maoists after he refused to give in to Maoist threats of extortions and call for resignation.

## IVF facility

For the first time in Nepal, Om Hospital and Research Center has selected 17 women for In Vitro Fertilization (IVF). The hospital has set up an ultra-modern lab to provide IVF services to those who fail to conceive. Ova fertilized outside the body of the women will be transferred inside the uterus 48 hours later, Dr. Bhola Rizal was quoted as saying by Kantipur. Of 48 women selected for screening tests in April, 17 have been shortlisted for IVF



CATCH THE DRIFT: farmers get to work with the first monsoon rains

and each one of them is expected to pay Rs. 200,000 in advance.

## Marathon man

A successful angioplasty was performed on ace marathoner Baikuntha Manandhar at the Escorts Heart Institute in India. Renowned cardiologist of Dr. Ashok Seth carried out the operation. In the 80s, Manadhar routinely won golds in the SAARC regional games and was regarded South Asia's uncontested marathon king.

## Maoists arrested

Indian police arrested five suspected Nepali Maoists in Champaran district, Bihar. Police seized three guns, homemade pistols and cartridges. India has recently stepped up anti-maoists operation

## RNA's choppers

The Royal Nepal Army received two new Light Advance Helicopters from India to boost its air capabilities. The specifications of the helicopters, which landed at Tribhuvan International Airport last Sunday, were not revealed. The Indian army version of the helicopter features a chin-mounted, three-barrel 20mm gun and four pylons capable of carrying four 68mm or 70mm rocket pods, according to Kantipur. Nepal was dispatched two Lancer helicopters from India last year.

## SLC results

The pass percentage of the SLC sharply increased this year to 46.18 percent, up 13 per cent over last year. Of the total 175,417 regular students, 81,008 passed the examination. 1,568 passed with distinction (introduced for the first time to categorize students who score 80 percent and above), 28,723 in first division, 45,445 in second and 5,272 in third division. Bishal Khanal of Everest Boarding School in Butwal topped the exams with 94.5 percent while Prathistha Gyawali of Galaxy Public School in Kathmandu was the topper among girls with 88.37 percent.

## Police in landmine

At least 22 security personnel, including an inspector of Armed Police Force (APF) Shiv Bahadur Khadka, were killed and 19 others were injured in a Maoist ambush at Khairi Khola in Banke. Fourteen other APF personnel died in a separate ambush over the weekend in Bhalubang, Dang. The security team in Banke was dispatched from Bageshowri APF Training Center in Shumsheregungj to defuse a bomb placed at Agaiya along the Mahendra Highway.







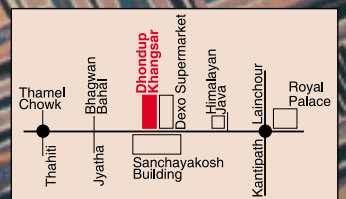
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# Emperors Of Ice Cream

BY SANJEEV UPRETI

While hunting for an apartment around East Side Providence, Rhode Island last summer, I spent a few days with Dhan Singh Rawat and Sher Singh Rawat from Gadwal. They kindly allowed me to stay with them till I found permanent lodgings. My temporary roommates from Gadwal were professional cooks at Kabob and Curry restaurant at Thayer Street, close to the university I was attending to pursue my degree. I was feeling slightly homesick as I moved in with them. Memories of family members, friends, teachers, students and relatives left behind in Nepal continued to pass through the corridors of my mind, evoking a sense of loneliness and exile. My feelings of loss were compounded when the Rawats lost their jobs after a fight with Vijay Dhar, the Indian owner of their restaurant whom they described as tyrannical and overbearing. Temporarily unemployed and psychologically wounded, they sat brooding in the apartment, and talked of their families left behind at Gadwal. They spoke of the spectacular mountains of Gadwal, of the cool pine trees of Rishikesh, and of delicious water dripping from the leaves in the forest onto their dry skin as the summer sun blazed in the skies.

“I have studied political science and history,” thundered Dhan Singh. “The stupid owner of Kabob and Curry should realize that he cannot mess around with me. One day I’ll go back to Gadwal and open a much bigger restaurant there than he has one at Thayer Street. And I might get into politics and become an MLA someday.” Sher Singh, his younger friend from Gadwal, asserted that with his newly acquired green card he had a great future in the hotel industry. “Screw Kabob and Curry, and to hell with chicken tandoor and palak paneer,” he declared. “With hard work and luck one day I might become the manager of a Hilton, a

Marriott, or a Hyatt, you know,” he said as he gazed at me and Dhan Singh fiercely, looking for approval.

Despite their bravado and undying optimism, however, it became clear after a few days that they were not going to get the jobs they wanted, and that they might have to go back to Kabob and Curry and make peace with chicken tandoor, papads and Vijay Dhar, the irate, dictatorial owner of the restaurant. Dhan Singh, despite his degree in history and politics lacked both the green card and other saleable skills



**As we ate cones of ice cream, we overcame our sense of cultural exile**

apart from cooking. Sher Singh, though young and enterprising, lacked the formal education and experience needed to get jobs in big American hotels.

As they sat in the apartment watching meaningless TV programs and drinking beer, the mood of depression thickened; both Gadwal and Kathmandu receded further away even as the memories of those places were transformed into immense shadows that flitted in and out of our New England summer traced by loss. TV brought us stories from around the world of motivated generals trying to become presidents, parliamentarians trying to become ministers, courtiers

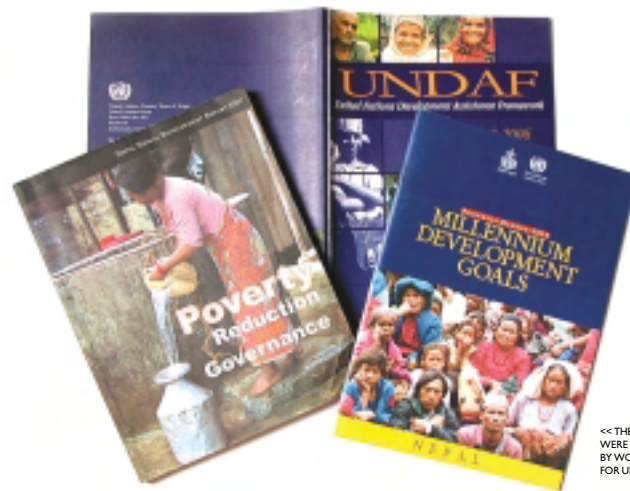
trying to become kings, and the rich and the powerful trying to become even richer and more powerful. These stories of ambition and achievement only served to highlight the continuing failure of my friends to find new jobs.

The mood of depression suddenly lifted one day, however, when the nagging doubts that the Rawats had about my cooking abilities were suddenly confirmed. After I nearly started a fire in the apartment trying to fry vegetables, the Rawats became certain that I knew next to nothing about cooking, the field of their professional expertise. And from then onwards their project began. Forgetting their recent insult at Kabob and Curry and the nagging uncertainties of their future, their sole effort was directed towards making a cook out of me. They taught me how to make curry and rice in double quick time, how to make an omelet using only a microwave, and how to use the grill for outdoor cooking. The more I fumbled with pans and pots and spoons and spices the greater became their merriment, and stronger their desire to initiate me into the fine art of cooking.

After they tried unsuccessfully to teach me how to make puddings and pies—fine intricate techniques that my mind was not able to master despite the effort—the Rawats began a new project, trying to teach me how to make ice cream. They made vanilla, pistachio, blueberry and butterscotch ice creams. Though I don’t think I’ve acquired the necessary skills or finesse to make ice creams, it was great fun participating in the culinary ritual. As we sat on the porch eating cones after cones of vanilla and butterscotch, we temporarily overcame our sense of loss and cultural exile. In that late summer of New England the consumption of ice cream made the Rawats forget the cool glades of Gadwal, just as it drove away from my mind the insistent memories of the fresh fountains of Budanilkantha and the shady groves of Gokarna. We became the makers and eaters of ice cream in our all too real present. As the cones broke under our teeth and a sweet liquid pleasure made a mess around our mouths we almost felt like emperors: the Emperors of Ice cream! **N**

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# An Overgrown Village

We deceive ourselves into thinking that we are denizens of a “metropolis,” even though the management of our civic amenities is worse than that of a tiny Indian municipality. It takes more than fancy buildings and flashy cars to make a real city

BY DEEPAK THAPA

**M**orning commuters headed towards Dilli Bazaar from the Purano Baneshwore area of Kathmandu Metropolitan City will have noticed that during the rush hour, there is almost invariably a garbage truck blocking half the road as it loads up on the trash collected at Pipal Bot. That one truck is enough to create a slowdown all the way to Maiti Devi as the two lanes merge into one near the truck, and even the agile motorcyclists find it quite difficult to weave their way in and out of the stalled traffic. It really is a wonder why the metropolitan authorities cannot arrange for garbage collection early in the morning as would be the commonsensical thing to do.

We deceive ourselves into thinking that we are denizens of a “metropolis,” even though the management of our civic amenities is worse than that of a tiny Indian municipality. But then that is not our fault since it was the government that decided that the capital (and I include Lalitpur as well) had become a ‘metropolitan city’ without considering if it could really live up to that claim. It takes more than fancy buildings and flashy cars to make a real city. And this is not to complain about not having the roads enough for the growing number of vehicles. That is a problem in all expanding cities; the issues are much more fundamental than that and I will consider just a few examples below.

Take the question of a public library. It is only thanks to AWON and what used to be a rather fine British Council Library and the American Library that Kathmanduites could access a proper library. The capital of the country and supposedly the intellectual hub still has not found it worth its while considering setting up a public library, a prerequisite for the intellectual health of urban dwellers everywhere.

A visitor to Kathmandu in the pre-1950 era had described the valley as the toilet bowl of Asia. Things have changed a great deal since but shapely turds are still a common sight in many parts of the city. So is the stink of urine at almost every nook and corner. Without enough public toilets around, can we blame people for relieving themselves anywhere they can in this one and only metropolis of Nepal?

Where are the public parks? Besides the dirty patch of grass and rundown walkways that still goes by the name Ratna Park and the Panchayat Silver Jubilee Park at Maharjunj-Ring Road, green spaces

are non-existent elsewhere in the city. That could have somewhat been compensated with roadside trees, but the attempts at growing trees seems limited to planting them and leaving the rest to chance.

It used to be quite common in old Hindi films where the hero is so poor he cannot even afford proper lighting at home and has to study under street lamps. Well, if such a hero were to live in Kathmandu, he would certainly have failed in life for our metropolis hardly has any street lighting worth the name. And where it does, the lights are not always on, and when they are it is common to find patches of dark where light bulbs have burnt out. Go into the alleys and one has to figure out the way through instinct and plain luck. And Kathmandu is said to be a metropolis.

A usual complaint of visitors to city is that there is no place fit for the daily constitutional. That is indeed a genuine complaint. The Pashupati area is possibly the only place which allows you to breathe dust- and smoke-free air but it is quite inaccessible to the majority of the people. Absent are the promenades where people can walk, jog or just hang out watching the world pass by.



There was a story in a newspaper sometime back that hiring the “kalo tempo,” the three-wheeled black smoker-belchers, for the whole day is a favorite among lovers who cannot afford the luxury of a trip outside the city since it is only within the deep recesses of the bumpy tempo that they can find a measure of privacy. Kathmandu just does not have any place where the city’s young lovers can just sit together and enjoy each other’s company without having to face off stares and jeers from local ruffians,

and oftentimes harassment from overzealous cops.

Most striking is the absence of a public transit system. A decent bus service that runs late into the night is an essential characteristic of a metropolis so that people from all income groups can afford to reach home at any time they like, whether from work or from an evening out downtown. Daytime travel has now been made convenient by private bus companies, but a reliable transport system can only come from a public body like the city office since this is more about providing a service to its taxpayers than just making money.

Back in 1981, a college friend from Calcutta visiting Kathmandu had called it an “overgrown village.” A quarter century later, Kathmandu still fits his description. **N**



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# CITY This Week

## EVENTS

### Wetter the Better

June 25. The JCS jazz trio brings you jazz, funk and reggae at Fusion Bar's poolside, Dwarika Hotel. For information: 4412415



### The Sound of Music

Presented by Malpi International School. At the Royal Nepal Academy Hall, Kamaladi. 5:30 p.m. June 25-26. For tickets and information: 4240159.

### Life Skills Training Camp

An effort to equip young people with basic life skills such as leadership, effective communication, decision-making, empathy, creative thinking, problem solving etc. June 25-27 at Evironment Resource Center, Bhaktapur. For information: 4471415

### International Music Day

Alliance Francaise together with the French embassy is organizing its 10<sup>th</sup> International Music day on June 21.

**MUSIC DAY:** 11 a.m.- 3 p.m. Live music

at Alliance Francaise with French snacks like quiches, croquet-monsieurs, French fries, ice cream etc. on sale.

**MUSIC NIGHT:** 7 p.m.- 8:30 p.m. Traditional Nepali music with buffet during the concert. 8:30 p.m.- 10:30 p.m. Live Nepali pop rock concert. For information: 424163.

### "Salsando" Dance and Fitness Studio

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shape. For information: 98510 33895 (for prices and reservations), 98510 46430 (for Salsa courses) or e-mail at salsapasionnp@hotmail.com

### Monsoon Clouds

A collection of paintings by well-known Nepali artists. Includes the works of resident and foreign visiting artists. Siddhartha Art Gallery. Babar Mahal Revisted. For information: 4218048. Starts June 25

### Pre-monsoon Hyundai Camp

Free checkup and upper car-body wash for Hyundai vehicles. At the AVCO Service Center, Maitidevi. Till June 22. For information: 4413086

### Summer Fun Camp

Lincoln school will offer parents and children a wonderful and exciting summer day camp programs for ages 3-12. The camp runs for seven weeks from June 21 to August 6. Children can be registered for a one-week session where each week has a special theme to it. There are Sports Camp, Computer Camp and Fun Day Camps for children aged between 6-12 years and a Pre-School Camp for those between 3-5 years from 9:00 am-2: 30 pm. For information: 4270482 or e-mail at dgurung@lsnepal.com.np

## ONGOING

### Dwarika's Hotel

Sekuwa Saanjh every Friday from 7 p.m. onwards. Tickets: Rs. 555- plus tax per person. Includes BBQ dinner, a can of beer or soft drink, live music by Abhaya & The Steam Injuns playing blues, jazz & beyond... Lucky Draw every Friday night. Drop your visiting card or BBQ coupons.

### Godavari Village Resort

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### Hotel Vajra

Dance performance of Hindu and Buddhist Gods. Great Pagoda Hall. Every Tuesday, 7 p.m. onwards. Tea and tickets Rs. 400.

Folk tunes of Nepal-Drums and Flute. Every Wednesday and Saturday at 6:30 pm onwards. The Explorer's Restaurant of Hotel Vajra. For information: 4271545.

### New Orleans Café

Blues Jam/ Open Mic Night every Monday, signup starts at 7 p.m. For information: 4224144.

If you're pulling all-nighters watching Euro 2004, why not have a blast while at it? If you can't hoot and cheer to your heart's content at home, round up your football fanatic friends and head for these venues in town. They'll keep the midnight lamps burning for you.

**HYATT REGENCY:** Experience the Euro Cup Fever at Hyatt till July 4 from 9 p.m. onwards at the Rox Bar, The Café and The Lounge. For information: 4491234

**HOTEL SHANGRI-LA:** Euro 2004 Live on Big Screen at Not just The Jazz Bar. For information: 4412999.

**HOTEL BLUESTAR:** Enjoy Euro Cup 2004 on a wide screen at Mandala Bar with discounts on beverages and snacks. For information: 4228833.

**K-TOO! BEER AND STEAKHOUSE:** Football Frenzy. Watch all the Euro Cup games at dinnertime every evening at K-Too! For information: 4700043.

# Euro 2004 Special



# Nepal's Roadmap

In the absence of leaders with vision and politics of substance, the responsibility has now fallen on the hands of ordinary Nepalis and the world community to ask difficult questions and make harsh comments

BY KIRAN CHALISE

The political arena has transformed itself into a “crowded chicken farm without any eggs”—too much politicking, too little substance. After the unwarranted loss of more than 10,000 innocent lives in the Maoist insurgency, after a tragic death of about a dozen key Royal family members and after delivering some of the most corrupted governments in history, it is “business as usual” for Nepali political entities. Questions need to be asked: at what cost? At whose expense?

The political jostling has resulted in a triangle—an accidental King, the Maoist rebels and a group of failed parties. Each blaming the other for everything that has gone (and is going) wrong. A rattan basket criticizes a palm leaf basket, a palm leaf basket criticizes a bamboo basket and a bamboo basket criticizes a rattan basket. Still, all baskets are full of holes. The same applies with the Nepali political scene.

In the absence of leaders with vision and politics of substance, the responsibility has now fallen on the hands of ordinary Nepalis and the world community to ask difficult questions and make harsh comments.

Here is the rub. What seems to be the real issue in Nepali politics today? I believe these are:

- firstly, the issue of monarchy or republic: whether it is necessary and relevant to keep the monarchy or should Nepal become a republic and
- secondly, what system of governance is appropriate in Nepal today: for example, active monarchy (similar to Panchayat System, pre 1990s), passive/constitutional monarchy (similar to multi-party democracy, post—1990s) and no monarchy (republican system without the involvement of monarchy.)

However, the three dissenting parties are not discussing the real issue but dealing with the side-shows such as constitutional amendments, holding elections, etc.

So, what could be the way forward? One cannot be doing what one has always been doing and expect a different result. It is time for some fresh, alternative and strategic thinking.

Perhaps, keeping with the ideals of a democratic tradition, the Nepali people should be given the opportunity to decide on such crucial issues through a referendum. Given the complexity and nature of the problem, a two-staged referendum (monitored/observed by an international delegation) should be conducted asking people to answer simple but important questions. For example,

## STAGE 1 REFERENDUM

**Question: “Should we keep the monarchy or become a republic?”**

Possible outcomes of stage 1 referendum are either keeping the monarchy or becoming a republic. Depending upon the outcome of stage 1, a little more detailed question should be asked at stage 2.

## STAGE 2 REFERENDUM

**Question: “Which political system should we choose?”**

If the result of stage 1 referendum is to keep the monarchy, then the choices for stage 2 will be political systems involving monarchy (such as active monarchy, constitutional monarchy, etc.)

If the result of stage 1 referendum is to become a republic, then the choices for stage 2 will be republican systems without the monarchy (such as democratic republic, communist republic, etc.)

## STAGE 3 IMPLEMENTATION

Adopt the chosen political system by amending the constitution, holding elections, forming the government and taking other necessary actions.

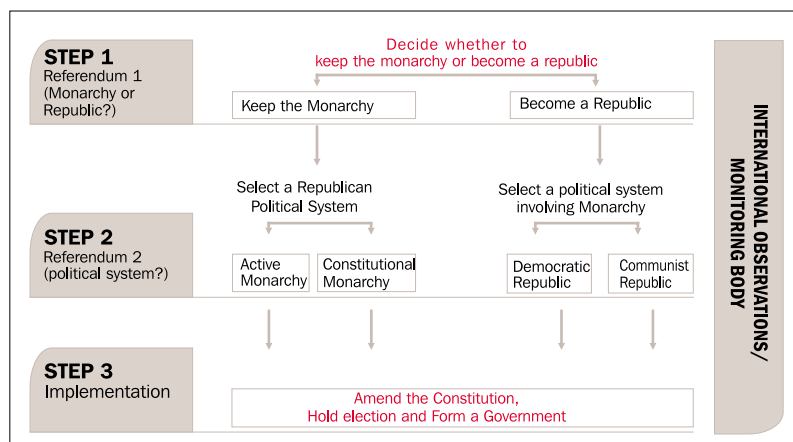
Is there any precedence of people deciding on a political system involving the monarchy? In November 1999, Australians went to the polls to decide whether to keep Queen Elizabeth II of England as their head of state or become a republic. The republicans lost by a margin of 45 percent to 55 percent. Australia is still a constitutional monarchy. It is a nation in its own right with the Queen as head of state.

Although there is no comparison in the socio-political context

between Nepal and Australia, the idea of using the referendum as a tool for a breakthrough in the present and ongoing stalemate is not impossible. Although a referendum will not solve all the problems we have, it will provide some identifiable benefits and a direction. It will strengthen democracy by allowing the people to have a say. It will test whether the monarchy still exists in the

heart and minds of ordinary Nepalis. It will determine whether the people are happy with the way things are and would prefer to maintain the status quo. And above all, it will prove whether people are really ready to tango with the Maoists as they claim.

What are the risks with this approach? What if the chosen system does not deliver? What if something goes wrong later on? Well, nothing can go wrong because nothing is going right. **N**





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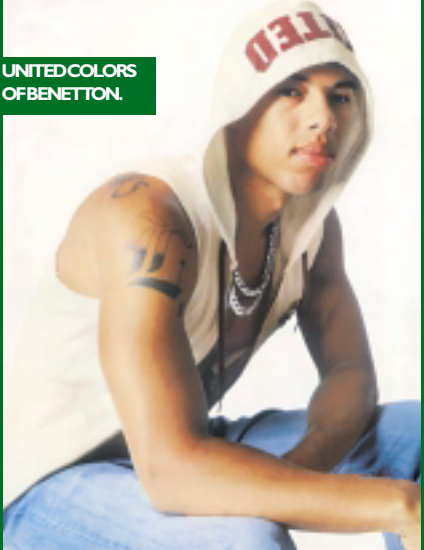
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# Alienation And Exile In Kathmandu

**F**iras Al-Bakwa, a 29-year-old Iraqi refugee, has been in Nepal for the last four years. He left Baghdad in 1999. The police fired into a large crowd that was demonstrating against the assassination of Ayatollah Al-Sadar, a Shia leader. Firas, who carried a wounded friend



to safety, fled after he heard Saddam's police were gunning for him. After spending some time in Jordan, Firas was on his way to New Zealand when the immigration authorities in Hong Kong detected his fake passport, and sent him back to his last port of arrival, Kathmandu. Firas has UNHCR status as a refugee but is unable to leave because the Nepali government insists he must pay the monthly \$180 visitor visa fee that he has accumulated for four years, along with fines. Firas talked with Sushma Joshi of Nation Weekly about his feelings of being unable to leave a country which has become his prison.

**Why did you leave Iraq?**

I was taking part in the protest against the killing of the Ayatollah. The Baathist party came and started to fire at the crowd. They killed so many people—100 or more. There was blood everywhere. It was like the movies.

**You fled to Jordan before coming here. Why did you not stay there?**

In Jordan, it's worse than here—they can always get you. They were always checking visas. They arrested many Iraqi people with Jordanian intelligence and sent them back to Iraq.

**How did you end up in Nepal?**

I was going to go to New Zealand, where my brothers live. I had heard of Nepal, but I didn't know where it was. Nobody knows about Nepal in the Middle East. My smuggler sent me here to make it appear like there were many steps so he could take a lot of money from me. That's why I hate my smuggler.

**How do you find this country?**

Frankly, I find it the worst place to be. They don't even recognize refugees that the UNHCR has. They see me as illegal. I wanted to go to a country where there can be dignity and rights, but instead I am here.

**What happened after you were sent back from Hong Kong?**

They put me in prison for six months in Dillibazaar. It was the worst time. There were other Iraqis there, and they told me to apply for refugee status in UNHCR. They took two months to give that to me, after which I went in front of a judge, and he reduced my jailterm to four months and released me.

**I have no family, no work.**

**I take violin and computer lessons. But without work it's not easy**

**What was jail in Nepal like?**

They cheated me. They gave me wrong information about bail so I had to stay in jail for six months.

**What has UNHCR done for you?**

UNHCR is a very weak organization. It's only for their employees, who make a good salary.

**Is your family back in Iraq?**

My father, my mother, my two brothers and two sisters are all back there. They want me to come back. Well, they want, and they don't. Being a young man is

risky in Iraq. My brother's car was hit by an American patrol and they beat him up, so it's not safe.

**Do you want to go back?**

Now that Saddam is gone, I would go back to Iraq, even illegally. But now the UN claims that they need permission from the Coalition Forces for me to go back to my own country.

**What's most difficult about being in Nepal?**

I have no family, no work. I take violin lessons, and computer lessons. But without work, it's not easy. I was a student of agriculture in Iraq. I tried to enroll in Rampur College in Chitwan, and they told me I had to pay \$20,000. I asked them: is this Cambridge University I am applying to?

**Do you have friends in Nepal—international, Iraqi, Nepali?**

Not really.

**How have you tried to leave Nepal?**

I waited 18 months to hear about my visa application to Australia. They rejected my application. They said I was not a refugee, and that I am not living outside my country. Should a country torture somebody in this way? Keeping a human being who wants to learn, to work, in this state is torture. Not physical torture, like Saddam, but still torture.

**What's next for you?**

I have been waiting to hear of my application from New Zealand for 16 months. How much time do I have? They have taken away a year and a half of my life. **N**



## All You Need Is Love

BY BISWAS BARAL

Pico Iyer's fictional travelogue "Abandon" is a mix of romance, mysticism and suspense. The book's protagonist is John McMillan, an Englishman studying Sufism in California, who travels around the world searching for the lost manuscripts of the great Persian Poet, Rumi. The manuscripts, which could be important for McMillan's thesis, are rumored to have escaped Iran during the revolution. McMillan's search for the lost works takes him to places as diverse as Iran, India, England, Syria and Spain.

McMillan lives in California instead of his native England to distance himself from his emotions and his past, and to be completely absorbed in scholarly pursuits. But his search for Rumi's lost work also opens him up to love. The story about McMillan and his Californian girlfriend Camilla Jensen runs parallel to the main text, which catalogues McMillan's travels. Although McMillan's search for the Sufi texts turns out futile, the realization about his love for Jensen, whom he comes to recognize as his soulmate, is triumph enough. After all, love and the meditation upon its mysteries are what Sufism is all about.

The stories in this book could also be a metaphor for the west's attempts to understand Islam. In light of the political climate after 9/11, the Afghan war and the war in Iraq, the deeper understanding of Islamic fundamentals has become quite a necessity; and Iyer put out this book in an opportune moment. In it, he tries to explore the problems between the west and the Islamic world created by the conflicts between Muslims and westerners. It highlights the eminence and goodness of self-effacing Sufism, and Islam at large, over the primarily materialistic ethos of the west.

The book also underscores the need for a greater understanding of the plights of the many suffering Arabs. In one instance in the book, an Iranian scholar in the United States, venting his frustrations

at the western world, and his own government, complains, "Of course you are sorry. You in the west are always sorry, very sorry for the sadness you have caused. You are excited because the 'moderates,' as you call them, come on CNN and say all the things the west wants to hear...The 'people' (in Iran) only think about one thing, and that is tomorrow. How will we get food? What will happen to our children? How will we live tomorrow, the next day?"

While Iyer can be commended for trying to get to the heart of how Islam has been misrepresented, for readers, a little clarity in plotting might have helped his cause. The plot is a mish-mash. On the one hand, Iyer tries to keep up the story's momentum by presenting a romantic love story, but at the same time the text sometimes veers into obscurity because of its overtly complicated network of settings and confusing circumstances. Also, the plot sometimes becomes mundane and repetitious. For example, Iyer unnecessarily describes in detail the mountainous settings of California and the lover's trips to an abandoned house, time and again. And more than half the novel is set inside McMillan's BMW or Jensen's coupe.

But, despite the weak plot, the novel redeems itself through the exploration of its ambitious theme—the inquisition of love, spirituality and the conflict between two dominant world-views.

Even though "Abandon" is not a work that will hook you with a gripping plot and scandalous prose, it is nevertheless an insightful narrative by an exceptionally gifted travel writer, essayist and journalist. Through the elegant portrayal of the deeper workings of the passionate and pious love between McMillan and Jensen, Iyer gives the readers an insight into the basics of Sufism. For readers perplexed by Islam, Iyer's book can be a starting point for unraveling the mysteries of this often-misunderstood religion. **N**



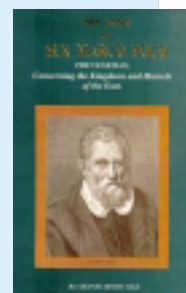
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# This Just Isn't Fair

The education strike has finally ended. And what a relief. After two weeks of eerie silence, classrooms and playgrounds are again abuzz with the chatter of happy students. Parents are again lining up at bus stops to see off their children. The children's homework and new lessons are again keeping parents and students busy. The students—small and not so small—deserve it all. They need to hope for a better tomorrow.

Times are difficult. And that is all the more reason why today's students need to look toward the future with hope and excitement. And perhaps more than any time before, we as parents and fellow citizens need to help students keep their hopes alive, nourish their dreams with care. We are indeed deeply concerned for the well being of the new generation. But the times perhaps call us to go a notch beyond. A seasoned educationist Father Lawrence Maniyar tells us that the new generation of students are haunted by a huge fear psychosis. Continued bandas, chakka jams and daily violence outside the classroom are taking a heavy toll on their mental health and sense of well-being. Much to our chagrin, he also told us the parents as a unit have done little to stand up to the grave injustices and pain caused to their children—and them—by the forced closures by the student unions.

It was a colossal waste the last two weeks: tens of thousands of students at the 25,000 government schools, at the more than 8,000 private schools and more than 200 campuses became victims of what would prove to be a mere fight over semantics. The pro-Maoist student wing ANNISU (Revolutionary) wanted the government to remove the "terrorist" tag slapped on it. And the govern-

ment relented—any civilized government would in the face of an impending crisis. We do not like to get into the politics attached with the "terrorist" tag here; and whether the government gained anything at all in slapping it in the first place. But what we know for sure is that the Maoists lost a lot this last two weeks. Let it be known: the public is bound to judge harshly any force that stops the progress of their children—and their future—dead on track. We once again appeal to the Maoists and student unions not to force shutdowns on an unwilling population.

The government, however, cannot run away from its own responsibilities in all this. Successive administrations

have mishandled the situation. The members of the Task Force that has been asked to sort out the fight over the fees tell us that the official approach to the problem has at best been cavalier. One clear voice coming out from schools, private or government,



the last two weeks was that successive governments have miserably failed the students: first in their continued failure to draw up clear-cut guidelines on school fees and then in following them up with rigor.

Obviously, both the officials and the unions have made mistakes. One in trying to wish away genuine grievances of inequity; the other in using educational institutions as soft target to fulfill their political demand. But we still say this: the Maoist students are the most to blame—for forcing schools and colleges to close down. The underlying politics was right there for all to see.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor



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