

STRIKING TEACHERS | CRICKET BLUES | SANGINA'S OLYMPIC DREAMS

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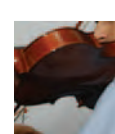
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Letters



“ Consumer confidence can’t be won solely by evoking patriotic emotions ”

BISHWO POUDEL

Army and the court

JOGENDRA GHIMIRE ARGUES PERSuasively when he says that the Army should obey court orders in order to enjoy moral superiority over the Maoist rebels that it is fighting against (Re: “Court Orders,” Legal Eye, July 4). Almost every single day, newspapers are rife with stories of the security forces’ defiance of the judiciary. In fighting against the Maoists—which to me is a just cause—the Army should not lose track of what it is fighting for: supremacy of the rule of law. But didn’t Ghimire question in one of his earlier articles (“When Rights Go Wrong,” April 19-25) the motivation of the human rights groups who are campaigning for justice to those who have been wronged by the Army? Ghimire made a rather confused defense of Army’s poor human rights record. I am not saying that the Army doesn’t deserve the benefit of doubt and that counter-insurgency measures are easy to enforce. But it has so much gain by admitting its mistakes openly and then persecuting the guilty—again openly. I am glad that Ghimire had the moral courage to revise his flawed position.

SUDHAM PALIKHE
VIA EMAIL

Poor Nepali toys

I ENJOYED SUSHMA JOSHI’S (“Middle Class Race,” Viewpoint, July 11). Her portrayal of a young boy unwittingly experiencing the material world is interesting and thought provoking. However, at the end of the article, she subtly suggests that indigenous toys are safer, and yet underrepresented in the

market. I am not so sure about this, and I am afraid this is probably wishful thinking. It is wrong to characterize consumers collectively as ignorant agents preferring alien products to indigenous ones, irrespective of the quality of the product. My limited experience with local markets in Nepal says the reason why local products sell less is because they are less trustworthy when it comes to quality. Consumer confidence can’t be won solely by evoking patriotic emotions. I think we particularly need to learn from the Chinese who were famous for producing shoddy goods until the late 80s but are now supplying goods of excellent quality at reasonable prices.

BISWO POUDEL
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY

Thamel bubble

PRIOR TO CHECKING INTO A GUEST house on the edge of Thamel, perhaps Kirsty Fisher should have checked herself into Kathmandu’s renowned Tilganga Eye Center (Re: “The Belly Of The Beast,” Arts & Society, July 4). A new pair of corrective corneal transplants would have enabled her to see clearly, without pride or prejudice, the ‘real’ Thamel and the ‘real’ Nepal.

Thamel has developed over the last two decades or so as a hub for a variety of touristic needs: cyber cafés to café lattes; singing bowls to sleeping bags; hashish to hash brown potatoes. Thamel is ideally-sized, ideally-located and ideally-organized to make it the perfect base from which the discovery of the ‘real’ Nepal can be planned. Only myopic and Lonely Planet-less tourists would mistake Thamel for either Shangri-la or the

'real' Nepal. To view the 'real' Nepal, the informed, curious tourists walk out to some of Kathmandu's traditional, historical and cultural must-sees nearby, such as the Durbar Square, Ason Bazaar, and Swayambhunath. And on a trek in the sublime countryside and hills of Nepal is where they experience Shangri-la, which is really a state of mind.

Nepal is full of troubles at the moment, but it also has an abundance of natural beauty, smiling people, amazing culture and an enviable sense of sangfroid. I salute every visitor who, in spite of the alarmist travel advisories their respective 'first' world countries routinely publish, come to visit Nepal. Their quest to discover foreign lands, connect with strange peoples and exotic cultures is commendable, besides helping the economy of a 'third' world country. I certainly salute the entrepreneurs of Thamel, who have coalesced together, albeit haphazardly, to provide services to cater to the various needs of these visitors.

For the fortunate ones who have the ability to see into the belly of Thamel, they will find that 'real' Nepali people live, work and wander through its ancient, relatively safe and clean lanes, courtyards and bazaars. One thing is clear: the real smug beast resides in the snug belly of those who have lost the sense of wonder, the hunger for adventure, the appreciation for the different. For them, sadly, their bubble better not burst.

KUNAL LAMA
CAFÉ MITRA & LOUNGE BAR
THAMEL

Moon or six pence

I DISAGREE WITH AJIT BARAL (RE: "Moon or Six Pence," Arts & Society, June 20). Unlike what he claims average Nepalis do not lack money to buy a painting. What they lack is the understanding of art. The thought that crossed my mind after reading his article: it is one of those articles that grossly undermines Nepali art and artists. The writer most uncouthly tries to portray local artists as "greedy people" who price their works outlandishly, making paintings a far-fetched dream for middle-class Nepalis. Baral tries to make a case for himself by describing Nepal as a semi-feudalistic

society, without a substantial industrial class. And because of this our artists should start selling their paintings cheap so as to create a middle-class market.

Baral fails to understand that art is not a commodity. It cannot be mass-produced. A lot of dedication, emotions and feelings go into the making of creative works. Some Nepali artists have dedicated their whole lives in order to excel in indigenous arts and to make their presence felt in the global art market. Indeed, a number of Nepali works are masterpieces and deserve to fetch high prices given their uniqueness.

Baral sounds outright irrational, when he suggests that Nepali artists should price their works keeping in view the affordability of local purchasers. But no work of art is created keeping a certain group or market in mind. The artist creates a piece of art for the sake of art, irrespective of how much money it will fetch him. Don't you think it is demeaning to expect the artist to create something so that the sachib (to use Baral's own term), who earns Rs. 10,000 per month, can afford it? In fact, I disagree with Baral's claim that because Nepal doesn't have an industrial class, there is no critical mass to market the work of art. Just look around you, there are fancy bungalows, expensive cars, and look at the money spent each night on partying in restaurants and clubs by the supposedly "average Nepali" or the sachib. Curiously, many houses have all the modern gizmos, but not a single painting.

It's not that the "average Nepalis" lack money to buy a painting, what they lack is the understanding of art. Selling paintings as cheaply as Srijana Art Gallery to expand the art market inside Nepal may not be the best way to create a market. The real issue here is the lack of awareness. Art is more than just a piece of work to fill the empty space on the wall. Raising pricing issues will not further public awareness. I do however agree with Baral that we need to create a market for art. And how do we do that? Baral could start out with writing articles that educate the "average Nepalis," (and the sachibs) about the values of Nepali art.

NAVIN JOSHI
DIRECTOR PARK GALLERY
CREATIVE DIRECTOR, MAXPRO P. LTD.

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Nation Weekly, The Media House, Tripureshor,
Kathmandu, Nepal (Regd. 113/059-060).
Tel: 2111102, 4229825, 4261831, 4263098

EDITOR: Akhilesh Upadhyay
editorial@nation.com.np

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR: Suman Pradhan
COPY EDITOR: Tiku Gauchan

STAFF WRITERS: Sushma Joshi, Satish Jung Shahi
PHOTOJOURNALIST: Sagar Shrestha
DESIGNER: Raj Kumar Shrestha

AD & CIRCULATION DIRECTOR: Krishna Shrestha
MARKETING EXECUTIVES:

Sarita Gautam and Rameshwor Ghimire
ad@nation.com.np

MARKETING CONSULTANT: Kreepa Shrestha

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Nripendra Karmacharya

SUBSCRIPTION: Bipin Raj Ojha
subscription@nation.com.np

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E-mail: editorial@nation.com.np

Fax: 4216281

Mail: Nation Weekly

The Media House, GPO 8975, EPC 5620
Tripureshor, Kathmandu, Nepal.

SUBSCRIPTION

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EPC 5620, Tripureshor, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 2111102, 4229825, 4261831, 4263098
Fax: 4216281

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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
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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EVERY MONDAY

Picture of the Week



CAPITAL PUNISHMENT: Purna Maya Shrestha makes a plea for her husband's life to the Chinese authorities. Ishwori Shrestha has been put on a death row in China for peddling drugs. With her are her sons Ishan, 5, and Mishan, 4, during a press appearance in Kathmandu

nw/Sagar Shrestha



Honorable Exit

The King should exercise his authority, under Article 127, to dismiss two controversial and incompetent judges. Already, the judges have badly bruised the Supreme Court and they have to go

BY JOGENDRA GHIMIRE

Quite a few heads will roll before the Williams Robinson scandal is put to rest. One is bound to reach this conclusion because the Judicial Council is not explicitly empowered to investigate or recommend the dismissal of Supreme Court judges.

Since my last column on the controversy over a month ago, three very important developments have taken place. The first was the report by a Nepal Bar Association committee, which found that the decision of the division bench comprising of Justices Krishna Kumar Verma and Baliram Kumar to acquit the drug dealer was flawed. Then came a preliminary finding by a review bench of the Supreme Court which echoed similar concerns. The third, and by far the most damaging development from the perspective of the two judges, came only last week in the form of a report of a three-member special team of the Judicial Council. The report delivered to the Chief Justice, who is also the chair of the Council, by Supreme Court Justices Min Bahadur Rayamajhi, Anup Raj Sharma and Khil Raj Regmi has found that (a) the two judges had betrayed public trust and confidence, and (b) the duo lacked competence to serve as judges of the apex court.

The investigation committee realizes the limits of the Judicial Council—and the Chief Justice—while initiating action against the duo. The Constitution, after all, makes the Supreme Court judges immune from action or investigation by any organ of the state, except for the possibility of impeachment by the Pratinidhi Sabha. That too for rather specific reasons: incompetence, misbehavior and failure to discharge the duties of office in good faith. That the investigation committee went to the extent of pronouncing the two judges incompetent—one of the grounds for impeachment under the Constitution—is clearly indicative of their conviction that they should no longer continue on the Bench.

The committee members have recommended that the Judicial Council should ask Verma and Kumar to quit. There had been an instance of resignation by one Supreme Court judge—Rajendra Raj Nakhwa—a few years ago who was asked to quit by the then Chief Justice, Keshav Prasad Upadhyay, after questionable behavior on the part of the judge.

If the resignation option does not work, the committee believes that the Chief Justice should administratively punish the two judges by not assigning them any work.

I find the first option acceptable. The second—of administrative punishment—is likely to be a long drawn out affair, and indicative of lack of clarity on the part of the judicial leadership on an extremely important issue. Of the two judges in question, Verma is due to retire in a few months' time, but Kumar, a more recent appointee, is likely to stay on for nearly 10 years. Which means, he will be in administrative punish-

ment at least until the new Pratinidhi Sabha comes into existence and decides on his fate, which could take a while. A more decisive action for the Judicial Council would be to take an unconventional—but bold—route on the procedural questions associated with the issue of Verma and Kumar, if they decline to quit without any fuss. The Council should recommend to the King to exercise his authority under Article 127 of the Constitution and dismiss the two judges.

Like it or not, we live in a constitutional set-up which would stop functioning had it not been for the use of Article 127 to “remove difficulties.” Since October of 2002, this last-resort provision has been used three times to appoint the prime minister and for a number of other executive functions. If that constitutional provision can be used for appointing the prime minister, which is a function assigned to the Parliament under the constitution, there is no reason why it can't be exercised for dismissing the judges? This too is a function that the Parliament should have performed and the procedure has to be facilitated in the absence of the Parliament.



Letting the two judges continue at the apex court will, besides continuing to tarnish the image of the judiciary, create an uneasy environment within the court. At least eight judges of the Supreme Court have already acted or spoken against Verma and Kumar—three as members of the review bench, three as Judicial Council committee members, and the Chief Justice and Justice Hari Prasad Sharma as members of the Judicial Council.

Two damaging reports and a damaging comment of a full bench later, their presence at the apex court is not in the interests of the judiciary. They should go and the judicial leadership should not hesitate to take a decisive action to ensure their departure—even if that means resorting to Article 127. **N**



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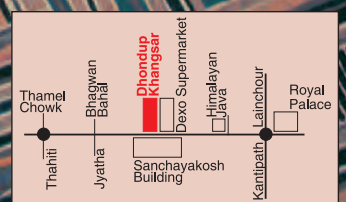
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Toxic chemicals

A large amount of outdated chemical waste has been stocked in the warehouses of Cotton Development Committee and Agricultural Seeds Company in Nepalgunj for the last 12 years. Activists warned of possible accidents due to the hazardous waste. The Stockholm International Convention says that the outdated chemicals must be returned to the country of origin for disposal.



Thimpu's "solution"

The Bhutanese Prime Minister, Jigmi Y Thinley, told the National Assembly that his government was making serious efforts to find a "durable solution" to the refugee problem, Kuenselonline reported. Thinley termed the December 22 incident in Khudunabari camp last year,

when refugees pelted stones at Bhutanese officials, following provocative statements from them, as a "regrettable setback." The scheduled repatriation of some refugees from the camp was stalled after members of Bhutanese Joint Verification Team pulled out of Jhapa following attacks on the visiting Bhutanese officials.

SLC slip-up

One hundred and ninety-one students who failed this year's SLC exam from Shahid Smiriti Secondary School, Chitwan, were allotted equal marks in two subjects—science; and environment, population and health. Teachers, who blame the Office of the Controller of Examination (OCE) for the oversight, have urged it not to bar the students from sitting for the "chance" SLC examination, which will soon follow. OCE said that it has started investigating the case.

Hepatitis scare

Hemophilia Society said hepatitis was found in nine out of 11 hemophilia patients, who have been transfusing blood regularly made



TIME FOR A TOAST: Photojournalists received awards from Sampada Photo Vision for their contribution

available by the Kathmandu-based blood bank. Even if the bank screens blood before transfusion, the window period of hepatitis might have been the reason why hepatitis screenings fail, the society chairman, Kiran Manandhar, said in defense of the blood bank in Kantipur.

No Nepalis

Nepali students have been barred from enrollment in colleges in Uttar Pradesh. RSS reports that they were denied admission in schools in Baharaich, Srivasti and Khiri districts, citing security reasons. These districts border Banke, Bardia, Kailali and Kanchanpur. An Indian daily citing officials of the Uttar Pradesh Higher Secondary Council said that admission

for students from the concerned districts will be allowed only after an investigation into their background, Kantipuronline reported.

Leniency plea

Purna Maya Shrestha, wife of Ishwori Kumar Shrestha who was arrested by the Chinese police a year ago, appealed for amnesty for her husband. A Chinese court sentenced Shrestha to death on charges of smuggling drugs into Tibet. She claimed her husband was innocent. The court had earlier handed a death sentence to Ravi Dahal and life imprisonment to Rewat Kumar Dahal. Both were found in possession of drugs in Tibet.

Salt Trading abroad

The proposal of Salt Trading Corporation (STC) to open a branch in Dubai, UAE and a retail outlet in Doha, Qatar was approved by the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry. Both the retail outlet and the branch office will be in operation within a month, according to Parmeshwar Mahaseth, the STC chairman. Sales of fruits and vegetables are expected to get a boost through the initiative. The outlet in Doha is a joint venture with Alfazar International Trading, a local company, while the Dubai office will function independently.

Shiva Shankar Mukherjee has been appointed as the new Indian ambassador to Nepal. Mukherjee will succeed Shyam Saran who has been nominated as the next Indian Foreign Secretary. Mukherjee is currently serving as the Indian High Commissioner to South Africa. In his pre-departure press meet last week, Saran said, "Violence isn't a legitimate means to earn political needs,"

commenting on the Maoist insurgency. He empathized with the plight of Nepalis, fleeing to India due to violence, "In times of distress, do you go to a friend or an enemy?"

He also expressed hope that the talks between Bhutan and Nepal would resume and the situation in the refugee camps doesn't get any more "complicated." There are reports that the Maoists have infiltrated the camps.

FINAL SHOW



Rain owes

Recurrent heavy rain has taken more than seven lives bringing the death toll to 10



over the weekend. Dozens of villages in Mahottari, Rautahat, Udaypur, Saptari, Sunsari, Dhankuta, Bara, Jhapa and Dang were inundated rendering hundreds of people homeless. Four people were killed in Dang, three in Dhanusa, two in Udaypur, one each in Rautahat and Sindhuli.

Cabinet expansion

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba expanded his three-member cabinet to 31. On board are CPN(UML), RPP, and NSP. The cabinet also includes two independent members who are Palace nominees. The portfolios of ministries are as follows.

- SHERBAHADUR DEUBA: Prime Minister, and Minister for Royal Palace, Defense and Foreign Affairs
- BHARAT MOHAN ADHIKARI: Deputy PM and Finance Minister

CABINET MINISTERS

- DR MOHAMMAD MOHSIN(I): Information and Communication
- BADRI PRASAD MANDAL (NSP): Forest and Soil Conservation
- BALARAM GHARTI MAGAR(RPP): Science and Technology
- BIMALENDRA NIDHI (NC-D): Education and Sports
- PRAKASH MAN SINGH(ND): Physical Planning and Works
- ASHOK RAI (CPN-UML): Local Development
- PURNA BAHADUR KHADKA (NC-D): Home
- DEEP KUMAR UPADHAYA (NC-D): Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation
- ISHWOR POKHREL (CPN-UML): Industry, Commerce and Supplies
- YUBA RAJ GYAWALI (CPN-UML): Local Development
- JOG MEHER SHRESTHA (RPP): Land Reform and Management
- HOM NATH DAHAL (NC-D): Agriculture and Cooperatives
- RAGHUJI PANT (CPN-UML): Labor and Transport
- BACHASPATI DEVKOTA (CPN-UML): Population and Environment
- ASTHA LAXMI SHAKYA (CPN-UML): Women, Children and Social Welfare
- TEK BAHADUR CHOKHYAL (NC-D): Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
- KRISHNA LAL THAKALI (INDEPENDENT): General Administration

STATE MINISTERS

- THAKUR PRASAD SHARMA (RPP): Water Resources
- DR PRAKASH SARAN MAHAT (NC-D): Foreign Affairs
- KRISHNA GOPAL SHRESTHA(CPN-UML): Local Development
- BAL KRISHNA KHAND (NC-D): Education and Sports
- URBA DUTTA PANT (CPN-UML): Labor and Transport
- DR BAMS DHAR MISHRA (CPN-UML): Health
- PRATIBHA RANA (RPP): Science and Technology
- RAMCHANDRA RAYA (RPP): Land Reform and Management

ASSISTANT MINISTERS

- UMA KANT CHOUDHARY (NC-D): Agriculture and Cooperatives
- LALBAHADURBISHWOKARMA(CPN-UML): Population and Environment
- HARI SHANKAR PARIYAR (NC-D): Physical Planning and Works
- BHIMKUMARIBUDHAMAGAR(ND): Tourism, Culture and Civil Aviation



ON AIR: Information Minister Mohamad Moshin in his first public appearance after taking office at Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union conference

The heavy downpour has also severely affected vehicular movement in the Prithivi and Mahendra highways leaving hundreds of passengers stranded.

New U.S. envoy

The new U.S. envoy, James Francis Moriarty, arrived in Kathmandu. A graduate of Dartmouth College, Moriarty began his Foreign Service career as a political officer in 1975.

He has served at U.S. embassies in Pakistan, Morocco and Swaziland and in American missions in China and Taiwan.

Coffee exports

Nepal Coffee Association exported 8.4 tons of coffee to the United States recently. Nepal Samacharpatra quoted an association official as saying that retail rates for the U.S. market have not been fixed yet—as this was the first time Nepali coffee is entering the U.S. market. To date, Japan is the biggest importer of Nepali coffee. It imports over 10 tons annually.

More killings

The Maoists shot dead Rajan Kuikel, an accountant at the Home Ministry, in Kathmandu in front of his Gaurighat residence. Kuikel died at the Medicare Nursing Home in Chabahil while undergoing treatment. Police say they are investigating the

case but no arrests have been made so far. The Maoists also shot dead Deputy Superintendent of Police Uttam Bahadur Karki and Maheshman Shrestha, ex-chairman of Kathmandu's ward-12. Both the killings took place a day after Prime Minister Deuba expanded his cabinet.

Farming census

The fifth National Agriculture Census-2058 made public by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) puts the population of farmers at more than 3.36 million. The country has over 2.65 hectares of agricultural land. CBS included those families farming over four *aanas* of land in the hills, eight *dhurs* in Tarai, or having five domestic animals and 20 avians in the census list.



RIGHTS: A policeman grabs a placard of a Blue Diamond Society activists as they head towards the post protest zone in Singha Durbar

PICTURES ON THE NET

Web designers “dreams & ideas” launched a website www.pjclub.com.np on Saturday that will highlight the work of Nepali photojournalists. The same company is also starting a two-month basic photojournalism class starting July 25 to encourage new talents, says a press statement issued by the PJ Club. Kantipur’s photojournalist Chandra Shekhar Karki will be the instructor for the course.



FACTS & FIGURES

The month of June might have dismayed Nepal Tourism Board due to figures on the arrival of Indian tourists in the country. Citing figures provided by the Department of Immigration, NTB recorded a decline of eight percent in the arrival of Indian tourists in June 2004 compared to figures in the same period last year. However, there was one suggestion made by outgoing Indian Ambassador Shyam Saran during his interaction with the media last week.

“Nepal needs to get its statistics right,” said Saran when asked the reason why Indians were reluctant to visit Nepal. “Many Indians come by road and the data they (NTB) record is only on air travel.” However, Saran did add that factors such as the opening of schools and the monsoon could have affected the arrival of Indian tourists. The overall tourism arrival figures looks rosy for the NTB this June. Figures recorded an increase of five percent compared to last year.

PROMOTING TOURISM

Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) and Jet Airways have joined hands to promote Nepal as the preferred tourist destination for Indian tourists. Together they organized a series of press conferences and meetings with Indian tour operators in the cities of Mumbai, Ahmedabad, New Delhi and Chandigarh. Jet Airways, in collaboration with NTB, is expected to come up with various promotional campaigns and attractive holiday packages. The Nepali participants during the course of the campaign were Hotel Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Himalaya Expeditions, Machan Wildlife Resort and Avia Club.

NCC’S NEW BRANCH

Nepal Credit & Commerce Bank Ltd. launched its 14th branch at Chabahil, Kathmandu. The Chabahil branch provides fully computerized services along with Any Branch Banking System (ABBS) facility with the Main Branch in New Road Branch and the Thankot Branch. The 12th and 13th branches of NCC Bank were opened in the month of June in Kalaiya and Pokhara respectively.

KYMCO’S NEW PULSAR 125 LUXE

Star International Ltd. launched the new Pulsar 125 Luxe. The newly launched motorcycle is manufactured by Taiwan based Kymco. The Pulsar 125 Luxe has a displacement of 124cc and a maximum output of 11.56 bhp, with a mileage of around 50 km. It is available in four colors: Black, Silver, Blue and Red. The new model comes with a two-year warranty.



SECOND SAAB FOR YETI

Yeti Airlines has acquired a second SAAB 340B. With the addition of the 36-seater aircraft, the airline now has the largest seat capacity in domestic aviation in Nepal and also offers the widest network of internal flights. The airline operates scheduled flights to remote areas such as Jumla, Dolpo, Simikot, Taplejung, Manang and Rumjatar carrying large volumes of cargo. There will now be additional flights on pre-existing flight routes to Biratnagar, Pokhara, Bhairahawa and Nepalgunj. The SAAB 340B aircraft is a Swedish made, regional commuter aircraft with a general passenger cabin configuration of 33-36 seats and maximum operating altitude of 25,000 feet.

NEW PROMISE TOOTH PASTE

New Promise, a worldwide brand of toothpaste established 25 years ago, is set to be launched in Nepal. The toothpaste has clove oil and a fresh mint flavor. The brand is being marketed as product that provides refresh breath and protection from cavities. The new toothpaste will reach the consumers in a soft squeeze tube and a blue international pack. It will be available in 3 conventional pack sizes – small (45g), medium (90g) and family (170g).

70,000 NEPALIS IN THE GULF

Nepal’s contribution to the U.A.E.’s labor market numbers between 1,000-1,500 each month with a sharp increase in the last 18 months, the Gulfnews.com website reported quoting Nepal Embassy’s Charge D’ Affaires Madhuban Prasad Poudel as saying in a report filed from the Abu Dhabi. The total Nepali population in the Gulf was reported to be about 70,000. The same report cited the U.A.E. government decision to ban unskilled Indian and Pakistani workers in the region as the reason behind the increase of Nepali workers. Poudel was speaking at a function hosted by the Embassy to promote tourism marking the 58th Birthday of King Gyanendra.



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Agitating teachers concede that their demands may be unlawful but it is the officials at the Tribhuvan University themselves who first bent the rules to please their political masters. “Now do it for us too,” say the teachers

BY SUNIL POKHREL

IT HAS BEEN 16 MONTHS SINCE the part-time teachers of Tribhuvan University and its constituent campuses began low-intensity protests over their status and pay. But, they have met with little success. The teachers are now determined to fight to the finish, including a hunger-strike-unto-death to start from July 16.

The Tribhuvan University Part-Time Teachers’ Association (TUPTTA) has taken to the streets with a three-point demand. The main one is for the permanent appointment of teachers who are on daily wages. For their part, university officials have made it clear that the demands cannot be met until there is an amendment to the university’s Service Commission Act. University offi-



CHAIN REACTION

cialists believe that the protest is politically motivated; TUPTTA members deny this.

“We have been treated shabbily. I am not allowed to take leave even during emergencies,” says a part-time teacher at Amrit Science Campus. “I am not permitted to issue books from the library. The part-timers are fired even for ideological differences with the campus chief of the colleges,” says the teacher who asked for anonymity. Low as their pay may be, part-timers do not get it on time. The Amrit Science Campus teacher says that he hasn’t received a single rupee since January.

The university has been a tool for the politically powerful for quite a while. Interference in its day-to-day work not only continued but also intensified in the post-1990 period. In a program organized by TUPTTA last week, leaders of all political parties, including human rights activist Krishna Pahadi expressed their solidarity with the teachers’ union. When a central committee member of the ruling NC(D) assured the teachers that he would have the concerned authority look into the matter, the reaction was mixed. Many of the teachers were relieved that their plight would finally get the attention it deserves while oth-

ers wondered if the university was an autonomous institution at all. In 1991, Tribhuvan University caved in to political pressure and appointed 1,200 permanent teachers.

Nanda Kishor Singh, president of TUPTTA, seems determined to make the officials repeat the mistake. The only condition 13 years ago to make the teachers’ status permanent was that they had to be associated with the university as a wage earner or contract teacher for at least a year. The Service Commission, which fills in the vacancies, was blatantly bypassed. Singh and his group want similar treatment now.



the 2,400 part-time teachers at the university's Central Campus and 61 colleges around the country who fill that void.

The large number of part-timers clearly indicates that the university has fallen short of teachers but filling in the vacancies isn't always easy due to the bureaucratic red tape and political meddling. For example, the result of an exam conducted almost two years ago by the Service Commission is still due.

"Tribhuvan University has so far turned a deaf ear to our just demands," says Singh. "The university is quick to fulfill every demand made by the student unions, but as teachers we can't adopt harsh measures," Singh adds.

The protests and numerous sit-ins in front of the Dean's Office by TUPTTA members forced the university officials to form a fact-finding committee to look into the problems of the part-timers and suggest solutions. The committee, among other things, asked the university to increase the pay per class from Rs 60 to 120 for Intermediate and Bachelor levels and to Rs. 150 for the Master's level. The agitating teachers however would accept none of the piecemeal solution.

Mahendra Singh, rector of Tribhuvan University, fails to see any good in the demand made by the teachers. "All part-timers were hired after they agreed to abide by the terms and conditions laid out to them," he says. "How can they now go against the terms which were agreed? Recruitments shall be made according to the needs of the university, not by political pressure."

As for TUPTTA, the association finds it convenient to take shelter under the 1991 precedent, though many of its members concede their demands may not be entirely lawful. They argue it's rather lame for the university to cite the law when its own officials have been in routine violation of the legal provisions themselves.

A teacher in the Central Campus predicts that the hunger strike will force the officials to meet the teachers' demand. "This is a classic example which shows how a violation of existing laws by the concerned authorities can instigate a chain reaction," he adds. **N**

"There have been a number of blunders," says professor Chuda Nath Uprety, chairman of the TU Service Commission. All appointments of staff and teachers should strictly be as per the existing TU Service Commission Act," Uprety adds. He sounds confident in his assertion, but records show that on numerous instances the university has bowed to political pressure. Between 1997 and 2002, as many as 2,400 teachers on daily wages, who had affiliations with political parties or were relatives of university officials, were granted contracts as teachers. This group receives perks,

job security and other benefits on par with permanent teachers. "We were left out simply because we didn't have the blessing of the power centers," Singh says.

Officials at the Dean's Office in Kirtipur say performances of permanent teachers have been left wanting and it's





NEW CABINET AND OLD PROBLEMS

Prime Minister Deuba has finally expanded his Cabinet with the induction of CPN(UML), RPP and NSP. The Maoists however seem to be in no mood to offer any concessions

BY AKHILESH UPADHYAY

AFTER MONTH-LONG negotiations, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba last week expanded his three-member cabinet to include 31 members from four parties, including his own NC(D).

On board, finally, were RPP, NSP and CPN(UML), whose participation will remain crucial if the new government is to gain any momentum, and crucially, to resolve the insurgency.

But if Deuba and his new coalition partners were expecting the Maoists to tone down their violent ways with the formation of a representative government, that was not to be. If anything, there have been a series of killings, including some high-profile assassinations, in recent days. The mayor of Pokhara and avowed Royalist, Harka Bahadur Gurung, was gunned down as Deuba was putting final touches to his new Cabinet. And DSP Uttam Karki was shot to death in broad daylight in Kathmandu, a day after the new Cabinet was sworn in. A Home Ministry official and a civilian have been shot dead since, both in the capital.



“We never expected it to be a cakewalk,” says Minendra Rijal, a Deuba aide and member of the 14-member Task Force that successfully finalized the Common Minimum Program between the four parties who are now in the government. “The new government’s top agenda is clear. We want to hold talks with the Maoists.”

There has been tremendous pressure on the new government to call a ceasefire and hold the talks—from the civil society, the international community and the rank-and-file members of the political parties, who have been on the receiving end in the conflict. The United Nations says it will not interfere in the negotiations, though it is willing to mediate, if asked. It has urged both sides to the conflict to recognize each other’s existence.

The European Union has called on both parties to announce an immediate ceasefire and create an environment for dialogue without setting any conditions. It has urged the government and demo-

cratic forces to work towards early negotiations with the insurgents. The EU sees the integration of the rebels into the political mainstream as a prerequisite to free and fair elections.

Ministers in the new Cabinet say the need to call a ceasefire is urgent but also concede that reviving talks is not going to be easy, much less so if the talks are to eventually bear fruit. Two previous failed rounds of peace processes have left a bitter taste in everybody’s mouth, including the Maoists and the Army. There is a near-consensus among the coalition partners that they first need to lay down the groundwork so that the peace momentum will carry beyond the initial euphoria of a truce, if and when it comes.

Already, the officials are making the right of kinds of noises. One of the first things Prime Minister Deuba did after his appointment last month was to urge the Maoists to come back to the negotiating table. He said he would do every-

thing to make peace, though his call came with a caveat. “The Royal Nepal Army will return to barracks if the Maoists stand for peace,” Deuba said.

But peace at what price? That’s the bone of contention. While there has been a lot of pressure on the government to declare a ceasefire, it is unlikely that it would do so without a minimum understanding of what it is going to gain from such a ceasefire. “Of course, we don’t want the violence to continue and we do deeply empathize with the family members of the dead,” says a Cabinet Minister. “But we hope the Maoists will approach the talks in good faith this time around. It gets difficult to work with a force that believes in political violence.”

Yet the coalition partners seem determined to give it a shot, given the urgency of the situation at hand. A number of CPN(UML) leaders say they were primarily motivated to join the government to start a dialogue with the Maoists, and that alone. “If it’s not now, when?” asks Bhim Rawal, central committee member of the UML and the party’s one of four representatives in the Task Force that worked out the Common Minimum Program.

The Common Minimum Program is an open-ended document, which deliberately avoids taking any dogmatic positions so as to make the Maoists believe that the government is keeping all its options open, including that of the constituent assembly. This is where the peace process could get a bit tricky. The Palace will want a guarantee of its role before it commits to a constituent assembly and the political parties will never negotiate for a party-less totalitarian state, if that’s what the Maoists are fighting for.

“The Maoists perhaps aren’t as intractable as some of us believe they are,” says NC(D)’s Rijal. “They do realize they aren’t going to get everything they demand.” He points out that the Maoists, in fact, insist that they would hold talks only with a government that has unambiguous backing from the King. The thinking is that the Maoists, with all their display of bravado, are still willing to make compromises and that there are few leaders in the NCP(Maoist) who are willing to fight to the finish and turn Nepal into another Sudan, wracked by a bloody civil war since the 50s. **N**

WITH SHUSHAM SHRESTHA

OPINION

Good Budget Is Good Politics

BY POSH RAJ PANDEY

The budget is not only a ritual where the Finance Minister crunches numbers about the revenue and expenditure, but also a policy document. It pro-



DIFFICULT TIMES: Minister Adhikari

vides the direction of the actions the incumbent government plans to take on economic, social and political matters in the days to come. Everyone, from slum dwellers to the filthy rich, road-side teashop owners to the lords of tea estates, unemployed to senior bureaucrats, mid-wife to housewife, all are curious on the content of the budget speech as it affects their lives, for better or worse.

Viewing the budget in this perspective, the way revenue is collected and expenditure is allocated could be a reliable instrument to meet the expectations of the people. This in Nepal's case is restoration of peace, opportunities for productive

and gainful work, better health facilities and sending children to school. A good budget will be good politics in terms of an opportunity for the newly formed all-party government to keep the promises—talks with the Maoists, restoration of peace and conducting elections.

The consensus on the concept and content of the budget among the coalition partners, with their ideological underpinnings at odds, would be a daunting task—if the wrangling over the preparation of the Common Minimum Program is any indication. The freedom of the Finance Minister is further curtailed by the legacy of violence coupled with lower level of income, a smaller fiscal base, a weaker social service delivery system, dwindling capacity to maintain law and order, reduced social cohesion, a reduced institutional capacity and diminished ability to either manage development policies. All are factors beyond his control.

Given these constraints, the Finance Minister recently indicated that the security expenditure will inevitably go up, a complete U-turn on what his party used to have a "firm" position on. He, however, qualified, tacitly that there are prospects of reducing regular expenditure, though the definition of security-related, regular and development expenditure is amorphous and its distinction delicate.

If one dissects the government revenue and expenditure, the re-

vised estimate for the last fiscal year shows that the government has not been able to generate revenue to meet expenditure for day-to-day operations and repayment of loans. The revenue collection and expenditure pattern shows that out of every one rupiah tax paid by people, about one *suka* goes to military and police, about one *suka* to loan repayment and interest payments and the remaining one *mohar* to general administration, constitutional organs, judiciary and social services. More conspicuously, the expenditure on defense and police has been growing over the period and has stood at about 5 per cent of the national income—a figure comparable to many of the developed countries.

Given an escalating insurgency and crime and social violence, increased government expenditure on military and police is only natural to restore peace and put pressure to bring the Maoists to the negotiating table. But, it has to be remembered that expenditures on security, though a public good benefiting all, is insensitive to the values of equity and fairness. Once built up, as other countries have found out, they are difficult to downsize.

Here lies the moot question. Can Nepal, where about half the

population goes to bed hungry, afford such a huge defense and police expenditure? Is an increase in such expenditure the best solution? Don't we have other alternatives? The experiences of other developing countries show that the rate of growth of military expenditure and the rate of economic growth are inversely related. Closer to home, the economic growth in Sri Lanka regressed when armed revolution

A frontal assault on insurgency lies not on skyrocketing military and police expenditure but on inclusive economic growth

started and the prospects of peace dialogue were dim when there were double-digit growths in security expenditure.

A frontal assault on insurgency lies not on skyrocketing military and police expenditure but on inclusive economic growth, safeguarding civil liberties, deepening democracy, improving social cohesion and reducing economic disparities. It can be achieved through "quality" expenditure on "soft" sectors by taking measures such as improving earning capacity of the people, generating employment, developing skills, providing health facilities, and developing infrastructure in rural areas. Let peace create dividends, rather than dividends to defense personnel create peace. **N**

Death toll since Deuba took office

July 6

Kathmandu: Ward 12 ex-chairman Mahesh Man Shrestha and Deputy Superintendent of Police Uttam Bahadur Karki shot to death

Salyan: 11 security personnel, 19 Maoists killed in clashes at Gangate area of Kalimati Kalche VDC.

July 7

Kathmandu: Maoists shot dead Rajen Kuikel, assistant accountant at the Home Ministry outside his residence at Gaurighat. **N**

June 14

Banke: Maoist ambush APF convoy, killing at least 22 police personnel in a landmine blast and wounding 12 in Khari Khola.

June 20

Dang: Maoists attack a police patrol, killing 18 people, including four civilians. Dozens are reported injured in a separate landmine blast

and the ensuing crossfire near the village of Dhan Khola.

July 2

Pokhara: Mayor Harka Bahadur Gurung, 65, shot by the Maoists

July 5

Birgunj: 12 policemen die in a Maoist ambush at Bahuarwa Batha VDC near Birgunj.

'Govt Is Open To All Options'

Minendra Rijal, a Deuba aide and former member of the National Planning Commission, was a member of the Task Force that successfully finalized the Common Minimum Program.

Will the new government do what the two previous governments failed to do—broker a permanent ceasefire with the Maoists?

We hope so. The Common Minimum Program doesn't deal with specifics. That's because we want to keep all options open.

There are criticisms that the Deuba cabinet turned out to be larger than was expected—even CPN(UML) General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal has said so much?

Yes, the Cabinet may have been larger than many expected. But you should bear in mind that these are extremely difficult times and it wasn't easy to put together a four-party government in the first place. Every single party faces problems of internal management. The big question of course is whether we can resolve the Maoist problem. I consider it a success that only one major political, the Nepali Congress, is not in the government now. But we are still hoping that they (Nepali Congress) will join the government at some point. They will be duly given four or five Ministries.

Koirala and the four agitating parties are saying they will negotiate with the Maoists too?

That's empty rhetoric. But Maoists have said the Nepali Congress should have a role in the peace talks. It's a tactical statement and serves both the interests of both Koirala and the Maoists.

Okay, the government has taken a pluralistic shape, what next?

As I said earlier, the CMP is an open-ended document and we remain open to all options. This was deliberate. Once there is public posturing on certain issues, negotiations become that much more difficult.

So you are saying that you are open about discussing the constituent assembly?

At the minimum, we seek negotiations. We need space to hold elections and conduct relief programs to help tens of thousands of the displaced throughout the country. Their needs are urgent.

Is the Palace open about constituent assembly?

I will look at it this way: Is the King a factor in Nepal politics? He is. It is, then, only natural that he should seek assurance on the role of the monarchy, just as we will seek assurance for multiparty democracy. There can't be a blank-check negotiation on the constituent assembly.

But the Maoists said last year when the peace talks failed that the government negotiators had put forth too many conditions and had taken a non-negotiable position on the constituent assembly?

The Maoists also realize they can't get everything they want. In fact, they insist that they will hold talks with a government that enjoys unambiguous support of the King.

How close are we to the ceasefire?

I can only say this: I don't think we are ready for a unilateral ceasefire. We need do some homework first rather than have a meaningless ceasefire. But don't get me wrong. I am not condoning violence and the daily mayhem. Far from it. But what is the purpose of a ceasefire if we

don't have a roadmap? There will again be accusations and counteraccusations and the chances are that the peace process will again collapse.

Are things getting out of control?

As a matter of fact, all major political parties, except the Nepali Congress, are now on board, and the Maoists must be closely following the turn of events. I sometimes get a feeling that the Maoist central leadership doesn't have control over their rank and file.

Are the Maoists under pressure to announce a ceasefire, just as the government?

Pretty much. Amid all this senseless violence, we tend to lose sight of the fact that things are getting out of hand for them. India has, of late, put tremendous pressure on them and they are on the run. India most certainly doesn't want its economic laggards in the north—

Bihar and Uttar Pradesh—taking a leaf out of the Maoist book and turning into Rukum and Rolpa. Bihar's GDP growth is way, way behind while parts of India are galloping ahead with as much as 12 percent growth. There were times when the Maoists got some leverage, with sections of the Indian establishment even assuming that the insurgency could give them leeway in managing the bilateral ties. And within

Nepal, too, the Maoist movement was used to offset the influence of democratic forces. This is not the case now. The tables have turned completely. All the forces have united together against the Maoists. We now say that we will not negotiate with the Maoists on certain points: the constitutional monarchy, multiparty democracy and our relations with India.

Is state on verge of collapse? At the popular level, one hears conflicting, even confusing, assertions as to who deserves the people's support?

Some people do say, "We saw the King, we saw the parties, and now let's see Baburam and Prachanda. Maybe they will bring in peace." But people are slowly beginning to realize the attendant dangers. A lot of people in Kathmandu are now nervous because they have started witnessing cold-blooded killings. They will get even more rude shocks when they witness the Maoists' totalitarian ways. What can I say of a force that believes in settling political feuds with violence and killings? **N**



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STARK CHOICES

Nepal has a relatively low HIV epidemic but it faces stark choices: either choose to marshal whatever resources it has to limit the spread of the disease—and avoid a catastrophe—or do nothing and deal with the consequences

BY SUMAN PRADHAN
IN BANGKOK

IN THE NINE YEARS OF THE Maoist conflict, Nepal has lost slightly more than 10,000 people. In just over a decade and a half, HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, has infected more than an estimated 61,000 Nepalis and killed 3,100.

These numbers, put out by the latest UNAIDS report, aren't yet anywhere near the death toll inflicted by the Maoist insurgency. But they are frightening nevertheless.

For one, most Nepalis living with the virus don't know their HIV status, and therefore could pass it on to other people. Two, only a very small minority of those who know their status have access to anti-retroviral drugs that help to slow the disease's progress. Moreover, most of those who were infected in the early 90s will progress to the AIDS stage of the disease, crippling an already under-funded and inadequate health care system.

Clearly, if effective measures are not taken now, then the virus could easily spread to epidemic proportions, further tearing the social and economic fabric of a poor country already ravaged by war.

For these reasons, countries like Nepal which are in the midst of a relatively low HIV epidemic now face stark choices: they could either choose to marshal whatever resources they have to limit the spread of the virus when it is still in its early epidemiological phases—and hence avoid a catastrophe in the future—or do nothing and deal with the consequences later.

"Many countries choose to ignore the threat in its early stages and pay for it later," says Marsha Thompson, an American epidemiology student attending the 15th International AIDS Conference in Bangkok. "It is always better to work on prevention in the early stages rather than spend huge and scarce resources later on treatment and care when the disease has reached epidemic proportions."

This seems like sound advice, but countries often don't follow it. Take the case of South Africa, a country with 30 million people. Despite repeated alarm bells sounded by the international com-



munity, the government of President Thabo Mbeki chose to ignore mounting evidence of a galloping epidemic, paying for it dearly later. Mbeki once even famously questioned the link between HIV and AIDS. We can see the consequence today: South Africa has 5.4 million people infected with HIV, and belatedly had to spend huge resources to fight the disease.

In nearby India, initial official denial (therefore little corrective action) has led

HIV to infect more than 5.1 million of its over a billion citizens. Though this figure still corresponds to less than 1 percent prevalence rate, the sheer number of infections means India accounts for at least 10 percent of the world's HIV infections.

Even today, there is little coordinated response to the epidemic in India, and denials at the highest levels still exist. "If we look at the current response in India, it's much better than two or three years ago, but it still falls way short of what's necessary to accentuate a looming disaster," said epidemiologist Richard Feachem, head of the Global Fund to treat AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, in a recent interview to Science Magazine.

On the other hand, there are countries like Thailand which quickly comprehended the grave consequences of the social and economic cost of the disease after initial hiccups. Thanks to an unabashed condom campaign in the early 1990s, the government and civil society in this devoutly Buddhist country has succeeded in keeping HIV infections at a manageable 570,000 among its 60 million people.

"Thailand offers an example of what developing countries can do if there's enough political will at the top," says Dr.

Peter Piot, the executive director of UNAIDS, the body which leads the joint-UN program on HIV/AIDS. "For Asian countries, the key to success is going to be strong leadership. Most countries in the region have the resources and capabilities to deal with the epidemic on their own. They just need the leadership."

Nepal probably doesn't fall in the list of Asian countries which have the material resources and capabilities, but that doesn't mean it can't succeed if the political will exists. Poor countries like Uganda have shown that HIV can be checked if governments are serious about it. Nepal too can go this route if the political leadership devotes just a fraction of the resources to combating HIV/AIDS that it is now devoting to resolving the Maoist conflict. **N**

FROM ROCK

The demand for Nepali workers is increasingly coming from areas where the risks could be greater than at home

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

SAMBHU RAI, 24, WORKED IN Kabul for six months with Canadian troops stationed there as a part of the multinational force, the International Security Assistance Force, deployed there after the fall of the Taliban regime. Rai is happy that he and his friends were treated well. "We were duly paid \$435 a month plus food and shelter," he says. But he has vivid memories of a nightmare. "One day, in an attack, a grenade landed very close to our camp, but fortunately it didn't explode," Rai recalls. But not everyone has been as lucky.

On April 9, two Nepalis working as security guards for a British private security firm, Global Risk Strategies, were killed in a landmine explosion in Iraq. The two were Shiva Prasad Lawati of Dharan and Ram Bahadur Gurung of Narayangadh. Officials are at a loss to explain how Nepalis have made it into Iraq without the government's permission and how they got there at all.

As the internal conflict in Nepal continues to escalate, a growing number of Nepalis are seeking greener pastures abroad to escape the crisis. But there is an irony in all this: the demand for Nepali workers is increasingly coming from areas where the risks could be greater than at home. And desperate for foreign employment, many Nepalis seem to have decided to bypass the official channel.

"We have received demands for Nepali workers in Iraq, but we haven't decided on the matter. The Foreign Ministry is looking into the proposal," says an official with the Ministry of Labor. But that hasn't stopped Nepalis from taking chances.

Until recently there was no evidence of Nepalis' presence in Iraq, except that of the British Gurkha troops. But things have changed in recent months: an uni-



TO HARD PLACE



identified Nepali employed by a security company was shot dead in the riots that swept the city of Basra in April. Foreign news agencies say that up to 2,000 Nepalis are employed by private security firms in Iraq. Global Risk Strategies is said to have recruited 500 Nepalis and 500 Fijians for its 1,500-strong army of private guards.

Two other American companies have reportedly hired ex-Gurkhas to provide security in Iraq. Florida-based Armor Group and Custer Battles have hired an unspecified number of ex-Gurkhas, who are based at Baghdad International Airport. Even the Royal Nepal Army and Nepal Police personnel are said to be

signing up for security assignments for private companies in Iraq. "What's the difference if we die here or there?" a government official quotes an RNA soldier as saying.

These reports, which are almost impossible to independently confirm, raise serious questions. One is: how can such a large number of Nepalis make it to Iraq without the government's knowledge? The answers, at best, are sketchy.

"People are going to Iraq through India, but we do not have any confirmation if they are forging Indian passports," says Bishnu Rimal of the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions. "Even some Nepali manpower companies are in-

involved in it, although we do not have hard facts to substantiate our claims," he adds.

Though many Nepalis who head to Iraq do so despite their knowledge of attendant dangers, others apparently are kept in the dark about their destination. Some have been told that they are being recruited for Kuwait but only after their arrival in Iraq do they find out that it is their final destination, Rimal says.

In recent days, serious doubts have started to emerge about the safety of people working in the Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia, which was once considered safe. After the attack on Al-Khobar in Saudi Arabia, Saudi oil firms have reportedly sought permission from Saudi authorities to hire ex-Gurkhas as private security guards, the Washington Times reported. These oil firms include the world's largest, Saudi Aramco, and its American rival Chevron Texaco. Al-Qaeda militants killed at least 22 people, including Americans and Indians, in twin attacks on oil company

offices on May 29.

But government officials seem unaware of such developments. Rimal derides the government's lack of concern for Nepalis employed abroad. He cites instances where the labor attachés in Nepali embassies themselves have harassed the laborers.

As the conflict intensifies both at home and in the countries of employment, Nepalis will find themselves increasingly caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. And until the government wakes up from its deep slumber and explores safer destinations, more and more Nepalis will be tempted to take the plunge. **N**



ALL'S NOT LOST

Nepal's recent showing hasn't been exactly sterling but the team is still in the run for a World Cup berth

BY YASHAS VAIDYA

EARLIER THIS MONTH, THE President of Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN), Jay Kumar Nath Shah, returned home a happy man. He had been elected a vice-president of the Asian Cricket Council in London. Now the cricket fraternity the world over will address the father figure of Nepali cricket with due reverence. At home, though, Shah has his task cut out: raise the standard of cricket at least at par with other emerging cricket nations, who like Nepal, are vying for a Test berth.

The team's recent showing hasn't been exactly sterling. Nepal, who finished runner-up to the United Arab Emirates in the ACC Trophy two years

ago, failed to live up to its growing stature this time round in Malaysia. After its defeat in the quarterfinals and eventual knockout from the regular tournament, Nepal proceeded to the Plate Championship, which pooled together all the losing quarterfinalists. It saved itself a final blush when it scored effortless wins over Bhutan and Iran and won the Plate Championship. Bhutan was humbled by nine wickets and it took Nepali batsmen just nine balls to overhaul Iran's total of 29. The latter was the quickest win in the ACC history.

The wins however don't mask the underlying fact that Nepal's march to the big league has been marked by fits and starts. And it still has that quality—consistency—missing in its arsenal.

Hopes were sky-high when the wily Sri Lankan coach Roy Dias was marshaling his resources before the Malaysian sojourn. It was not to be. Qatar, which was expected to offer little resistance, delivered a shock. It restricted Nepal to 164 runs at the loss of six wickets to

knock out Nepal from title contention, and with it a direct passage to the International Cricket Council (ICC) Trophy to be held in Ireland next year. The ICC Trophy serves as the qualifier for the World Cup, the ultimate trophy.

It was too painful for the game's passionate followers who reminisce Nepal's recent exploits. "This has come as a huge letdown. We were hoping Nepal would put in a better show," says a former cricket administrator. "Such poor performances would only discount our past achievements slicing locals' belief in the country's emerging team."

The belief didn't come overnight. The Plate Championship of the Under-19 World Cup in New Zealand two years ago saw Nepal sweep past every opposition to reach the final; Nepal finished runner-up to Zimbabwe. (The top six teams had advanced to the Super League, while the six second-rung teams, which failed to make it to the Super League, proceeded to the Plate Championship.) The highlight of that

tour was six wins in a trot for Nepal, including those against Pakistan and Bangladesh. The current national team has inherited many of the players from that winning side. "We're very disappointed for not being able to perform well in the tournament," says Raju Khadka, the team captain, discussing the Malaysian tour.

He concedes that complacency was one huge factor that led to the downfall. Qatar was supposed to be a cakewalk. "We had thought that we'd be pitted against stronger teams like the U.A.E., Malaysia, Hong Kong. Definitely not Qatar."

"Yet," he says bravely, "all's not lost for Nepal. We are still in the reckoning for the ICC Trophy." While the winner and runner-up in Malaysia qualify directly for the ICC Trophy, losing semi-finalists and the winners of the Plate final, Nepal, will fight for the solitary slot in another qualifier, scheduled for February next year. The event will also feature teams from Europe, Africa and America.

"The team had a lapse of application in fundamental areas resulting in the poor showing," Khadka explains, "but we'll come back strongly to clinch that next available berth."

A one-off victory against Malaysia in the Intercontinental Cup notwithstanding, this year has been disappointing. In the Under-19 World Cup in Bangladesh, Nepal was a mere shadow of the team it was some years ago.

These failures have cast a long shadow over Nepal's long-cherished dreams of qualifying for the World Cup. Also in the wane is Nepal's stature as a "fast-track nation." Shah, the CAN president, is sure to face some difficult questions from colleagues in the ICC and the ACC if the slide continues.

He admits Nepal's "good and determined work" failed to bring in the desired results this time. "But it doesn't deter us from making more efforts," he adds, dispelling suggestions that Nepal would be removed from the ICC list of fast-emerging cricket countries and deprived of the attendant incentives.

According to him, CAN is mulling over a comprehensive plan to overcome inconsistencies of Nepali sides, more so for the national team. That includes frequent exchange of tours within South Asia. Works for the ACC's Central Youth Cricket Academy will begin shortly. In 2001, the ACC selected Nepal ahead of other contenders, U.A.E. and Malaysia, for the project.

The ACC will make an initial investment to the tune of US\$ 1 million for the academy that it has envisaged along the line of world-renowned academies of Australia and South Africa. The project is aimed at improving the standard of the game in non-Test playing countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, U.A.E., Thailand, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and Nepal. The Asian Cricket Foundation (ACF), an arm of the ACC formed to

generate funds for the development of the game, has earmarked US\$ 2.5 million for development of cricket in the Asian region.

The project had been stalled after the ACC rejected Nepal's proposal to select Pokhara as the venue for the academy on grounds that it lacks cricketing culture as well as adequate infrastructure such as an international airport. There was fear all around that Nepal would lose the project when the then member-secretary Binod Shankar Palikhe, a native of Pokhara, stubbornly stood against the ACC's choice—Kathmandu. "Fortunately for all cricket-loving Nepalis, the project has survived," Shah says.

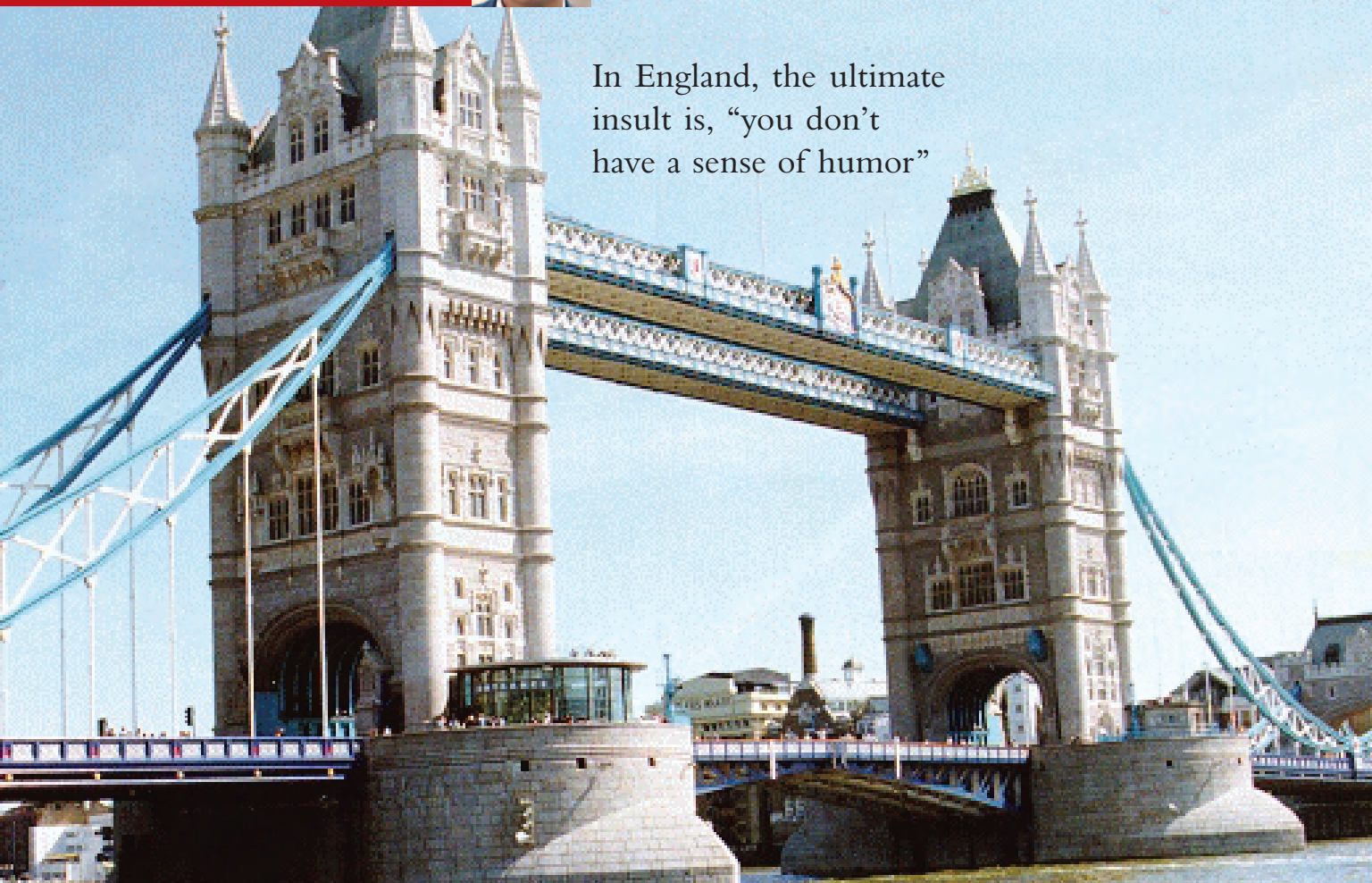
The government has allocated 36 ropanis of land in Mulpani, 10 km. northeast of the capital for the project. Ross Turner, Peter Hanlon and Graham Watson, all from Cricket Australia, were here late last year to inspect the project site in the capital. "We are now awaiting the final approval from the ACC," says Shah, who is more keen to talk about the academy than Nepal's recent performances. **N**



IN/S/S



In England, the ultimate insult is, “you don’t have a sense of humor”



NOTES FROM A SMALL ISLAND

BY SWARNIM WAGLÉ

Death as celebration

REVIEWING BILL BRYSON’S unusually funny book on Britain, “Notes from a Small Island,” for a Kathmandu newspaper a few years ago, I paraphrased a quip: in most places of the world, if people don’t like you, they will call you names and say you are an idiot or a fool. Only in England, the ultimate insult is, “you don’t have a sense of humor.” Presently on a short visit to this country, one of the first things I did was to go for humor shopping in print. Beyond the piles of hundreds of promoted books for summer reading, I lo-

cated at an unlikely spot a lonely copy of “The Very Best of the Daily Telegraph Books of Obituaries.” This is supposed to be a deadly serious book on freshly dead people. The Daily Telegraph has, over the years, especially under Hugh Massingberd between 1986 and 1994, built a reputation for carrying readable obituaries. Its obit section actually went on to develop a very likeable personality, presenting the lives of dead people in a direct, witty manner, as opposed to the almost universal custom of always speaking well of the deceased. Of the English, who are stereotypically reverential and reserved, and good at pomp and formal ceremonies, one would have expected that

they’d eulogize all their dead as the greatest beings who ever walked their rain-soaked island. Not so, evidently, in the pages of *The Daily Telegraph* at least, as this book talks about dead people, presumably the British really want to hear about them. Here’s an excerpt on some Denisa Lady Newborough, “who has died aged 79, was many things: wire-walker, night club girl, nude dancer, air-pilot. She only refused to be two things—a whore and a spy—and there were attempts to make her both, she once wrote.” If you are dying for a serious laugh, possibly the English way, pick up this book, make some tea, and enjoy the newly dead.

The 1688 Revolution

There is one thing 21st century Nepal could learn from 17th century England—how to resolve the tussle between the monarch and the people’s representatives, formally embodied by a parliament? The period between 1603 and 1688 was tumultuous in England. The crown’s desire to raise revenue arbitrarily provoked a chain of events that, briefly, even led to its abolition. Although English republicanism was short-lived, with the monarchy reinstated in 1660, problems persisted till the end of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 when governmental institutions were fundamentally altered. Limits were set to the unilateral actions of the monarch, and it was made clear that everything else the monarch did needed explicit parliamentary approval. In a 1989 article by Douglas North and Barry Weingast in the *Journal of Economic History*, “Constitution and Commitment,” they argue that the institutions of representative government then formed in England with a subdued (not eliminated) monarch, an assertive parliament, and an independent judiciary went on to create a rule-based regime that set the stage for England’s subsequent glory. Protection of private

wealth and minimization of risks from a confiscating government led a capital markets boom that gave access to massive funds for the state. In 1690, France was Europe’s richest power. By 1765 it had lost Louisiana and Canada, and was on the verge of bankruptcy. England, on the other hand, was beginning the Industrial Revolution that changed the world in two centuries in a manner that the previous 20 hadn’t managed. This simplified lesson from an alien island may not exactly resonate with us 300 years on, but it is a good story that underscores the importance of good institutions, rule of law, and primacy of an effective, sovereign parliament.

Browning Blair

Ten years ago, the leader of the British Labor Party was the wise, respectable Scotsman, John Smith. No one knows if he would have continued the jettisoning of the left-wing baggage of the old Labor Party that had made it unelectable for 15 years, but the affable man that Smith was, people really wished he would dislodge the Tories in the next elections. Sadly, he died suddenly in 1994, letting history create a completely unforeseen era in Britain. Tony Blair, the shadow Home Secretary, and Gordon Brown, the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, were young equals who not only nursed mutual respect but also once shared the same office at Westminster. Theoretically speaking, however, only one of them could compete for the vacated leadership then if both of them were to win eventually. Brown relented, only because, it is said, he was not married and didn’t have a family, a perceived liability for the top job in western democracies. By the onset of 2004, Tony Blair had gone on to write Labor, British and European history, teach George Bush some English, and become tired in the process. The speculation in Britain now is not

whether, but when and how soon Blair will quit. Will he lead Labor to its third consecutive election victory next year, and serve another long term, or has he already made his position untenable be-



cause of woes over Iraq, or the simple fatigue that comes with protracted democratic leadership? After Blair, then, who? Gordon Brown has in the meantime not only married and fathered a child, but also has established a reputation for being a competent Chancellor. While relationships between Brown and Blair have been lukewarm for a number of years, nobody has doubted that Blair would second Brown when the time comes. As has been observed by humorists, the English not only have a sense of humor, but also a childish sense of fair play. Perhaps with a wink from Downing Street, Peter Mandelson, the Blair confidant, recently stated that Gordon would, of course, be a natural successor to Tony.

Looking ahead, could leaders like Gordon Brown from Europe, and John Kerry in the United States—both serious men with intellect and integrity on the same side of progressive politics—potentially reconfigure world events for the better leading up to 2008? Even if they can’t do much, could they at least undo some of the damage their predecessors did? Obviously, we can only wait and see if and when the couple emerges. And not everyone is excited anyway. An English friend, ever the funny skeptic, remarked recently in the context of Mexico, “the problem with Britain, also, is that it is too far from God and too close to the United States.” **N**

Views expressed in this column are personal, and do not necessarily reflect those of institutions the writer is affiliated with.



ADMISSION RUSH

Ten-plus-two schools are booming as students increasingly opt for the range of choices and the perceived higher quality of private institutions

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD RASHMI Bhattarai has just passed her School Leaving Certificate exams with a first-division score. Her private school in Maharajgunj goes only up to the 10th grade. She has decided not to follow the old dictum that students who pass in the first division should study science. Instead she will study humanities at one of the ten-plus-two schools around Kumaripati in Patan. This, she says, is because her friends will be going there too, and she doesn't want to undergo the torment of facing a new school environment alone. She also thinks private schools are better than TU affiliates.

"Two of my friends have applied to Champion (Academy) and another one left for Dehradun (in India)," says Bhattarai, who had just arrived at her home with brochures of three other ten-plus-two schools—United Academy, Prasadi Academy and Pinnacle Academy. Her father, a government employee, says he has left it up to his daughter to decide on her future as long as she keeps on doing well in studies.

"The ten-plus-two schools are more disciplined, and the teachers are better," says Bhattarai between phone calls from friends, while continuing her conversation about schools. "Plus, unlike those under Tribhuvan University, there is less politics and the classes are regular."

Ever since the ten-plus-two education system came into effect in 1992, more and more private schools have been affiliated with the Higher Secondary Education Board. And education packed with extra curricular facilities seems to



be good business. Though many still argue that education should be service-oriented rather than a business, most of the ten-plus-two schools have registered

under the Company Act. This means that they have to follow guidelines of the Education Act but are allowed to make profits and have to pay taxes, which educational institutions registered as trusts do not.

The increasing business trend can be best seen in the media: many schools spend a large portion of their annual budget, up to Rs 1,000,000 yearly, on advertisements in print, on radio and on television to bring in new students.

"Parents are ready to spend any amount for a quality education in Nepal," says Pushpa Raj Shrestha, assistant manager of administration and finance at Apex College in New Baneshwor, which doesn't offer ten-plus-two classes but rather starts at bachelors level. "Competition has become so high with the increasing number of schools that advertisement has become essential."

Last year about 66,000 students enrolled in more than 850 schools affiliated with the Higher Secondary Education Board. This year 74 new schools have applied for affiliation to run the ten-plus-two system. It may be the ten-plus-two schools' good marketing or the failing of overcrowded government colleges that has contributed to this growth.

"It is profitable for a school to run ten-plus-two [classes], as almost all the infrastructure such as buses and class space is shared by classes under 10 and plus-two," says Rajendra Ghising, senior executive officer at GEMS in Dhapakhel, which, like Apex, has ruled out getting

on the "ten-plus-two bandwagon." Ten-plus-two schools charge from Rs 25,000 to 70,000 per student, depending upon the facilities.

"Students in ten-plus-two require a little more freedom, as they are grown-ups, and mixing them up with the school kids could be difficult for both," Ghising adds. According to him, not all schools have opted to open a ten-plus-two and there are also a few who run specifically the ten-plus-two or ten-plus-two and higher education.

But despite the increasing trend, the idea of turning educational institutions into all-profit business houses has not appealed to all. The student

unions have time and again accused the ten-plus-two system of being "too elitist" and expensive, and they have protested the government attempt to bring all students at government campuses under the ten-plus-two system. One of the key demands of the Maoist-aligned students in the recent education strike was for all ten-plus-two schools to decrease their fees by 25 percent.

Educators say the admissions at most ten-plus-two schools have not been affected by protests. At least for people like Rashmi, there are far more choices for higher studies than were available to post-SLC students a decade ago. ■



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The Show Must Go On

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

At the crossroads of the busy Ring Road in Maharajgunj stands a black bust that is ignored by most passersby. Few know that the place is called Narayan Gopal Chowk. That the commemorative bust of Swor Samrat Narayan Gopal Gurubacharya, Nepal's most illustrious singer, signifies nothing is a telling statement on the way Nepal treats her artists.

Fifty meters towards Chabahil, just a stone's throw away from Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala's house, lies Naryan Gopal's home, Geet Ganga, now a silent abode: Gopal's wife Pemala passed away on July 1. The empty two-story house (there are no heirs to the house, Naryan Gopal and his wife were childless) still houses the harmonium, tabala, stereo, music notes and stacks of National Geographic magazines that Narayan Gopal was so fond of.

But, thankfully there are some among Gopal's fans who would like to do their bit to preserve the Swor Samrat's memories. For a start, efforts are underway to preserve Gopal's music paraphernalia. "We are turning the singer's house into a Narayan Gopal Museum," says music analyst Prakash Sayami, who is also a member of the Narayan Gopal Sangeet Kosh. Narayan Gopal's close colleagues, including music maestro Amber Gurung and economist Bishwamber Pyakurel, formally established the group in 1991 after his death. The group wants to display the items Narayan Dai once used in the exact locations that he used to place them, and also archive the musical instruments. The Swor Samrat's wife bequeathed the house to the Kosh, and the house will also be used as an office for the Kosh and to conduct free violin lessons.

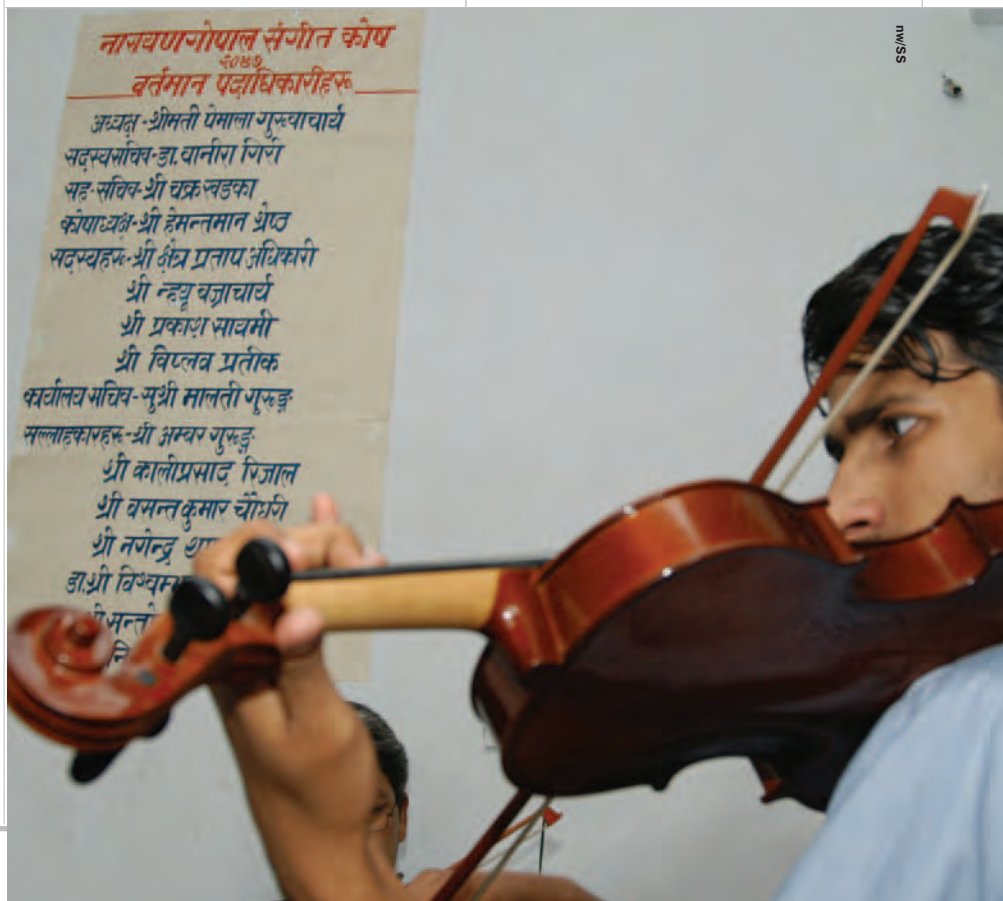
Sayami and Gopal's wife had been collecting Narayan Gopal's original lyrics to publish them in a book, titled "Kaalajayi Sworharu." The idea for the book came to Pemala in 1999 when she had gone to Baglung to attend a memo-

rial program and heard some of the participants singing the wrong lyrics. Sayami wants the project to continue.

"Kaalajayi Sworharu' (the voices that defeat death) is going to do justice to Narayan Gopal and the song writers whose works have already gone missing from official records," says songwriter Chhetra Pratap Adhikari, who came up with the name for the book. So far, around 137 songs have been collected. Other works of the singer have been hard to track down although many could be stashed away in the archives of Radio Nepal. The Kosh is also planning a CD of previously unreleased material. "Apart from that, the Narayan Gopal Sangeet Kosh must continue to encourage young music artists and release quality work. "Quality was one area that Narayan Gopal was so particular about in his work," adds Adhikari. Some of the students who come to the Kosh are differently-abled, and the organization wants to help them earn a living with music.

The Kosh conducts a nationwide singing competition every two years

to discover new talent. Funding for most of its programs comes from the government and contributions from Narayan Gopal fans, both Nepali and foreign. Recently it decided to allow lyricists to produce music videos and gave permission to other singers to sing Narayan Gopal's songs. "The result was tremendous. We wanted to give other artists the opportunity to rework Narayan Gopal's songs. That's why we finally overcame our strict views on music rights," says Sayami. Lyricist Nagendra Thapa is already working on a music video of Narayan Gopal's famous song "Birsara Feri Malai Nahaera," with rare footage of the Swor Samrat at a recording studio in Mumbai. Young talents Pawal Chamling and Satyanarayan Manandhar have also sung Narayan Gopal numbers on their albums. "We now want to publish a music bulletin or magazine compiling the experiences of Narayan Dai's contemporaries to document Nepal's developing music scene," says Sayami. The Kosh couldn't have picked a better method to pay homage to Narayan Gopal. Building statues of the great can only grant a popular name so much mileage; building on their work ensures that the legacy lives on. **N**



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Born To Rock

Iman Shah certainly believes in the age-old adage, “Do what you love and you’ll never have to work a day.”

BY YASHAS VAIDYA

In the heart of the city at Lainchaur, shielded from the bustle of nearby Thamel, is a place of tranquility and music. An old white building with a “Studio” sign on the entrance is home to BMI Studios. Here you’ll find Iman Shah at work. He’ll be fiddling with the volume control knobs, feet tapping to the beat of the music; a multi-track recorder in front of him, various instruments lie all around. On a given day you might find him working on all sorts of music. Shah says, “Artists from different schools of music use our recording facilities. I don’t hold prejudices against any kind of music. Good music is always good music.” He has worked with rock, classical and pop artists. “I make it a point to listen up on the type of music I’m working on,” Shah continues, “or else I feel like I’m cheating the artist I’m working with.” Even so he says, “My heart is still in rock music because that’s what I grew up with.”

Co-owner of BMI Studios and chief audio engineer, Shah is a towering figure

in the Nepali rock scene and has worked with quite a few rock bands. Big names include Nepathya, Mukti and Revival and Robin N’ Looza; he has also worked with bands emerging from the underground Nepali rock scene.

Shah started playing the guitar at the age of 15 with his high school band, The Vegetarian Vampires. In the late 90’s Shah played with different underground bands. They covered the usual fare: Iron Maiden, Metallica and Deep Purple. Even though there are a large number of rock concerts these days, Shah believes that the underground concert scene was better then. “People didn’t have much else to do, no cable TV. So whenever there was a concert, lots of people would turn out. Now there’s only a limited concert-going crowd.”

In 1991 he went to the United States and continued to play the club and college circuit there with his band, In Transit. He got hold of some recording equipment to record with his own band, and was hooked to the art of mixing and producing music. After five years in the recording business in the United States,

he came back to Nepal in 1998. After a year, he started Sacred Soundz but became fully involved in commercial recording only with the establishment of BMI Studios in 2002.

Many premier and up-and-coming rock bands prefer to work with him because of his rich experience. He is not only an experienced audio engineer, but also doubles up as a producer. An audio engineer, he explains, is responsible for bringing out the sound that the artist wants. A producer creatively directs bands towards achieving the sound they want. “It’s their sound. I only help in bringing it out.” And that he does pretty well, having had a hand in many big hits, including Nepathya’s “Sa Karnali” and “Bhoolma Bhulyo” by Robin N’ Looza.

So what is the seasoned rocker’s take on the state of Nepali rock music? “There is no real market for pure or hard rock,” he says, “but rock music covers a wide spectrum these days.” The many sub-genres like metal, punk, alternative, fusion and so on have garnered mass appeal worldwide. The offshoots are gaining ground in Nepal too. Nepathya’s new album “Bhedako Unjasto” fuses rock with traditional music from various parts of Nepal, creating, to use Shah’s term, “folk rock.”

Despite the variety of styles and the creativity of some artists, Shah sees Nepali music suffering a creative relapse. He attributes this, to among other things,

the rise of “MTV culture, music being watched rather than listened to. All of the music is beginning to sound the same. There’s not much creativity anymore.”

After more than a decade in the recording business, Shah thinks he still has a long way to go. “You keep on learning,” he says. “There is a chance I will learn something new every time I work with a new artist.” Creating music is an unending process. “Music requires dedication, effort all the way through. There are no shortcuts.” For Shah, music is not work. It’s his way of life. **N**



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Given the attractions the west offers for the new rich in China, not least the direct air links, more and more Chinese are likely to opt for vacations in Paris and London than in Pokhara and Langtang

BY TRAILOKYA RAJ ARYAL IN BEIJING

Although Nepal was declared a tourist destination by the Chinese government and a tourism agreement was signed between the two countries in November 2001, it has failed to attract Chinese tourists. The reason: the government and the tourism entrepreneurs aren't doing enough.

While our government and entrepreneurs wait for a miracle that would bring the Chinese tourists to Nepal, the Chinese tourists are already on their way to other destinations in Asia and, more recently, in Europe.

As the Chinese middle class continues to grow, each year more and more Chinese are vacationing abroad. According to data published by the China National Tourism Administration, between 1992 and 2002, there was almost a five-fold increase in the number of Chinese traveling abroad. In 1992, around 3.5-4 million Chinese did so. But in 2002 that figure rose to almost 20 million, the majority headed to such destinations as Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia; and 645,000 to Europe. The number of Chinese traveling to Europe is likely to increase in coming years as some European countries have already relaxed their visa rules regulations for Chinese tourists and many others are in the process of doing so.

In February 2004, the Chinese government and the EU signed a tourism agreement that would make it easier for the Chinese tourists to travel to the destinations approved by the Chinese government.

The Chinese tourists will soon have as many as 50 destinations to choose from. Given the attractions the west offers for the new rich in China, not least the direct air links, more and more Chinese are likely to opt for vacations in Paris and London than in Pokhara and Langtang. China Daily quotes the Managing Director of China Outbound Travel Agency as saying, "Many Chinese tourists will likely visit Europe in coming years to experience a different culture. Plus, it will be easier to travel to Europe because of the direct air links." There is as strong a "pull factor" as well. Unlike our government, RNAC, Nepal Association of Travel Agents (NATA) and Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), the European countries and their travel agents are not just waiting for a miracle that would bring Chinese tourists to their countries. The Europeans have launched ag-

gressive promotion campaigns in Chinese cities. Many have already established their Tourist Information Offices, and increased their flights in China. Finair, which entered the Chinese Market in September 2003 with a weekly flight to Shanghai, will soon have a total of 15 flights a week from various Chinese cities. Other airlines are also either increasing their flights or offering attractive packages to the Chinese tourists.

All this means, we are losing our market to new destinations in Europe. Our RNAC does fly twice a week to Shanghai, but the flights are more like refueling stops on the Kathmandu-Osaka-Kathmandu route. To make the matters worse, constant delays (thanks to the depleting fleet) are common.

Sometimes a single flight delay extends up to three days and sometimes the air links are suspended for more than two months. The NTB does organize tourism fairs in Beijing and Shanghai but they have not been effective because of lack of coordination with the local media and travel agents. As a matter of fact, hardly anyone knows about these fairs and many promotional materials—posters, brochures and CDs—are left in the Embassy to gather dust. Unsurprisingly, the promotions have hardly made any impression on people in big cities like Beijing, Shenzhen and Shanghai. The NTB seems content to harp on the fact that there was an increase in the Chinese tourists traveling to Nepal in the beginning of this year, even though the increase is too insignificant given China's vast potential as a tourist market.

NATA, for its part, doesn't seem to be doing much either. Instead of sitting idle or participating in ineffective tourism campaigns with NTB, it should play an aggressive role and not just rely on the government and its subsidiaries to bring in more Chinese tourists. It should establish ties with the Chinese travel agencies and airlines (an MoU on air routes has already been signed between China and Nepal) and enter into a profit-sharing agreement with them, just like the travel agencies from the west are doing here. Also it should ask the government to provide the same preferential treatment to the Chinese tourists that it provides to the Indians. Time is running out for Nepal. At this rate, attracting even the modest target of 120,000 tourists a year seems a *hong liang mei meng*, a pipedream. It's a pity we aren't doing enough to tap a huge market next door. **N**

(Aryal is a student of International Relations at Peking University in Beijing.)

RNAC: Depleted fleet



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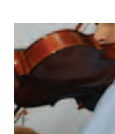
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Letters



“ Consumer confidence can’t be won solely by evoking patriotic emotions ”

BISHWO POUDEL

Army and the court

JOGENDRA GHIMIRE ARGUES PERSuasively when he says that the Army should obey court orders in order to enjoy moral superiority over the Maoist rebels that it is fighting against (Re: “Court Orders,” Legal Eye, July 4). Almost every single day, newspapers are rife with stories of the security forces’ defiance of the judiciary. In fighting against the Maoists—which to me is a just cause—the Army should not lose track of what it is fighting for: supremacy of the rule of law. But didn’t Ghimire question in one of his earlier articles (“When Rights Go Wrong,” April 19-25) the motivation of the human rights groups who are campaigning for justice to those who have been wronged by the Army? Ghimire made a rather confused defense of Army’s poor human rights record. I am not saying that the Army doesn’t deserve the benefit of doubt and that counter-insurgency measures are easy to enforce. But it has so much gain by admitting its mistakes openly and then persecuting the guilty—again openly. I am glad that Ghimire had the moral courage to revise his flawed position.

SUDHAM PALIKHE
VIA EMAIL

Poor Nepali toys

I ENJOYED SUSHMA JOSHI’S (“Middle Class Race,” Viewpoint, July 11). Her portrayal of a young boy unwittingly experiencing the material world is interesting and thought provoking. However, at the end of the article, she subtly suggests that indigenous toys are safer, and yet underrepresented in the

market. I am not so sure about this, and I am afraid this is probably wishful thinking. It is wrong to characterize consumers collectively as ignorant agents preferring alien products to indigenous ones, irrespective of the quality of the product. My limited experience with local markets in Nepal says the reason why local products sell less is because they are less trustworthy when it comes to quality. Consumer confidence can’t be won solely by evoking patriotic emotions. I think we particularly need to learn from the Chinese who were famous for producing shoddy goods until the late 80s but are now supplying goods of excellent quality at reasonable prices.

BISWO POUDEL
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY

Thamel bubble

PRIOR TO CHECKING INTO A GUEST house on the edge of Thamel, perhaps Kirsty Fisher should have checked herself into Kathmandu’s renowned Tilganga Eye Center (Re: “The Belly Of The Beast,” Arts & Society, July 4). A new pair of corrective corneal transplants would have enabled her to see clearly, without pride or prejudice, the ‘real’ Thamel and the ‘real’ Nepal.

Thamel has developed over the last two decades or so as a hub for a variety of touristic needs: cyber cafés to café lattes; singing bowls to sleeping bags; hashish to hash brown potatoes. Thamel is ideally-sized, ideally-located and ideally-organized to make it the perfect base from which the discovery of the ‘real’ Nepal can be planned. Only myopic and Lonely Planet-less tourists would mistake Thamel for either Shangri-la or the

'real' Nepal. To view the 'real' Nepal, the informed, curious tourists walk out to some of Kathmandu's traditional, historical and cultural must-sees nearby, such as the Durbar Square, Ason Bazaar, and Swayambhunath. And on a trek in the sublime countryside and hills of Nepal is where they experience Shangri-la, which is really a state of mind.

Nepal is full of troubles at the moment, but it also has an abundance of natural beauty, smiling people, amazing culture and an enviable sense of sangfroid. I salute every visitor who, in spite of the alarmist travel advisories their respective 'first' world countries routinely publish, come to visit Nepal. Their quest to discover foreign lands, connect with strange peoples and exotic cultures is commendable, besides helping the economy of a 'third' world country. I certainly salute the entrepreneurs of Thamel, who have coalesced together, albeit haphazardly, to provide services to cater to the various needs of these visitors.

For the fortunate ones who have the ability to see into the belly of Thamel, they will find that 'real' Nepali people live, work and wander through its ancient, relatively safe and clean lanes, courtyards and bazaars. One thing is clear: the real smug beast resides in the snug belly of those who have lost the sense of wonder, the hunger for adventure, the appreciation for the different. For them, sadly, their bubble better not burst.

KUNAL LAMA
CAFÉ MITRA & LOUNGE BAR
THAMEL

Moon or six pence

I DISAGREE WITH AJIT BARAL (RE: "Moon or Six Pence," Arts & Society, June 20). Unlike what he claims average Nepalis do not lack money to buy a painting. What they lack is the understanding of art. The thought that crossed my mind after reading his article: it is one of those articles that grossly undermines Nepali art and artists. The writer most uncouthly tries to portray local artists as "greedy people" who price their works outlandishly, making paintings a far-fetched dream for middle-class Nepalis. Baral tries to make a case for himself by describing Nepal as a semi-feudalistic

society, without a substantial industrial class. And because of this our artists should start selling their paintings cheap so as to create a middle-class market.

Baral fails to understand that art is not a commodity. It cannot be mass-produced. A lot of dedication, emotions and feelings go into the making of creative works. Some Nepali artists have dedicated their whole lives in order to excel in indigenous arts and to make their presence felt in the global art market. Indeed, a number of Nepali works are masterpieces and deserve to fetch high prices given their uniqueness.

Baral sounds outright irrational, when he suggests that Nepali artists should price their works keeping in view the affordability of local purchasers. But no work of art is created keeping a certain group or market in mind. The artist creates a piece of art for the sake of art, irrespective of how much money it will fetch him. Don't you think it is demeaning to expect the artist to create something so that the sachib (to use Baral's own term), who earns Rs. 10,000 per month, can afford it? In fact, I disagree with Baral's claim that because Nepal doesn't have an industrial class, there is no critical mass to market the work of art. Just look around you, there are fancy bungalows, expensive cars, and look at the money spent each night on partying in restaurants and clubs by the supposedly "average Nepali" or the sachib. Curiously, many houses have all the modern gizmos, but not a single painting.

It's not that the "average Nepalis" lack money to buy a painting, what they lack is the understanding of art. Selling paintings as cheaply as Srijana Art Gallery to expand the art market inside Nepal may not be the best way to create a market. The real issue here is the lack of awareness. Art is more than just a piece of work to fill the empty space on the wall. Raising pricing issues will not further public awareness. I do however agree with Baral that we need to create a market for art. And how do we do that? Baral could start out with writing articles that educate the "average Nepalis," (and the sachibs) about the values of Nepali art.

NAVIN JOSHI
DIRECTOR PARK GALLERY
CREATIVE DIRECTOR, MAXPRO P. LTD.

nation

Nation Weekly, The Media House, Tripureshor,
Kathmandu, Nepal (Regd. 113/059-060).
Tel: 2111102, 4229825, 4261831, 4263098

EDITOR: Akhilesh Upadhyay
editorial@nation.com.np

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR: Suman Pradhan
COPY EDITOR: Tiku Gauchan

STAFF WRITERS: Sushma Joshi, Satish Jung Shahi
PHOTOJOURNALIST: Sagar Shrestha
DESIGNER: Raj Kumar Shrestha

AD & CIRCULATION DIRECTOR: Krishna Shrestha
MARKETING EXECUTIVES:

Sarita Gautam and Rameshwar Ghimire
ad@nation.com.np

MARKETING CONSULTANT: Kreepa Shrestha

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Nripendra Karmacharya

SUBSCRIPTION: Bipin Raj Ojha
subscription@nation.com.np

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E-mail: editorial@nation.com.np

Fax: 4216281

Mail: Nation Weekly

The Media House, GPO 8975, EPC 5620

Tripureshor, Kathmandu, Nepal.

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Tel: 2111102, 4229825, 4261831, 4263098

Fax: 4216281

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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
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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EVERY MONDAY

Picture of the Week



CAPITAL PUNISHMENT: Purna Maya Shrestha makes a plea for her husband's life to the Chinese authorities. Ishwori Shrestha has been put on a death row in China for peddling drugs. With her are her sons Ishan, 5, and Mishan, 4, during a press appearance in Kathmandu

nw/Sagar Shrestha



Honorable Exit

The King should exercise his authority, under Article 127, to dismiss two controversial and incompetent judges. Already, the judges have badly bruised the Supreme Court and they have to go

BY JOGENDRA GHIMIRE

Quite a few heads will roll before the Williams Robinson scandal is put to rest. One is bound to reach this conclusion because the Judicial Council is not explicitly empowered to investigate or recommend the dismissal of Supreme Court judges.

Since my last column on the controversy over a month ago, three very important developments have taken place. The first was the report by a Nepal Bar Association committee, which found that the decision of the division bench comprising of Justices Krishna Kumar Verma and Baliram Kumar to acquit the drug dealer was flawed. Then came a preliminary finding by a review bench of the Supreme Court which echoed similar concerns. The third, and by far the most damaging development from the perspective of the two judges, came only last week in the form of a report of a three-member special team of the Judicial Council. The report delivered to the Chief Justice, who is also the chair of the Council, by Supreme Court Justices Min Bahadur Rayamajhi, Anup Raj Sharma and Khil Raj Regmi has found that (a) the two judges had betrayed public trust and confidence, and (b) the duo lacked competence to serve as judges of the apex court.

The investigation committee realizes the limits of the Judicial Council—and the Chief Justice—while initiating action against the duo. The Constitution, after all, makes the Supreme Court judges immune from action or investigation by any organ of the state, except for the possibility of impeachment by the Pratinidhi Sabha. That too for rather specific reasons: incompetence, misbehavior and failure to discharge the duties of office in good faith. That the investigation committee went to the extent of pronouncing the two judges incompetent—one of the grounds for impeachment under the Constitution—is clearly indicative of their conviction that they should no longer continue on the Bench.

The committee members have recommended that the Judicial Council should ask Verma and Kumar to quit. There had been an instance of resignation by one Supreme Court judge—Rajendra Raj Nakhwa—a few years ago who was asked to quit by the then Chief Justice, Keshav Prasad Upadhyay, after questionable behavior on the part of the judge.

If the resignation option does not work, the committee believes that the Chief Justice should administratively punish the two judges by not assigning them any work.

I find the first option acceptable. The second—of administrative punishment—is likely to be a long drawn out affair, and indicative of lack of clarity on the part of the judicial leadership on an extremely important issue. Of the two judges in question, Verma is due to retire in a few months' time, but Kumar, a more recent appointee, is likely to stay on for nearly 10 years. Which means, he will be in administrative punish-

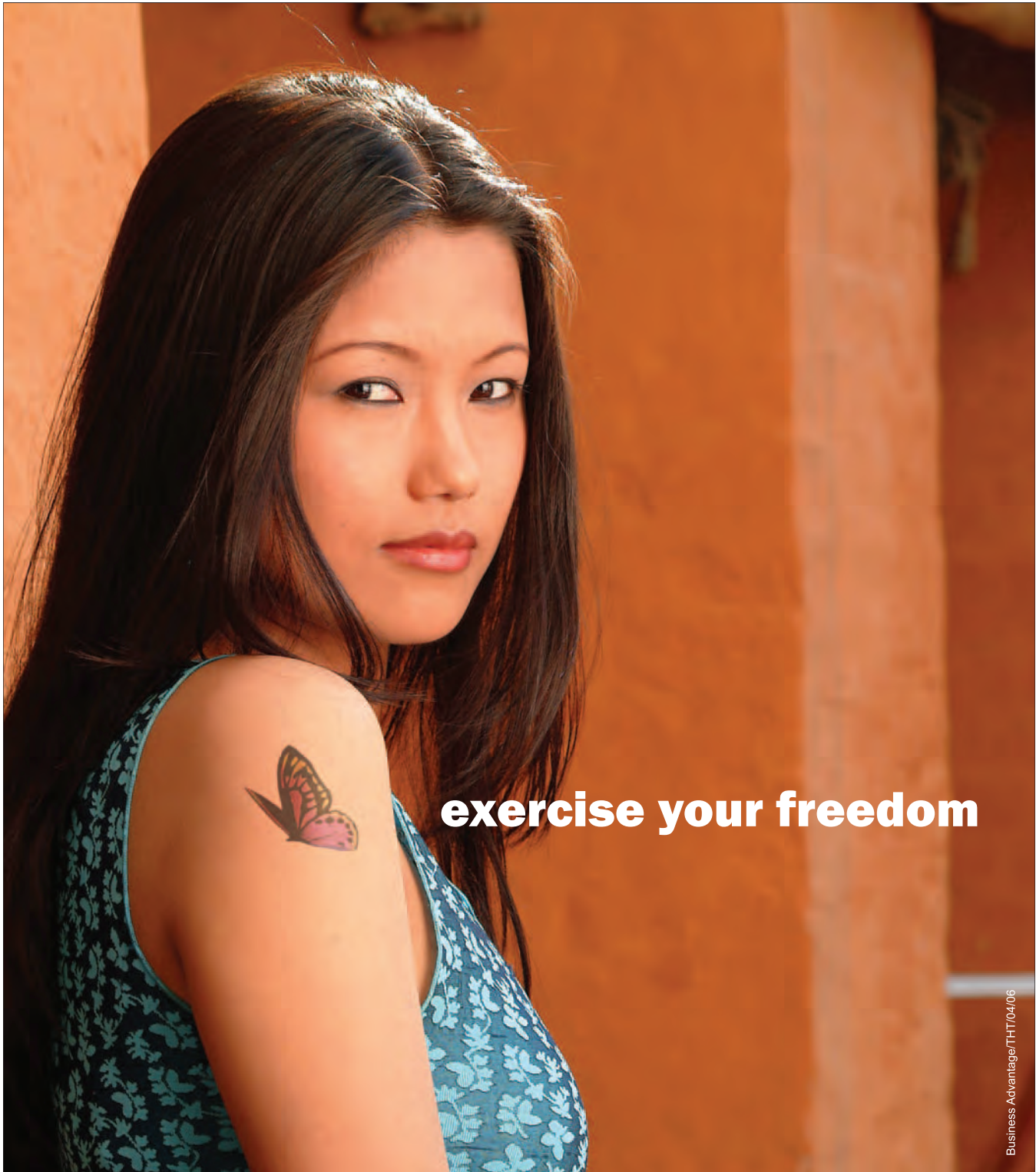
ment at least until the new Pratinidhi Sabha comes into existence and decides on his fate, which could take a while. A more decisive action for the Judicial Council would be to take an unconventional—but bold—route on the procedural questions associated with the issue of Verma and Kumar, if they decline to quit without any fuss. The Council should recommend to the King to exercise his authority under Article 127 of the Constitution and dismiss the two judges.

Like it or not, we live in a constitutional set-up which would stop functioning had it not been for the use of Article 127 to “remove difficulties.” Since October of 2002, this last-resort provision has been used three times to appoint the prime minister and for a number of other executive functions. If that constitutional provision can be used for appointing the prime minister, which is a function assigned to the Parliament under the constitution, there is no reason why it can't be exercised for dismissing the judges? This too is a function that the Parliament should have performed and the procedure has to be facilitated in the absence of the Parliament.



Letting the two judges continue at the apex court will, besides continuing to tarnish the image of the judiciary, create an uneasy environment within the court. At least eight judges of the Supreme Court have already acted or spoken against Verma and Kumar—three as members of the review bench, three as Judicial Council committee members, and the Chief Justice and Justice Hari Prasad Sharma as members of the Judicial Council.

Two damaging reports and a damaging comment of a full bench later, their presence at the apex court is not in the interests of the judiciary. They should go and the judicial leadership should not hesitate to take a decisive action to ensure their departure—even if that means resorting to Article 127. **N**



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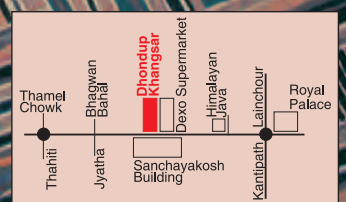
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Toxic chemicals

A large amount of outdated chemical waste has been stocked in the warehouses of Cotton Development Committee and Agricultural Seeds Company in Nepalgunj for the last 12 years. Activists warned of possible accidents due to the hazardous waste. The Stockholm International Convention says that the outdated chemicals must be returned to the country of origin for disposal.



Thimpu's "solution"

The Bhutanese Prime Minister, Jigmi Y Thinley, told the National Assembly that his government was making serious efforts to find a "durable solution" to the refugee problem, Kuenselonline reported. Thinley termed the December 22 incident in Khudunabari camp last year,

when refugees pelted stones at Bhutanese officials, following provocative statements from them, as a "regrettable setback." The scheduled repatriation of some refugees from the camp was stalled after members of Bhutanese Joint Verification Team pulled out of Jhapa following attacks on the visiting Bhutanese officials.

SLC slip-up

One hundred and ninety-one students who failed this year's SLC exam from Shahid Smiriti Secondary School, Chitwan, were allotted equal marks in two subjects—science; and environment, population and health. Teachers, who blame the Office of the Controller of Examination (OCE) for the oversight, have urged it not to bar the students from sitting for the "chance" SLC examination, which will soon follow. OCE said that it has started investigating the case.

Hepatitis scare

Hemophilia Society said hepatitis was found in nine out of 11 hemophilia patients, who have been transfusing blood regularly made



TIME FOR A TOAST: Photojournalists received awards from Sampada Photo Vision for their contribution

available by the Kathmandu-based blood bank. Even if the bank screens blood before transfusion, the window period of hepatitis might have been the reason why hepatitis screenings fail, the society chairman, Kiran Manandhar, said in defense of the blood bank in Kantipur.

No Nepalis

Nepali students have been barred from enrollment in colleges in Uttar Pradesh. RSS reports that they were denied admission in schools in Baharaich, Srivasti and Khiri districts, citing security reasons. These districts border Banke, Bardia, Kailali and Kanchanpur. An Indian daily citing officials of the Uttar Pradesh Higher Secondary Council said that admission

for students from the concerned districts will be allowed only after an investigation into their background, Kantipuronline reported.

Leniency plea

Purna Maya Shrestha, wife of Ishwori Kumar Shrestha who was arrested by the Chinese police a year ago, appealed for amnesty for her husband. A Chinese court sentenced Shrestha to death on charges of smuggling drugs into Tibet. She claimed her husband was innocent. The court had earlier handed a death sentence to Ravi Dahal and life imprisonment to Rewat Kumar Dahal. Both were found in possession of drugs in Tibet.

Salt Trading abroad

The proposal of Salt Trading Corporation (STC) to open a branch in Dubai, UAE and a retail outlet in Doha, Qatar was approved by the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry. Both the retail outlet and the branch office will be in operation within a month, according to Parmeshwar Mahaseth, the STC chairman. Sales of fruits and vegetables are expected to get a boost through the initiative. The outlet in Doha is a joint venture with Alfazar International Trading, a local company, while the Dubai office will function independently.

Shiva Shankar Mukherjee has been appointed as the new Indian ambassador to Nepal. Mukherjee will succeed Shyam Saran who has been nominated as the next Indian Foreign Secretary. Mukherjee is currently serving as the Indian High Commissioner to South Africa. In his pre-departure press meet last week, Saran said, "Violence isn't a legitimate means to earn political needs,"

commenting on the Maoist insurgency. He empathized with the plight of Nepalis, fleeing to India due to violence, "In times of distress, do you go to a friend or an enemy?"

He also expressed hope that the talks between Bhutan and Nepal would resume and the situation in the refugee camps doesn't get any more "complicated." There are reports that the Maoists have infiltrated the camps.

FINAL SHOW



Rain owes

Recurrent heavy rain has taken more than seven lives bringing the death toll to 10



over the weekend. Dozens of villages in Mahottari, Rautahat, Udaypur, Saptari, Sunsari, Dhankuta, Bara, Jhapa and Dang were inundated rendering hundreds of people homeless. Four people were killed in Dang, three in Dhanusa, two in Udaypur, one each in Rautahat and Sindhuli.

Cabinet expansion

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba expanded his three-member cabinet to 31. On board are CPN(UML), RPP, and NSP. The cabinet also includes two independent members who are Palace nominees. The portfolios of ministries are as follows.

- SHERBAHADUR DEUBA: Prime Minister, and Minister for Royal Palace, Defense and Foreign Affairs
- BHARAT MOHAN ADHIKARI: Deputy PM and Finance Minister

CABINET MINISTERS

- DR MOHAMMAD MOHSIN(I): Information and Communication
- BADRI PRASAD MANDAL (NSP): Forest and Soil Conservation
- BALARAM GHARTI MAGAR(RPP): Science and Technology
- BIMALENDRA NIDHI (NC-D): Education and Sports
- PRAKASH MAN SINGH(ND): Physical Planning and Works
- ASHOK RAI (CPN-UML): Local Development
- PURNA BAHADUR KHADKA (NC-D): Home
- DEEP KUMAR UPADHAYA (NC-D): Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation
- ISHWOR POKHREL (CPN-UML): Industry, Commerce and Supplies
- YUBA RAJ GYAWALI (CPN-UML): Local Development
- JOG MEHER SHRESTHA (RPP): Land Reform and Management
- HOM NATH DAHAL (NC-D): Agriculture and Cooperatives
- RAGHUJI PANT (CPN-UML): Labor and Transport
- BACHASPATI DEVKOTA (CPN-UML): Population and Environment
- ASTHA LAXMI SHAKYA (CPN-UML): Women, Children and Social Welfare
- TEK BAHADUR CHOKHYAL (NC-D): Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
- KRISHNA LAL THAKALI (INDEPENDENT): General Administration

STATE MINISTERS

- THAKUR PRASAD SHARMA (RPP): Water Resources
- DR PRAKASH SARAN MAHAT (NC-D): Foreign Affairs
- KRISHNA GOPAL SHRESTHA(CPN-UML): Local Development
- BAL KRISHNA KHAND (NC-D): Education and Sports
- URBA DUTTA PANT (CPN-UML): Labor and Transport
- DR BAMS DHAR MISHRA (CPN-UML): Health
- PRATIBHA RANA (RPP): Science and Technology
- RAMCHANDRA RAYA (RPP): Land Reform and Management

ASSISTANT MINISTERS

- UMA KANT CHOUDHARY (NC-D): Agriculture and Cooperatives
- LALBAHADURBISHWOKARMA (CPN-UML) Population and Environment
- HARI SHANKAR PARIYAR (NC-D): Physical Planning and Works
- BHIMKUMARIBUDHAMAGAR(ND): Tourism, Culture and Civil Aviation



ON AIR: Information Minister Mohamad Moshin in his first public appearance after taking office at Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union conference

The heavy downpour has also severely affected vehicular movement in the Prithivi and Mahendra highways leaving hundreds of passengers stranded.

New U.S. envoy

The new U.S. envoy, James Francis Moriarty, arrived in Kathmandu. A graduate of Dartmouth College, Moriarty began his Foreign Service career as a political officer in 1975.

He has served at U.S. embassies in Pakistan, Morocco and Swaziland and in American missions in China and Taiwan.

Coffee exports

Nepal Coffee Association exported 8.4 tons of coffee to the United States recently. Nepal Samacharpatra quoted an association official as saying that retail rates for the U.S. market have not been fixed yet—as this was the first time Nepali coffee is entering the U.S. market. To date, Japan is the biggest importer of Nepali coffee. It imports over 10 tons annually.

More killings

The Maoists shot dead Rajan Kuikel, an accountant at the Home Ministry, in Kathmandu in front of his Gaurighat residence. Kuikel died at the Medicare Nursing Home in Chabahil while undergoing treatment. Police say they are investigating the

case but no arrests have been made so far. The Maoists also shot dead Deputy Superintendent of Police Uttam Bahadur Karki and Maheshman Shrestha, ex-chairman of Kathmandu's ward-12. Both the killings took place a day after Prime Minister Deuba expanded his cabinet.

Farming census

The fifth National Agriculture Census-2058 made public by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) puts the population of farmers at more than 3.36 million. The country has over 2.65 hectares of agricultural land. CBS included those families farming over four *aanas* of land in the hills, eight *dhurs* in Tarai, or having five domestic animals and 20 avians in the census list.



RIGHTS: A policeman grabs a placard of a Blue Diamond Society activists as they head towards the post protest zone in Singha Durbar

PICTURES ON THE NET

Web designers “dreams & ideas” launched a website www.pjclub.com.np on Saturday that will highlight the work of Nepali photojournalists. The same company is also starting a two-month basic photojournalism class starting July 25 to encourage new talents, says a press statement issued by the PJ Club. Kantipur’s photojournalist Chandra Shekhar Karki will be the instructor for the course.



FACTS & FIGURES

The month of June might have dismayed Nepal Tourism Board due to figures on the arrival of Indian tourists in the country. Citing figures provided by the Department of Immigration, NTB recorded a decline of eight percent in the arrival of Indian tourists in June 2004 compared to figures in the same period last year. However, there was one suggestion made by outgoing Indian Ambassador Shyam Saran during his interaction with the media last week.

“Nepal needs to get its statistics right,” said Saran when asked the reason why Indians were reluctant to visit Nepal. “Many Indians come by road and the data they (NTB) record is only on air travel.” However, Saran did add that factors such as the opening of schools and the monsoon could have affected the arrival of Indian tourists. The overall tourism arrival figures looks rosy for the NTB this June. Figures recorded an increase of five percent compared to last year.

PROMOTING TOURISM

Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) and Jet Airways have joined hands to promote Nepal as the preferred tourist destination for Indian tourists. Together they organized a series of press conferences and meetings with Indian tour operators in the cities of Mumbai, Ahmedabad, New Delhi and Chandigarh. Jet Airways, in collaboration with NTB, is expected to come up with various promotional campaigns and attractive holiday packages. The Nepali participants during the course of the campaign were Hotel Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Himalaya Expeditions, Machan Wildlife Resort and Avia Club.

NCC’S NEW BRANCH

Nepal Credit & Commerce Bank Ltd. launched its 14th branch at Chabahil, Kathmandu. The Chabahil branch provides fully computerized services along with Any Branch Banking System (ABBS) facility with the Main Branch in New Road Branch and the Thankot Branch. The 12th and 13th branches of NCC Bank were opened in the month of June in Kalaiya and Pokhara respectively.

KYMCO’S NEW PULSAR 125 LUXE

Star International Ltd. launched the new Pulsar 125 Luxe. The newly launched motorcycle is manufactured by Taiwan based Kymco. The Pulsar 125 Luxe has a displacement of 124cc and a maximum output of 11.56 bhp, with a mileage of around 50 km. It is available in four colors: Black, Silver, Blue and Red. The new model comes with a two-year warranty.



SECOND SAAB FOR YETI

Yeti Airlines has acquired a second SAAB 340B. With the addition of the 36-seater aircraft, the airline now has the largest seat capacity in domestic aviation in Nepal and also offers the widest network of internal flights. The airline operates scheduled flights to remote areas such as Jumla, Dolpo, Simikot, Taplejung, Manang and Rumjatar carrying large volumes of cargo. There will now be additional flights on pre-existing flight routes to Biratnagar, Pokhara, Bhairahawa and Nepalgunj. The SAAB 340B aircraft is a Swedish made, regional commuter aircraft with a general passenger cabin configuration of 33-36 seats and maximum operating altitude of 25,000 feet.

NEW PROMISE TOOTH PASTE

New Promise, a worldwide brand of toothpaste established 25 years ago, is set to be launched in Nepal. The toothpaste has clove oil and a fresh mint flavor. The brand is being marketed as product that provides refresh breath and protection from cavities. The new toothpaste will reach the consumers in a soft squeeze tube and a blue international pack. It will be available in 3 conventional pack sizes – small (45g), medium (90g) and family (170g).

70,000 NEPALIS IN THE GULF

Nepal’s contribution to the U.A.E.’s labor market numbers between 1,000-1,500 each month with a sharp increase in the last 18 months, the Gulfnews.com website reported quoting Nepal Embassy’s Charge D’ Affaires Madhuban Prasad Poudel as saying in a report filed from the Abu Dhabi. The total Nepali population in the Gulf was reported to be about 70,000. The same report cited the U.A.E. government decision to ban unskilled Indian and Pakistani workers in the region as the reason behind the increase of Nepali workers. Poudel was speaking at a function hosted by the Embassy to promote tourism marking the 58th Birthday of King Gyanendra.



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Agitating teachers concede that their demands may be unlawful but it is the officials at the Tribhuvan University themselves who first bent the rules to please their political masters. “Now do it for us too,” say the teachers

BY SUNIL POKHREL

IT HAS BEEN 16 MONTHS SINCE the part-time teachers of Tribhuvan University and its constituent campuses began low-intensity protests over their status and pay. But, they have met with little success. The teachers are now determined to fight to the finish, including a hunger-strike-unto-death to start from July 16.

The Tribhuvan University Part-Time Teachers’ Association (TUPTTA) has taken to the streets with a three-point demand. The main one is for the permanent appointment of teachers who are on daily wages. For their part, university officials have made it clear that the demands cannot be met until there is an amendment to the university’s Service Commission Act. University offi-



CHAIN REACTION

cialists believe that the protest is politically motivated; TUPTTA members deny this.

“We have been treated shabbily. I am not allowed to take leave even during emergencies,” says a part-time teacher at Amrit Science Campus. “I am not permitted to issue books from the library. The part-timers are fired even for ideological differences with the campus chief of the colleges,” says the teacher who asked for anonymity. Low as their pay may be, part-timers do not get it on time. The Amrit Science Campus teacher says that he hasn’t received a single rupee since January.

The university has been a tool for the politically powerful for quite a while. Interference in its day-to-day work not only continued but also intensified in the post-1990 period. In a program organized by TUPTTA last week, leaders of all political parties, including human rights activist Krishna Pahadi expressed their solidarity with the teachers’ union. When a central committee member of the ruling NC(D) assured the teachers that he would have the concerned authority look into the matter, the reaction was mixed. Many of the teachers were relieved that their plight would finally get the attention it deserves while oth-

ers wondered if the university was an autonomous institution at all. In 1991, Tribhuvan University caved in to political pressure and appointed 1,200 permanent teachers.

Nanda Kishor Singh, president of TUPTTA, seems determined to make the officials repeat the mistake. The only condition 13 years ago to make the teachers’ status permanent was that they had to be associated with the university as a wage earner or contract teacher for at least a year. The Service Commission, which fills in the vacancies, was blatantly bypassed. Singh and his group want similar treatment now.



the 2,400 part-time teachers at the university's Central Campus and 61 colleges around the country who fill that void.

The large number of part-timers clearly indicates that the university has fallen short of teachers but filling in the vacancies isn't always easy due to the bureaucratic red tape and political meddling. For example, the result of an exam conducted almost two years ago by the Service Commission is still due.

"Tribhuvan University has so far turned a deaf ear to our just demands," says Singh. "The university is quick to fulfill every demand made by the student unions, but as teachers we can't adopt harsh measures," Singh adds.

The protests and numerous sit-ins in front of the Dean's Office by TUPTTA members forced the university officials to form a fact-finding committee to look into the problems of the part-timers and suggest solutions. The committee, among other things, asked the university to increase the pay per class from Rs 60 to 120 for Intermediate and Bachelor levels and to Rs. 150 for the Master's level. The agitating teachers however would accept none of the piecemeal solution.

Mahendra Singh, rector of Tribhuvan University, fails to see any good in the demand made by the teachers. "All part-timers were hired after they agreed to abide by the terms and conditions laid out to them," he says. "How can they now go against the terms which were agreed? Recruitments shall be made according to the needs of the university, not by political pressure."

As for TUPTTA, the association finds it convenient to take shelter under the 1991 precedent, though many of its members concede their demands may not be entirely lawful. They argue it's rather lame for the university to cite the law when its own officials have been in routine violation of the legal provisions themselves.

A teacher in the Central Campus predicts that the hunger strike will force the officials to meet the teachers' demand. "This is a classic example which shows how a violation of existing laws by the concerned authorities can instigate a chain reaction," he adds. **N**

"There have been a number of blunders," says professor Chuda Nath Uprety, chairman of the TU Service Commission. All appointments of staff and teachers should strictly be as per the existing TU Service Commission Act," Uprety adds. He sounds confident in his assertion, but records show that on numerous instances the university has bowed to political pressure. Between 1997 and 2002, as many as 2,400 teachers on daily wages, who had affiliations with political parties or were relatives of university officials, were granted contracts as teachers. This group receives perks,

job security and other benefits on par with permanent teachers. "We were left out simply because we didn't have the blessing of the power centers," Singh says.

Officials at the Dean's Office in Kirtipur say performances of permanent teachers have been left wanting and it's





NEW CABINET **AND** OLD PROBLEMS

Prime Minister Deuba has finally expanded his Cabinet with the induction of CPN(UML), RPP and NSP. The Maoists however seem to be in no mood to offer any concessions

BY AKHILESH UPADHYAY

AFTER MONTH-LONG negotiations, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba last week expanded his three-member cabinet to include 31 members from four parties, including his own NC(D).

On board, finally, were RPP, NSP and CPN(UML), whose participation will remain crucial if the new government is to gain any momentum, and crucially, to resolve the insurgency.

But if Deuba and his new coalition partners were expecting the Maoists to tone down their violent ways with the formation of a representative government, that was not to be. If anything, there have been a series of killings, including some high-profile assassinations, in recent days. The mayor of Pokhara and avowed Royalist, Harka Bahadur Gurung, was gunned down as Deuba was putting final touches to his new Cabinet. And DSP Uttam Karki was shot to death in broad daylight in Kathmandu, a day after the new Cabinet was sworn in. A Home Ministry official and a civilian have been shot dead since, both in the capital.



“We never expected it to be a cakewalk,” says Minendra Rijal, a Deuba aide and member of the 14-member Task Force that successfully finalized the Common Minimum Program between the four parties who are now in the government. “The new government’s top agenda is clear. We want to hold talks with the Maoists.”

There has been tremendous pressure on the new government to call a ceasefire and hold the talks—from the civil society, the international community and the rank-and-file members of the political parties, who have been on the receiving end in the conflict. The United Nations says it will not interfere in the negotiations, though it is willing to mediate, if asked. It has urged both sides to the conflict to recognize each other’s existence.

The European Union has called on both parties to announce an immediate ceasefire and create an environment for dialogue without setting any conditions. It has urged the government and demo-

cratic forces to work towards early negotiations with the insurgents. The EU sees the integration of the rebels into the political mainstream as a prerequisite to free and fair elections.

Ministers in the new Cabinet say the need to call a ceasefire is urgent but also concede that reviving talks is not going to be easy, much less so if the talks are to eventually bear fruit. Two previous failed rounds of peace processes have left a bitter taste in everybody’s mouth, including the Maoists and the Army. There is a near-consensus among the coalition partners that they first need to lay down the groundwork so that the peace momentum will carry beyond the initial euphoria of a truce, if and when it comes.

Already, the officials are making the right of kinds of noises. One of the first things Prime Minister Deuba did after his appointment last month was to urge the Maoists to come back to the negotiating table. He said he would do every-

thing to make peace, though his call came with a caveat. “The Royal Nepal Army will return to barracks if the Maoists stand for peace,” Deuba said.

But peace at what price? That’s the bone of contention. While there has been a lot of pressure on the government to declare a ceasefire, it is unlikely that it would do so without a minimum understanding of what it is going to gain from such a ceasefire. “Of course, we don’t want the violence to continue and we do deeply empathize with the family members of the dead,” says a Cabinet Minister. “But we hope the Maoists will approach the talks in good faith this time around. It gets difficult to work with a force that believes in political violence.”

Yet the coalition partners seem determined to give it a shot, given the urgency of the situation at hand. A number of CPN(UML) leaders say they were primarily motivated to join the government to start a dialogue with the Maoists, and that alone. “If it’s not now, when?” asks Bhim Rawal, central committee member of the UML and the party’s one of four representatives in the Task Force that worked out the Common Minimum Program.

The Common Minimum Program is an open-ended document, which deliberately avoids taking any dogmatic positions so as to make the Maoists believe that the government is keeping all its options open, including that of the constituent assembly. This is where the peace process could get a bit tricky. The Palace will want a guarantee of its role before it commits to a constituent assembly and the political parties will never negotiate for a party-less totalitarian state, if that’s what the Maoists are fighting for.

“The Maoists perhaps aren’t as intractable as some of us believe they are,” says NC(D)’s Rijal. “They do realize they aren’t going to get everything they demand.” He points out that the Maoists, in fact, insist that they would hold talks only with a government that has unambiguous backing from the King. The thinking is that the Maoists, with all their display of bravado, are still willing to make compromises and that there are few leaders in the NCP(Maoist) who are willing to fight to the finish and turn Nepal into another Sudan, wracked by a bloody civil war since the 50s. **N**

WITH SHUSHAM SHRESTHA

OPINION

Good Budget Is Good Politics

BY POSH RAJ PANDEY

The budget is not only a ritual where the Finance Minister crunches numbers about the revenue and expenditure, but also a policy document. It pro-



DIFFICULT TIMES: Minister Adhikari

vides the direction of the actions the incumbent government plans to take on economic, social and political matters in the days to come. Everyone, from slum dwellers to the filthy rich, road-side teashop owners to the lords of tea estates, unemployed to senior bureaucrats, mid-wife to housewife, all are curious on the content of the budget speech as it affects their lives, for better or worse.

Viewing the budget in this perspective, the way revenue is collected and expenditure is allocated could be a reliable instrument to meet the expectations of the people. This in Nepal's case is restoration of peace, opportunities for productive

and gainful work, better health facilities and sending children to school. A good budget will be good politics in terms of an opportunity for the newly formed all-party government to keep the promises—talks with the Maoists, restoration of peace and conducting elections.

The consensus on the concept and content of the budget among the coalition partners, with their ideological underpinnings at odds, would be a daunting task—if the wrangling over the preparation of the Common Minimum Program is any indication. The freedom of the Finance Minister is further curtailed by the legacy of violence coupled with lower level of income, a smaller fiscal base, a weaker social service delivery system, dwindling capacity to maintain law and order, reduced social cohesion, a reduced institutional capacity and diminished ability to either manage development policies. All are factors beyond his control.

Given these constraints, the Finance Minister recently indicated that the security expenditure will inevitably go up, a complete U-turn on what his party used to have a "firm" position on. He, however, qualified, tacitly that there are prospects of reducing regular expenditure, though the definition of security-related, regular and development expenditure is amorphous and its distinction delicate.

If one dissects the government revenue and expenditure, the re-

vised estimate for the last fiscal year shows that the government has not been able to generate revenue to meet expenditure for day-to-day operations and repayment of loans. The revenue collection and expenditure pattern shows that out of every one rupiah tax paid by people, about one *suka* goes to military and police, about one *suka* to loan repayment and interest payments and the remaining one *mohar* to general administration, constitutional organs, judiciary and social services. More conspicuously, the ex-

penditure on defense and police has been growing over the period and has stood at about 5 per cent of the national income—a figure comparable to many of the developed countries.

Given an escalating insurgency and crime and social violence, increased government expenditure on military and police is only natural to restore peace and put pressure to bring the Maoists to the negotiating table. But, it has to be remembered that expenditures on security, though a public good benefiting all, is insensitive to the values of equity and fairness. Once built up, as other countries have found out, they are difficult to downsize.

Here lies the moot question. Can Nepal, where about half the

population goes to bed hungry, afford such a huge defense and police expenditure? Is an increase in such expenditure the best solution? Don't we have other alternatives? The experiences of other developing countries show that the rate of growth of military expenditure and the rate of economic growth are inversely related. Closer to home, the economic growth in Sri Lanka regressed when armed revolution

A frontal assault on insurgency lies not on skyrocketing military and police expenditure but on inclusive economic growth

started and the prospects of peace dialogue were dim when there were double-digit growths in security expenditure.

A frontal assault on insurgency lies not on skyrocketing military and police expenditure but on inclusive economic growth, safeguarding civil liberties, deepening democracy, improving social cohesion and reducing economic disparities. It can be achieved through "quality" expenditure on "soft" sectors by taking measures such as improving earning capacity of the people, generating employment, developing skills, providing health facilities, and developing infrastructure in rural areas. Let peace create dividends, rather than dividends to defense personnel create peace. **N**

Death toll since Deuba took office

July 6

Kathmandu: Ward 12 ex-chairman Mahesh Man Shrestha and Deputy Superintendent of Police Uttam Bahadur Karki shot to death

Salyan: 11 security personnel, 19 Maoists killed in clashes at Gangate area of Kalimati Kalche VDC.

July 7

Kathmandu: Maoists shot dead Rajen Kuikel, assistant accountant at the Home Ministry outside his residence at Gaurighat. **N**

June 14

Banke: Maoist ambush APF convoy, killing at least 22 police personnel in a landmine blast and wounding 12 in Khari Khola.

June 20

Dang: Maoists attack a police patrol, killing 18 people, including four civilians. Dozens are reported injured in a separate landmine blast

and the ensuing crossfire near the village of Dhan Khola.

July 2

Pokhara: Mayor Harka Bahadur Gurung, 65, shot by the Maoists

July 5

Birgunj: 12 policemen die in a Maoist ambush at Bahuarwa Batha VDC near Birgunj.

'Govt Is Open To All Options'

Minendra Rijal, a Deuba aide and former member of the National Planning Commission, was a member of the Task Force that successfully finalized the Common Minimum Program.

Will the new government do what the two previous governments failed to do—broker a permanent ceasefire with the Maoists?

We hope so. The Common Minimum Program doesn't deal with specifics. That's because we want to keep all options open.

There are criticisms that the Deuba cabinet turned out to be larger than was expected—even CPN(UML) General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal has said so much?

Yes, the Cabinet may have been larger than many expected. But you should bear in mind that these are extremely difficult times and it wasn't easy to put together a four-party government in the first place. Every single party faces problems of internal management. The big question of course is whether we can resolve the Maoist problem. I consider it a success that only one major political, the Nepali Congress, is not in the government now. But we are still hoping that they (Nepali Congress) will join the government at some point. They will be duly given four or five Ministries.

Koirala and the four agitating parties are saying they will negotiate with the Maoists too?

That's empty rhetoric. But Maoists have said the Nepali Congress should have a role in the peace talks. It's a tactical statement and serves both the interests of both Koirala and the Maoists.

Okay, the government has taken a pluralistic shape, what next?

As I said earlier, the CMP is an open-ended document and we remain open to all options. This was deliberate. Once there is public posturing on certain issues, negotiations become that much more difficult.

So you are saying that you are open about discussing the constituent assembly?

At the minimum, we seek negotiations. We need space to hold elections and conduct relief programs to help tens of thousands of the displaced throughout the country. Their needs are urgent.

Is the Palace open about constituent assembly?

I will look at it this way: Is the King a factor in Nepal politics? He is. It is, then, only natural that he should seek assurance on the role of the monarchy, just as we will seek assurance for multiparty democracy. There can't be a blank-check negotiation on the constituent assembly.

But the Maoists said last year when the peace talks failed that the government negotiators had put forth too many conditions and had taken a non-negotiable position on the constituent assembly?

The Maoists also realize they can't get everything they want. In fact, they insist that they will hold talks with a government that enjoys unambiguous support of the King.

How close are we to the ceasefire?

I can only say this: I don't think we are ready for a unilateral ceasefire. We need do some homework first rather than have a meaningless ceasefire. But don't get me wrong. I am not condoning violence and the daily mayhem. Far from it. But what is the purpose of a ceasefire if we

don't have a roadmap? There will again be accusations and counteraccusations and the chances are that the peace process will again collapse.

Are things getting out of control?

As a matter of fact, all major political parties, except the Nepali Congress, are now on board, and the Maoists must be closely following the turn of events. I sometimes get a feeling that the Maoist central leadership doesn't have control over their rank and file.

Are the Maoists under pressure to announce a ceasefire, just as the government?

Pretty much. Amid all this senseless violence, we tend to lose sight of the fact that things are getting out of hand for them. India has, of late, put tremendous pressure on them and they are on the run. India most certainly doesn't want its economic laggards in the north—Bihar and Uttar Pradesh—taking a leaf out of the Maoist book and turning into Rukum and Rolpa. Bihar's GDP growth is way, way behind while parts of India are galloping ahead with as much as 12 percent growth. There were times when the Maoists got some leverage, with sections of the Indian establishment even assuming that the insurgency could give them leeway in managing the bilateral ties. And within

Nepal, too, the Maoist movement was used to offset the influence of democratic forces. This is not the case now. The tables have turned completely. All the forces have united together against the Maoists. We now say that we will not negotiate with the Maoists on certain points: the constitutional monarchy, multiparty democracy and our relations with India.

Is state on verge of collapse? At the popular level, one hears conflicting, even confusing, assertions as to who deserves the people's support?

Some people do say, "We saw the King, we saw the parties, and now let's see Baburam and Prachanda. Maybe they will bring in peace." But people are slowly beginning to realize the attendant dangers. A lot of people in Kathmandu are now nervous because they have started witnessing cold-blooded killings. They will get even more rude shocks when they witness the Maoists' totalitarian ways. What can I say of a force that believes in settling political feuds with violence and killings? **N**



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STARK CHOICES

Nepal has a relatively low HIV epidemic but it faces stark choices: either choose to marshal whatever resources it has to limit the spread of the disease—and avoid a catastrophe—or do nothing and deal with the consequences

BY SUMAN PRADHAN
IN BANGKOK

IN THE NINE YEARS OF THE Maoist conflict, Nepal has lost slightly more than 10,000 people. In just over a decade and a half, HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, has infected more than an estimated 61,000 Nepalis and killed 3,100.

These numbers, put out by the latest UNAIDS report, aren't yet anywhere near the death toll inflicted by the Maoist insurgency. But they are frightening nevertheless.

For one, most Nepalis living with the virus don't know their HIV status, and therefore could pass it on to other people. Two, only a very small minority of those who know their status have access to anti-retroviral drugs that help to slow the disease's progress. Moreover, most of those who were infected in the early 90s will progress to the AIDS stage of the disease, crippling an already under-funded and inadequate health care system.

Clearly, if effective measures are not taken now, then the virus could easily spread to epidemic proportions, further tearing the social and economic fabric of a poor country already ravaged by war.

For these reasons, countries like Nepal which are in the midst of a relatively low HIV epidemic now face stark choices: they could either choose to marshal whatever resources they have to limit the spread of the virus when it is still in its early epidemiological phases—and hence avoid a catastrophe in the future—or do nothing and deal with the consequences later.

"Many countries choose to ignore the threat in its early stages and pay for it later," says Marsha Thompson, an American epidemiology student attending the 15th International AIDS Conference in Bangkok. "It is always better to work on prevention in the early stages rather than spend huge and scarce resources later on treatment and care when the disease has reached epidemic proportions."

This seems like sound advice, but countries often don't follow it. Take the case of South Africa, a country with 30 million people. Despite repeated alarm bells sounded by the international com-



munity, the government of President Thabo Mbeki chose to ignore mounting evidence of a galloping epidemic, paying for it dearly later. Mbeki once even famously questioned the link between HIV and AIDS. We can see the consequence today: South Africa has 5.4 million people infected with HIV, and belatedly had to spend huge resources to fight the disease.

In nearby India, initial official denial (therefore little corrective action) has led

HIV to infect more than 5.1 million of its over a billion citizens. Though this figure still corresponds to less than 1 percent prevalence rate, the sheer number of infections means India accounts for at least 10 percent of the world's HIV infections.

Even today, there is little coordinated response to the epidemic in India, and denials at the highest levels still exist. "If we look at the current response in India, it's much better than two or three years ago, but it still falls way short of what's necessary to accentuate a looming disaster," said epidemiologist Richard Feachem, head of the Global Fund to treat AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, in a recent interview to *Science Magazine*.

On the other hand, there are countries like Thailand which quickly comprehended the grave consequences of the social and economic cost of the disease after initial hiccups. Thanks to an unabashed condom campaign in the early 1990s, the government and civil society in this devoutly Buddhist country has succeeded in keeping HIV infections at a manageable 570,000 among its 60 million people.

"Thailand offers an example of what developing countries can do if there's enough political will at the top," says Dr.

Peter Piot, the executive director of UNAIDS, the body which leads the joint-UN program on HIV/AIDS. "For Asian countries, the key to success is going to be strong leadership. Most countries in the region have the resources and capabilities to deal with the epidemic on their own. They just need the leadership."

Nepal probably doesn't fall in the list of Asian countries which have the material resources and capabilities, but that doesn't mean it can't succeed if the political will exists. Poor countries like Uganda have shown that HIV can be checked if governments are serious about it. Nepal too can go this route if the political leadership devotes just a fraction of the resources to combating HIV/AIDS that it is now devoting to resolving the Maoist conflict. **N**

FROM ROCK

The demand for Nepali workers is increasingly coming from areas where the risks could be greater than at home

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

SAMBHU RAI, 24, WORKED IN Kabul for six months with Canadian troops stationed there as a part of the multinational force, the International Security Assistance Force, deployed there after the fall of the Taliban regime. Rai is happy that he and his friends were treated well. "We were duly paid \$435 a month plus food and shelter," he says. But he has vivid memories of a nightmare. "One day, in an attack, a grenade landed very close to our camp, but fortunately it didn't explode," Rai recalls. But not everyone has been as lucky.

On April 9, two Nepalis working as security guards for a British private security firm, Global Risk Strategies, were killed in a landmine explosion in Iraq. The two were Shiva Prasad Lawati of Dharan and Ram Bahadur Gurung of Narayangadh. Officials are at a loss to explain how Nepalis have made it into Iraq without the government's permission and how they got there at all.

As the internal conflict in Nepal continues to escalate, a growing number of Nepalis are seeking greener pastures abroad to escape the crisis. But there is an irony in all this: the demand for Nepali workers is increasingly coming from areas where the risks could be greater than at home. And desperate for foreign employment, many Nepalis seem to have decided to bypass the official channel.

"We have received demands for Nepali workers in Iraq, but we haven't decided on the matter. The Foreign Ministry is looking into the proposal," says an official with the Ministry of Labor. But that hasn't stopped Nepalis from taking chances.

Until recently there was no evidence of Nepalis' presence in Iraq, except that of the British Gurkha troops. But things have changed in recent months: an uni-



TO HARD PLACE



identified Nepali employed by a security company was shot dead in the riots that swept the city of Basra in April. Foreign news agencies say that up to 2,000 Nepalis are employed by private security firms in Iraq. Global Risk Strategies is said to have recruited 500 Nepalis and 500 Fijians for its 1,500-strong army of private guards.

Two other American companies have reportedly hired ex-Gurkhas to provide security in Iraq. Florida-based Armor Group and Custer Battles have hired an unspecified number of ex-Gurkhas, who are based at Baghdad International Airport. Even the Royal Nepal Army and Nepal Police personnel are said to be

signing up for security assignments for private companies in Iraq. "What's the difference if we die here or there?" a government official quotes an RNA soldier as saying.

These reports, which are almost impossible to independently confirm, raise serious questions. One is: how can such a large number of Nepalis make it to Iraq without the government's knowledge? The answers, at best, are sketchy.

"People are going to Iraq through India, but we do not have any confirmation if they are forging Indian passports," says Bishnu Rimal of the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions. "Even some Nepali manpower companies are in-

involved in it, although we do not have hard facts to substantiate our claims," he adds.

Though many Nepalis who head to Iraq do so despite their knowledge of attendant dangers, others apparently are kept in the dark about their destination. Some have been told that they are being recruited for Kuwait but only after their arrival in Iraq do they find out that it is their final destination, Rimal says.

In recent days, serious doubts have started to emerge about the safety of people working in the Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia, which was once considered safe. After the attack on Al-Khobar in Saudi Arabia, Saudi oil firms have reportedly sought permission from Saudi authorities to hire ex-Gurkhas as private security guards, the Washington Times reported. These oil firms include the world's largest, Saudi Aramco, and its American rival Chevron Texaco. Al-Qaeda militants killed at least 22 people, including Americans and Indians, in twin attacks on oil company

offices on May 29.

But government officials seem unaware of such developments. Rimal derides the government's lack of concern for Nepalis employed abroad. He cites instances where the labor attachés in Nepali embassies themselves have harassed the laborers.

As the conflict intensifies both at home and in the countries of employment, Nepalis will find themselves increasingly caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. And until the government wakes up from its deep slumber and explores safer destinations, more and more Nepalis will be tempted to take the plunge. **N**



ALL'S NOT LOST

Nepal's recent showing hasn't been exactly sterling but the team is still in the run for a World Cup berth

BY YASHAS VAIDYA

EARLIER THIS MONTH, THE President of Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN), Jay Kumar Nath Shah, returned home a happy man. He had been elected a vice-president of the Asian Cricket Council in London. Now the cricket fraternity the world over will address the father figure of Nepali cricket with due reverence. At home, though, Shah has his task cut out: raise the standard of cricket at least at par with other emerging cricket nations, who like Nepal, are vying for a Test berth.

The team's recent showing hasn't been exactly sterling. Nepal, who finished runner-up to the United Arab Emirates in the ACC Trophy two years

ago, failed to live up to its growing stature this time round in Malaysia. After its defeat in the quarterfinals and eventual knockout from the regular tournament, Nepal proceeded to the Plate Championship, which pooled together all the losing quarterfinalists. It saved itself a final blush when it scored effortless wins over Bhutan and Iran and won the Plate Championship. Bhutan was humbled by nine wickets and it took Nepali batsmen just nine balls to overhaul Iran's total of 29. The latter was the quickest win in the ACC history.

The wins however don't mask the underlying fact that Nepal's march to the big league has been marked by fits and starts. And it still has that quality—consistency—missing in its arsenal.

Hopes were sky-high when the wily Sri Lankan coach Roy Dias was marshaling his resources before the Malaysian sojourn. It was not to be. Qatar, which was expected to offer little resistance, delivered a shock. It restricted Nepal to 164 runs at the loss of six wickets to

knock out Nepal from title contention, and with it a direct passage to the International Cricket Council (ICC) Trophy to be held in Ireland next year. The ICC Trophy serves as the qualifier for the World Cup, the ultimate trophy.

It was too painful for the game's passionate followers who reminisce Nepal's recent exploits. "This has come as a huge letdown. We were hoping Nepal would put in a better show," says a former cricket administrator. "Such poor performances would only discount our past achievements slicing locals' belief in the country's emerging team."

The belief didn't come overnight. The Plate Championship of the Under-19 World Cup in New Zealand two years ago saw Nepal sweep past every opposition to reach the final; Nepal finished runner-up to Zimbabwe. (The top six teams had advanced to the Super League, while the six second-rung teams, which failed to make it to the Super League, proceeded to the Plate Championship.) The highlight of that

tour was six wins in a trot for Nepal, including those against Pakistan and Bangladesh. The current national team has inherited many of the players from that winning side. "We're very disappointed for not being able to perform well in the tournament," says Raju Khadka, the team captain, discussing the Malaysian tour.

He concedes that complacency was one huge factor that led to the downfall. Qatar was supposed to be a cakewalk. "We had thought that we'd be pitted against stronger teams like the U.A.E., Malaysia, Hong Kong. Definitely not Qatar."

"Yet," he says bravely, "all's not lost for Nepal. We are still in the reckoning for the ICC Trophy." While the winner and runner-up in Malaysia qualify directly for the ICC Trophy, losing semi-finalists and the winners of the Plate final, Nepal, will fight for the solitary slot in another qualifier, scheduled for February next year. The event will also feature teams from Europe, Africa and America.

"The team had a lapse of application in fundamental areas resulting in the poor showing," Khadka explains, "but we'll come back strongly to clinch that next available berth."

A one-off victory against Malaysia in the Intercontinental Cup notwithstanding, this year has been disappointing. In the Under-19 World Cup in Bangladesh, Nepal was a mere shadow of the team it was some years ago.

These failures have cast a long shadow over Nepal's long-cherished dreams of qualifying for the World Cup. Also in the wane is Nepal's stature as a "fast-track nation." Shah, the CAN president, is sure to face some difficult questions from colleagues in the ICC and the ACC if the slide continues.

He admits Nepal's "good and determined work" failed to bring in the desired results this time. "But it doesn't deter us from making more efforts," he adds, dispelling suggestions that Nepal would be removed from the ICC list of fast-emerging cricket countries and deprived of the attendant incentives.

According to him, CAN is mulling over a comprehensive plan to overcome inconsistencies of Nepali sides, more so for the national team. That includes frequent exchange of tours within South Asia. Works for the ACC's Central Youth Cricket Academy will begin shortly. In 2001, the ACC selected Nepal ahead of other contenders, U.A.E. and Malaysia, for the project.

The ACC will make an initial investment to the tune of US\$ 1 million for the academy that it has envisaged along the line of world-renowned academies of Australia and South Africa. The project is aimed at improving the standard of the game in non-Test playing countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, U.A.E., Thailand, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and Nepal. The Asian Cricket Foundation (ACF), an arm of the ACC formed to

generate funds for the development of the game, has earmarked US\$ 2.5 million for development of cricket in the Asian region.

The project had been stalled after the ACC rejected Nepal's proposal to select Pokhara as the venue for the academy on grounds that it lacks cricketing culture as well as adequate infrastructure such as an international airport. There was fear all around that Nepal would lose the project when the then member-secretary Binod Shankar Palikhe, a native of Pokhara, stubbornly stood against the ACC's choice—Kathmandu. "Fortunately for all cricket-loving Nepalis, the project has survived," Shah says.

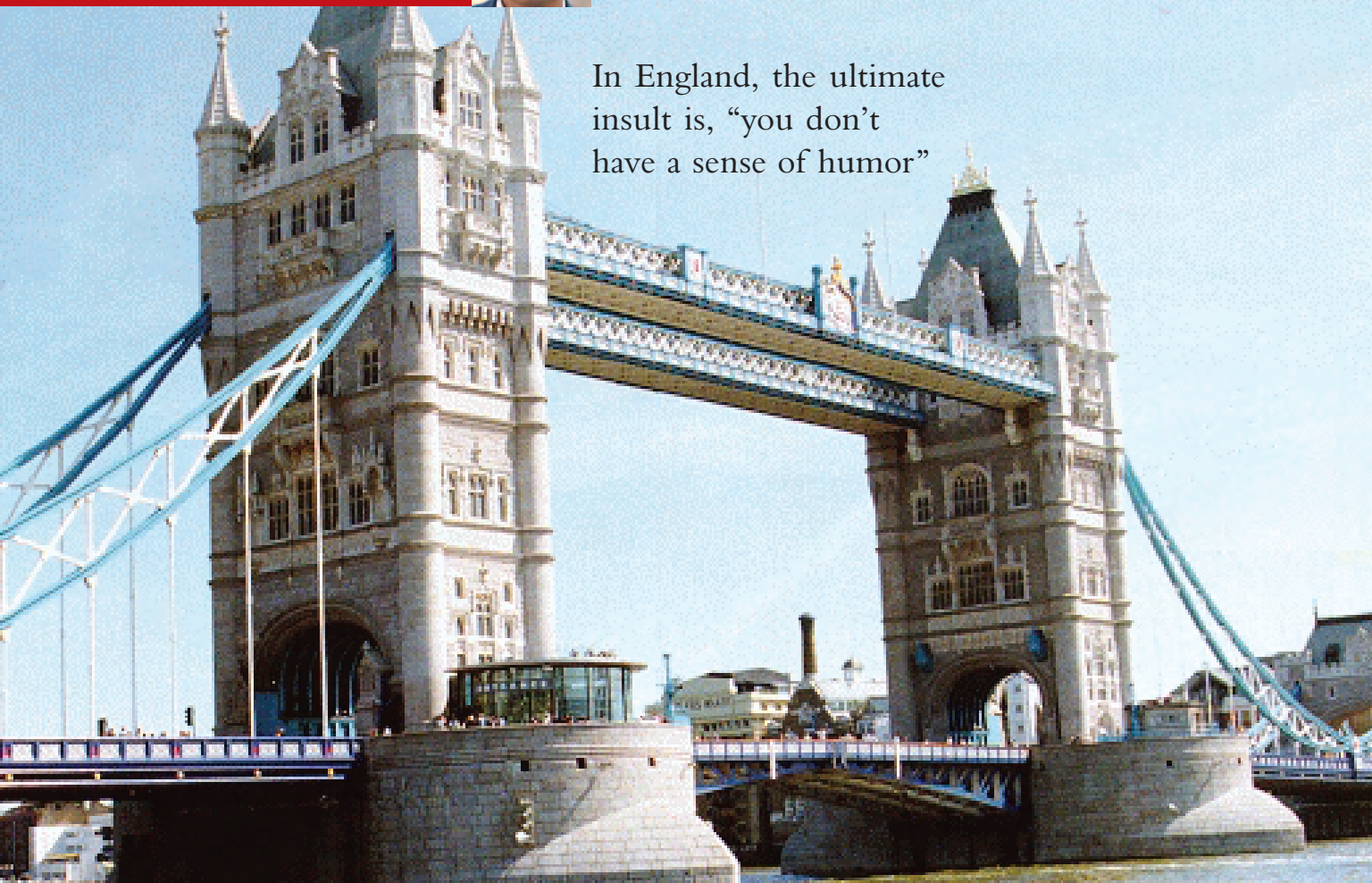
The government has allocated 36 ropanis of land in Mulpani, 10 km. northeast of the capital for the project. Ross Turner, Peter Hanlon and Graham Watson, all from Cricket Australia, were here late last year to inspect the project site in the capital. "We are now awaiting the final approval from the ACC," says Shah, who is more keen to talk about the academy than Nepal's recent performances. **N**



IN/S/S



In England, the ultimate insult is, “you don’t have a sense of humor”



NOTES FROM A SMALL ISLAND

BY SWARNIM WAGLÉ

Death as celebration

REVIEWING BILL BRYSON’S unusually funny book on Britain, “Notes from a Small Island,” for a Kathmandu newspaper a few years ago, I paraphrased a quip: in most places of the world, if people don’t like you, they will call you names and say you are an idiot or a fool. Only in England, the ultimate insult is, “you don’t have a sense of humor.” Presently on a short visit to this country, one of the first things I did was to go for humor shopping in print. Beyond the piles of hundreds of promoted books for summer reading, I lo-

cated at an unlikely spot a lonely copy of “The Very Best of the Daily Telegraph Books of Obituaries.” This is supposed to be a deadly serious book on freshly dead people. The Daily Telegraph has, over the years, especially under Hugh Massingberd between 1986 and 1994, built a reputation for carrying readable obituaries. Its obit section actually went on to develop a very likeable personality, presenting the lives of dead people in a direct, witty manner, as opposed to the almost universal custom of always speaking well of the deceased. Of the English, who are stereotypically reverential and reserved, and good at pomp and formal ceremonies, one would have expected that

they’d eulogize all their dead as the greatest beings who ever walked their rain-soaked island. Not so, evidently, in the pages of *The Daily Telegraph* at least, as this book talks about dead people, presumably the British really want to hear about them. Here’s an excerpt on some Denisa Lady Newborough, “who has died aged 79, was many things: wire-walker, night club girl, nude dancer, air-pilot. She only refused to be two things—a whore and a spy—and there were attempts to make her both, she once wrote.” If you are dying for a serious laugh, possibly the English way, pick up this book, make some tea, and enjoy the newly dead.

The 1688 Revolution

There is one thing 21st century Nepal could learn from 17th century England—how to resolve the tussle between the monarch and the people’s representatives, formally embodied by a parliament? The period between 1603 and 1688 was tumultuous in England. The crown’s desire to raise revenue arbitrarily provoked a chain of events that, briefly, even led to its abolition. Although English republicanism was short-lived, with the monarchy reinstated in 1660, problems persisted till the end of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 when governmental institutions were fundamentally altered. Limits were set to the unilateral actions of the monarch, and it was made clear that everything else the monarch did needed explicit parliamentary approval. In a 1989 article by Douglas North and Barry Weingast in the *Journal of Economic History*, “Constitution and Commitment,” they argue that the institutions of representative government then formed in England with a subdued (not eliminated) monarch, an assertive parliament, and an independent judiciary went on to create a rule-based regime that set the stage for England’s subsequent glory. Protection of private

wealth and minimization of risks from a confiscating government led a capital markets boom that gave access to massive funds for the state. In 1690, France was Europe’s richest power. By 1765 it had lost Louisiana and Canada, and was on the verge of bankruptcy. England, on the other hand, was beginning the Industrial Revolution that changed the world in two centuries in a manner that the previous 20 hadn’t managed. This simplified lesson from an alien island may not exactly resonate with us 300 years on, but it is a good story that underscores the importance of good institutions, rule of law, and primacy of an effective, sovereign parliament.

Browning Blair

Ten years ago, the leader of the British Labor Party was the wise, respectable Scotsman, John Smith. No one knows if he would have continued the jettisoning of the left-wing baggage of the old Labor Party that had made it unelectable for 15 years, but the affable man that Smith was, people really wished he would dislodge the Tories in the next elections. Sadly, he died suddenly in 1994, letting history create a completely unforeseen era in Britain. Tony Blair, the shadow Home Secretary, and Gordon Brown, the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, were young equals who not only nursed mutual respect but also once shared the same office at Westminster. Theoretically speaking, however, only one of them could compete for the vacated leadership then if both of them were to win eventually. Brown relented, only because, it is said, he was not married and didn’t have a family, a perceived liability for the top job in western democracies. By the onset of 2004, Tony Blair had gone on to write Labor, British and European history, teach George Bush some English, and become tired in the process. The speculation in Britain now is not

whether, but when and how soon Blair will quit. Will he lead Labor to its third consecutive election victory next year, and serve another long term, or has he already made his position untenable be-



cause of woes over Iraq, or the simple fatigue that comes with protracted democratic leadership? After Blair, then, who? Gordon Brown has in the meantime not only married and fathered a child, but also has established a reputation for being a competent Chancellor. While relationships between Brown and Blair have been lukewarm for a number of years, nobody has doubted that Blair would second Brown when the time comes. As has been observed by humorists, the English not only have a sense of humor, but also a childish sense of fair play. Perhaps with a wink from Downing Street, Peter Mandelson, the Blair confidant, recently stated that Gordon would, of course, be a natural successor to Tony.

Looking ahead, could leaders like Gordon Brown from Europe, and John Kerry in the United States—both serious men with intellect and integrity on the same side of progressive politics—potentially reconfigure world events for the better leading up to 2008? Even if they can’t do much, could they at least undo some of the damage their predecessors did? Obviously, we can only wait and see if and when the couple emerges. And not everyone is excited anyway. An English friend, ever the funny skeptic, remarked recently in the context of Mexico, “the problem with Britain, also, is that it is too far from God and too close to the United States.” **N**

Views expressed in this column are personal, and do not necessarily reflect those of institutions the writer is affiliated with.



ADMISSION RUSH

Ten-plus-two schools are booming as students increasingly opt for the range of choices and the perceived higher quality of private institutions

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD RASHMI Bhattarai has just passed her School Leaving Certificate exams with a first-division score. Her private school in Maharajgunj goes only up to the 10th grade. She has decided not to follow the old dictum that students who pass in the first division should study science. Instead she will study humanities at one of the ten-plus-two schools around Kumaripati in Patan. This, she says, is because her friends will be going there too, and she doesn't want to undergo the torment of facing a new school environment alone. She also thinks private schools are better than TU affiliates.

"Two of my friends have applied to Champion (Academy) and another one left for Dehradun (in India)," says Bhattarai, who had just arrived at her home with brochures of three other ten-plus-two schools—United Academy, Prasadi Academy and Pinnacle Academy. Her father, a government employee, says he has left it up to his daughter to decide on her future as long as she keeps on doing well in studies.

"The ten-plus-two schools are more disciplined, and the teachers are better," says Bhattarai between phone calls from friends, while continuing her conversation about schools. "Plus, unlike those under Tribhuvan University, there is less politics and the classes are regular."

Ever since the ten-plus-two education system came into effect in 1992, more and more private schools have been affiliated with the Higher Secondary Education Board. And education packed with extra curricular facilities seems to



be good business. Though many still argue that education should be service-oriented rather than a business, most of the ten-plus-two schools have registered

under the Company Act. This means that they have to follow guidelines of the Education Act but are allowed to make profits and have to pay taxes, which educational institutions registered as trusts do not.

The increasing business trend can be best seen in the media: many schools spend a large portion of their annual budget, up to Rs 1,000,000 yearly, on advertisements in print, on radio and on television to bring in new students.

"Parents are ready to spend any amount for a quality education in Nepal," says Pushpa Raj Shrestha, assistant manager of administration and finance at Apex College in New Baneshwor, which doesn't offer ten-plus-two classes but rather starts at bachelors level. "Competition has become so high with the increasing number of schools that advertisement has become essential."

Last year about 66,000 students enrolled in more than 850 schools affiliated with the Higher Secondary Education Board. This year 74 new schools have applied for affiliation to run the ten-plus-two system. It may be the ten-plus-two schools' good marketing or the failing of overcrowded government colleges that has contributed to this growth.

"It is profitable for a school to run ten-plus-two [classes], as almost all the infrastructure such as buses and class space is shared by classes under 10 and plus-two," says Rajendra Ghising, senior executive officer at GEMS in Dhapakhel, which, like Apex, has ruled out getting

on the "ten-plus-two bandwagon." Ten-plus-two schools charge from Rs 25,000 to 70,000 per student, depending upon the facilities.

"Students in ten-plus-two require a little more freedom, as they are grown-ups, and mixing them up with the school kids could be difficult for both," Ghising adds. According to him, not all schools have opted to open a ten-plus-two and there are also a few who run specifically the ten-plus-two or ten-plus-two and higher education.

But despite the increasing trend, the idea of turning educational institutions into all-profit business houses has not appealed to all. The student

unions have time and again accused the ten-plus-two system of being "too elitist" and expensive, and they have protested the government attempt to bring all students at government campuses under the ten-plus-two system. One of the key demands of the Maoist-aligned students in the recent education strike was for all ten-plus-two schools to decrease their fees by 25 percent.

Educators say the admissions at most ten-plus-two schools have not been affected by protests. At least for people like Rashmi, there are far more choices for higher studies than were available to post-SLC students a decade ago. ■



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The Show Must Go On

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

At the crossroads of the busy Ring Road in Maharajgunj stands a black bust that is ignored by most passersby. Few know that the place is called Narayan Gopal Chowk. That the commemorative bust of Swor Samrat Narayan Gopal Gurubacharya, Nepal's most illustrious singer, signifies nothing is a telling statement on the way Nepal treats her artists.

Fifty meters towards Chabahil, just a stone's throw away from Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala's house, lies Naryan Gopal's home, Geet Ganga, now a silent abode: Gopal's wife Pemala passed away on July 1. The empty two-story house (there are no heirs to the house, Naryan Gopal and his wife were childless) still houses the harmonium, tabala, stereo, music notes and stacks of National Geographic magazines that Narayan Gopal was so fond of.

But, thankfully there are some among Gopal's fans who would like to do their bit to preserve the Swor Samrat's memories. For a start, efforts are underway to preserve Gopal's music paraphernalia. "We are turning the singer's house into a Narayan Gopal Museum," says music analyst Prakash Sayami, who is also a member of the Narayan Gopal Sangeet Kosh. Narayan Gopal's close colleagues, including music maestro Amber Gurung and economist Bishwamber Pyakurel, formally established the group in 1991 after his death. The group wants to display the items Narayan Dai once used in the exact locations that he used to place them, and also archive the musical instruments. The Swor Samrat's wife bequeathed the house to the Kosh, and the house will also be used as an office for the Kosh and to conduct free violin lessons.

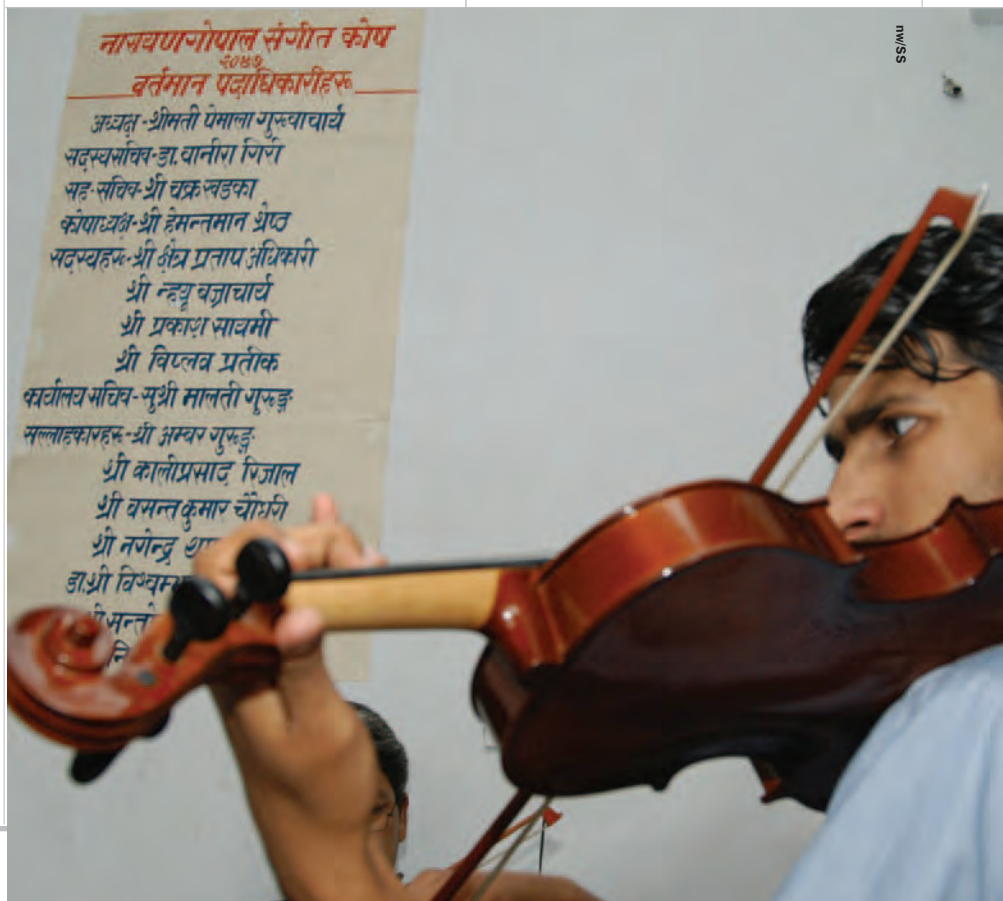
Sayami and Gopal's wife had been collecting Narayan Gopal's original lyrics to publish them in a book, titled "Kaalajayi Sworharu." The idea for the book came to Pemala in 1999 when she had gone to Baglung to attend a memo-

rial program and heard some of the participants singing the wrong lyrics. Sayami wants the project to continue.

"Kaalajayi Sworharu' (the voices that defeat death) is going to do justice to Narayan Gopal and the song writers whose works have already gone missing from official records," says songwriter Chhetra Pratap Adhikari, who came up with the name for the book. So far, around 137 songs have been collected. Other works of the singer have been hard to track down although many could be stashed away in the archives of Radio Nepal. The Kosh is also planning a CD of previously unreleased material. "Apart from that, the Narayan Gopal Sangeet Kosh must continue to encourage young music artists and release quality work. "Quality was one area that Narayan Gopal was so particular about in his work," adds Adhikari. Some of the students who come to the Kosh are differently-abled, and the organization wants to help them earn a living with music.

The Kosh conducts a nationwide singing competition every two years

to discover new talent. Funding for most of its programs comes from the government and contributions from Narayan Gopal fans, both Nepali and foreign. Recently it decided to allow lyricists to produce music videos and gave permission to other singers to sing Narayan Gopal's songs. "The result was tremendous. We wanted to give other artists the opportunity to rework Narayan Gopal's songs. That's why we finally overcame our strict views on music rights," says Sayami. Lyricist Nagendra Thapa is already working on a music video of Narayan Gopal's famous song "Birsera Feri Malai Nahaera," with rare footage of the Swor Samrat at a recording studio in Mumbai. Young talents Pawal Chamling and Satyanarayan Manandhar have also sung Narayan Gopal numbers on their albums. "We now want to publish a music bulletin or magazine compiling the experiences of Narayan Dai's contemporaries to document Nepal's developing music scene," says Sayami. The Kosh couldn't have picked a better method to pay homage to Narayan Gopal. Building statues of the great can only grant a popular name so much mileage; building on their work ensures that the legacy lives on. **N**



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Born To Rock

Iman Shah certainly believes in the age-old adage, “Do what you love and you’ll never have to work a day.”

BY YASHAS VAIDYA

In the heart of the city at Lainchaur, shielded from the bustle of nearby Thamel, is a place of tranquility and music. An old white building with a “Studio” sign on the entrance is home to BMI Studios. Here you’ll find Iman Shah at work. He’ll be fiddling with the volume control knobs, feet tapping to the beat of the music; a multi-track recorder in front of him, various instruments lie all around. On a given day you might find him working on all sorts of music. Shah says, “Artists from different schools of music use our recording facilities. I don’t hold prejudices against any kind of music. Good music is always good music.” He has worked with rock, classical and pop artists. “I make it a point to listen up on the type of music I’m working on,” Shah continues, “or else I feel like I’m cheating the artist I’m working with.” Even so he says, “My heart is still in rock music because that’s what I grew up with.”

Co-owner of BMI Studios and chief audio engineer, Shah is a towering figure

in the Nepali rock scene and has worked with quite a few rock bands. Big names include Nepathya, Mukti and Revival and Robin N’ Looza; he has also worked with bands emerging from the underground Nepali rock scene.

Shah started playing the guitar at the age of 15 with his high school band, The Vegetarian Vampires. In the late 90’s Shah played with different underground bands. They covered the usual fare: Iron Maiden, Metallica and Deep Purple. Even though there are a large number of rock concerts these days, Shah believes that the underground concert scene was better then. “People didn’t have much else to do, no cable TV. So whenever there was a concert, lots of people would turn out. Now there’s only a limited concert-going crowd.”

In 1991 he went to the United States and continued to play the club and college circuit there with his band, In Transit. He got hold of some recording equipment to record with his own band, and was hooked to the art of mixing and producing music. After five years in the recording business in the United States,

he came back to Nepal in 1998. After a year, he started Sacred Soundz but became fully involved in commercial recording only with the establishment of BMI Studios in 2002.

Many premier and up-and-coming rock bands prefer to work with him because of his rich experience. He is not only an experienced audio engineer, but also doubles up as a producer. An audio engineer, he explains, is responsible for bringing out the sound that the artist wants. A producer creatively directs bands towards achieving the sound they want. “It’s their sound. I only help in bringing it out.” And that he does pretty well, having had a hand in many big hits, including Nepathya’s “Sa Karnali” and “Bhoolma Bhulyo” by Robin N’ Looza.

So what is the seasoned rocker’s take on the state of Nepali rock music? “There is no real market for pure or hard rock,” he says, “but rock music covers a wide spectrum these days.” The many sub-genres like metal, punk, alternative, fusion and so on have garnered mass appeal worldwide. The offshoots are gaining ground in Nepal too. Nepathya’s new album “Bhedako Unjasto” fuses rock with traditional music from various parts of Nepal, creating, to use Shah’s term, “folk rock.”

Despite the variety of styles and the creativity of some artists, Shah sees Nepali music suffering a creative relapse. He attributes this, to among other things,

the rise of “MTV culture, music being watched rather than listened to. All of the music is beginning to sound the same. There’s not much creativity anymore.”

After more than a decade in the recording business, Shah thinks he still has a long way to go. “You keep on learning,” he says. “There is a chance I will learn something new every time I work with a new artist.” Creating music is an unending process. “Music requires dedication, effort all the way through. There are no shortcuts.” For Shah, music is not work. It’s his way of life. **N**



SS/ANU

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Nepal's Pipedream

Given the attractions the west offers for the new rich in China, not least the direct air links, more and more Chinese are likely to opt for vacations in Paris and London than in Pokhara and Langtang

BY TRAILOKYA RAJ ARYAL IN BEIJING

Although Nepal was declared a tourist destination by the Chinese government and a tourism agreement was signed between the two countries in November 2001, it has failed to attract Chinese tourists. The reason: the government and the tourism entrepreneurs aren't doing enough.

While our government and entrepreneurs wait for a miracle that would bring the Chinese tourists to Nepal, the Chinese tourists are already on their way to other destinations in Asia and, more recently, in Europe.

As the Chinese middle class continues to grow, each year more and more Chinese are vacationing abroad. According to data published by the China National Tourism Administration, between 1992 and 2002, there was almost a five-fold increase in the number of Chinese traveling abroad. In 1992, around 3.5-4 million Chinese did so. But in 2002 that figure rose to almost 20 million, the majority headed to such destinations as Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia; and 645,000 to Europe. The number of Chinese traveling to Europe is likely to increase in coming years as some European countries have already relaxed their visa rules regulations for Chinese tourists and many others are in the process of doing so.

In February 2004, the Chinese government and the EU signed a tourism agreement that would make it easier for the Chinese tourists to travel to the destinations approved by the Chinese government.

The Chinese tourists will soon have as many as 50 destinations to choose from. Given the attractions the west offers for the new rich in China, not least the direct air links, more and more Chinese are likely to opt for vacations in Paris and London than in Pokhara and Langtang. China Daily quotes the Managing Director of China Outbound Travel Agency as saying, "Many Chinese tourists will likely visit Europe in coming years to experience a different culture. Plus, it will be easier to travel to Europe because of the direct air links." There is as strong a "pull factor" as well. Unlike our government, RNAC, Nepal Association of Travel Agents (NATA) and Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), the European countries and their travel agents are not just waiting for a miracle that would bring Chinese tourists to their countries. The Europeans have launched ag-

gressive promotion campaigns in Chinese cities. Many have already established their Tourist Information Offices, and increased their flights in China. Finair, which entered the Chinese Market in September 2003 with a weekly flight to Shanghai, will soon have a total of 15 flights a week from various Chinese cities. Other airlines are also either increasing their flights or offering attractive packages to the Chinese tourists.

All this means, we are losing our market to new destinations in Europe. Our RNAC does fly twice a week to Shanghai, but the flights are more like refueling stops on the Kathmandu-Osaka-Kathmandu route. To make the matters worse, constant delays (thanks to the depleting fleet) are common.

Sometimes a single flight delay extends up to three days and sometimes the air links are suspended for more than two months. The NTB does organize tourism fairs in Beijing and Shanghai but they have not been effective because of lack of coordination with the local media and travel agents. As a matter of fact, hardly anyone knows about these fairs and many promotional materials—posters, brochures and CDs—are left in the Embassy to gather dust. Unsurprisingly, the promotions have hardly made any impression on people in big cities like Beijing, Shenzhen and Shanghai. The NTB seems content to harp on the fact that there was an increase in the Chinese tourists traveling to Nepal in the beginning of this year, even though the increase is too insignificant given China's vast potential as a tourist market.

NATA, for its part, doesn't seem to be doing much either. Instead of sitting idle or participating in ineffective tourism campaigns with NTB, it should play an aggressive role and not just rely on the government and its subsidiaries to bring in more Chinese tourists. It should establish ties with the Chinese travel agencies and airlines (an MoU on air routes has already been signed between China and Nepal) and enter into a profit-sharing agreement with them, just like the travel agencies from the west are doing here. Also it should ask the government to provide the same preferential treatment to the Chinese tourists that it provides to the Indians. Time is running out for Nepal. At this rate, attracting even the modest target of 120,000 tourists a year seems a *hong liang mei meng*, a pipedream. It's a pity we aren't doing enough to tap a huge market next door. **N**

(Aryal is a student of International Relations at Peking University in Beijing.)



RNAC: Depleted fleet

CITY This Week

EVENTS



Just Divine Night

Enjoy the hottest Latin music around. Date: July 17. Time: 7 p.m. At the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. Tickets: Rs. 500, including 1 complimentary Jack Daniel's whiskey. Attire: Red/Black. For information: 9851056697, 9851068871

For information: 4491234, extension 5230.

Celebrating 25 years

At Shangri la Hotel, Lazimpat. Enter the dragon: Hong Kong Style. July 17 and 18. For information: 4412999

Monsoon Splash

Enjoy the Monsoon with the monsoon grind. At the Mahendra Police Club. Date: July 16. Time: 1 p.m. Tickets: Rs. 200

Eat Cake!!

Let children express themselves by decorating their own cake. At the Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency. Date: July 17.



ART EXHIBITIONS

Secret Moments

An exhibition of paintings by Bhairaj Maharjan. Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. Till July 15. Time: 11 a.m. – 6 p.m. For information: 4218048

Monsoon Exhibition

An array of paintings by various artists. Park Gallery, Lazimpat and Park Gallery, Pulchowk. For information: 4419353, 5522307

ONGOING

All That Jazz

Presenting the JCS Trio and the best of jazz in Nepal. At the Fusion Bar, Dwarika's Hotel. Every Friday. Time: 7p.m. Tickets: Rs. 555. For information: 4479488.

Live Music

Catch Hits FM award winning singer Dimple and his band Full Circle live. At The Bakery Cafe, Jawalakhel. Every Friday. Time: 7 p.m. For information: 4434554

Grand Slam Offer

The dual tennis court packages a dual delight of tennis plus breakfast. At Godavari Village Resort. Tickets: Rs. 444. Prior reservations recommended. For information: 5560675

Thakali cuisine

Enjoy a Thakali lunch with two kinds of curry and great phapar Dhindo from Mustang and many other items. Thakali Thasang Kitchen. Time: 10 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. For information: 4224144.

Earthwatch

Have a farmhouse breakfast with birds, lunch with butterflies and dinner with fireflies, at Park Village. At Park Village Restaurant, Budhanilkantha. For information: 4375280

Dwarika's Thali

Enjoy Nepali cuisine for lunch and hospitality. At Dwarika's Courtyard, Dwarika's Hotel. For info: 4479488

BBQ Dinner

Enjoy Summit's Barbeque dinner along with vegetarian specials. At the Summit Hotel. For information: 5521810.

BAGMATI RIVER FESTIVAL

Following the success of the previous Bagmati River festivals, the Nepal River Conservation Trust (NRCT) and Sustainable Tourism Network (STN) are organizing the 4th Bagmati River Festival from June 5 to August 21. The project hopes to draw public attention to the critically degraded condition of the Bagmati River, and provide a platform for action. The program organizers hope that the various groups and individuals in Kathmandu who are concerned about the condition of the Bagmati River will come get involved in the festival and make it their festival.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS YOU CAN CATCH

Heritage Walk at Teku-Thapathali and Shankhamul. Date: July 17. Time: 8 - 10 a.m. **Live Music Concert.** At Moksh. Date: July 17. Time: 7 – 9 p.m. **Cycle Rally** from Chobhar – Balaju. Date: July 18. Starts at 8 a.m. Coorganized by: Lions Club Kathmandu Insight. For information: 4412508

Rafting (open to public) at nominal charges at the Bagmati River (Sundarijal-Gokarna). Every weekend in July. Time: 8 - 11 p.m. For information: 4435207 (NRCT), 4256909(STN) or the respective co-organizer(s) or check out the website www.nepalrivers.org.np



SS/ANU



Don't Celebrate Yet

The presidential election in November will be the mother of all election battles. Democrats sound confident of victory but it may be too early to celebrate

BY SUSHMA JOSHI

July 4th is an American holiday that doesn't mean much to a Nepali passing by. But this year, as I watched fireworks explode over Lake Champlain near the Canadian border, I felt it. July 4, 1776 was the date of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Drafted by Thomas Jefferson, it laid out reasons why the Americans were finally sick and tired of the British king. As America goes through "extraordinary times" with a president who often seems more nominated than elected, that document takes on special significance.

I have been in and out of America for a dozen years, and have clear memories of only two 4th of Julies, giving a hint about how important the Declaration of Independence was in my scheme of things. One is the time when I was sitting in a bar in Juneau, Alaska, eating a plate of the most delicious, smoked, barbecued, and sauced ribs of—cow meat.

The second time was halfway around the continent, in a small town next to Providence, Rhode Island. As I walked down the crowded streets, my friend spotted the mayor and rushed over to shake hands with him. This was no ordinary mayor, but Mayor Vincent Cianci—a cult figure who has managed to rule Rhode Island like the Godfather for three decades. Cianci was a popular and charismatic man—not only did he clean up downtown and bring in Venetian style gondolas to float down a once-abandoned waterway, he also featured in a television series called "Providence" and even started his own brand of pasta sauce that sold well in the heavily Italian immigrant community of Rhode Island. But like the Godfather, Cianci had his darker side—it was common knowledge that he was heavily corrupt, and he had once arranged for thugs to beat up—and torture with a lit cigarette—a man who had slept with his wife.

The rule of Cianci appeared never-ending. Like all leaders in power who are known to be corrupt but who still sustain approval and followers due to the magic of power, Cianci kept on getting re-elected, in spite of overwhelming evidence of kickbacks and bribes in his government. Studies have been done about the psychology of people who blindly follow a charismatic leader. Hitler was one of those charismatic creatures, albeit in a twisted way. This is the factor—charisma—that worries me when I think about the upcoming American election in November. The liberals, I feel, are too smug about their forthcoming win, too sure Bush will be ousted. America is a strange can of worms, and I wouldn't celebrate the end of President Bush—just yet.

Take the man who drove me from the airport. He was a good, honest, God-fearing man. He had worked all his life at a medical insurance company, and had six children who he had put through school. All of them were hard workers, except for the middle son who was unem-

ployed. He was retired, he said. He didn't need the money, but still worked part-time driving the van. "Are you going to vote for Mr. Bush?" I asked. He looked at me and for a tiny, infinitesimal moment, sensing the irony of "Mr. Bush," he nodded, "Yes, I am going to."

"And I will tell you why," he said. "Mr. Bush is a good Christian man. He had the guts to stand up to Saddam Hussein and call his bluff when nobody—not the United Nations or Europe—were willing to touch him. I respect his courage."

It wasn't that this man was uneducated, or unintelligent. Far from it. He was, in fact, frightening like the mass of Americans—good, hard-working, middle class Christians, who would form the majority of the Middle America voting bloc.

It was too late in the night to argue about the harm Bush had done to America, and the world—the billions of dollars that were cut from education and healthcare to wage a costly and bloody war against Iraq, a country already beaten down with sanctions and a tyrannical ruler; the war against terror that had become a war against immigrants and the poor; the countless ways in which the law was suppressed, information was hidden from the public, and the constitution ignored in order to further the oil-grabbing schemes of a clique of powerful millionaires. I paid my money, thanked the driver and let him go.

Not all tyrants last forever. Especially in America, the clear-eyed

respect for the law is written in black ink in the Declaration of Independence, and comes back to catch men who thought they had committed the perfect crime. Cianci was accused of running a criminal enterprise from City Hall that collected more than \$2 million in kickbacks and bribes in exchange for contracts,

leases and city jobs over a nine-year period. An FBI probe collected enough evidence to convict Cianci of racketeering conspiracy and send him to a federal prison in New Jersey for five years and four months. The world waits with bated breath to know when this process will catch up with Mr. Bush. But the Democrats, it feels, are too confident about winning. This will be the mother of all election battles where charisma and Christianity (the evangelical kind), blind faith and ideological divides will rule the day. It may be too early to start popping open the champagne. If badly timed, the world may have to wait four more agonizing and destructive years before they get to drink it. **N**



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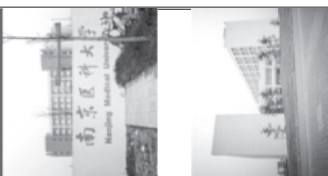
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Fist Of Fury

Taekwondo star, Sangina Baidya is probably the most successful Nepali athlete, at least in Olympian terms. In February, she bagged bronze in the Asian Regional Taekwondo Qualification Tournament in Bangkok and with it a place in the 2004 Athens Olympic Games. In doing so, she became the first Nepali athlete to

actually qualify for the Olympics. She was named Player of the Year by Nepal Sports Journalists' Forum. She was also awarded the Trishakti Patta on the King's 58th Birthday last week. With just more than a month to go for the Olympics, **Yashas Vaidya** of **Nation Weekly** spoke with Sangina about her preparations and hopes for the upcoming Olympics.

What do you think your chances are of winning a medal in Athens?

Only the top players from around the world make it to the Games. So the competition is going to be tough. Asian players are considered among the best in the world, so I am in with a chance. But nothing can be said with certainty. A lot depends on the tie-sheet. It will be decided in that ring itself.

How does it feel to be showered with so many laurels?

To be given such recognition means a lot to me. It has definitely come as a boost for the upcoming Olympiad.

You are the first Nepali to have qualified for the Olympics?

I am very proud to be representing my country at the Games. I guess that it is the ultimate dream of any athlete to represent his/her country at the biggest international sporting event. Ever since I achieved success at the Asian Taekwondo Championships, I have had this belief that I am capable of competing in the Olympics. With that in mind, I have worked hard and trained accordingly to fulfill that dream.

People say you cannot make a living out of sports in Nepal?

Most people do not see a future in sports, but I feel it is possible. There is a pre-condition though — you need to get the results. It depends on your caliber as well. It is possible, but it needs to be backed up by hard work, determination and discipline. You need some measure of success to survive in this field.

You have received tremendous backing from the private sector as well...

I have been chosen by six companies to be their brand ambassador. I think it is the

I was approached by television channels sometime back to work for them as a sports anchor

first time in Nepal that an athlete has been selected as a brand ambassador. Private sector companies showing an interest in sports is a positive development. It will help motivate the younger athletes. It is not that Nepali athletes lack talent, hard work or determination; the right kind of support has not existed till now. This is a good beginning and continuity must be given to it.

How was it in the beginning, learning martial arts?

I had an interest in martial arts from my childhood. I've always been a big fan of Bruce Lee's. In the beginning, it was slightly uncomfortable, few girls in the

midst of a large number of boys. But I became the National Champion after three months of my taking up taewando. So that was a definite boost. Martial arts is tough. But once I got the hang of it, it was alright.

So how is Sangina's training regime like?

Stamina is very important. You need to be able to last for 90 minutes in the ring. So in the mornings, I train to improve my stamina and strength. It basically involves running long distances, sprinting, speed training, power training and so on. In the evening, I work on my technique with sparring matches and the like. I trained in South Korea for a month. But my health suffered a bit so I came back to rest. I'll be continuing my training from this week or so.

How long do you plan to continue competing?

I will continue till I am allowed by my health and physically fit to do so. I'll wait until the Olympics are over to decide. I might try my hand at coaching, open an academy of some sort to train players for the national team.

How about trying your luck elsewhere, maybe the media?

I was approached by television channels sometime back to work for them as a sports anchor. But I felt I needed to concentrate on the Olympics at that time, so I didn't give it much thought. I am positive towards it and might think about it after the Olympics. But right now, I am concentrating fully on the Olympics. **N**

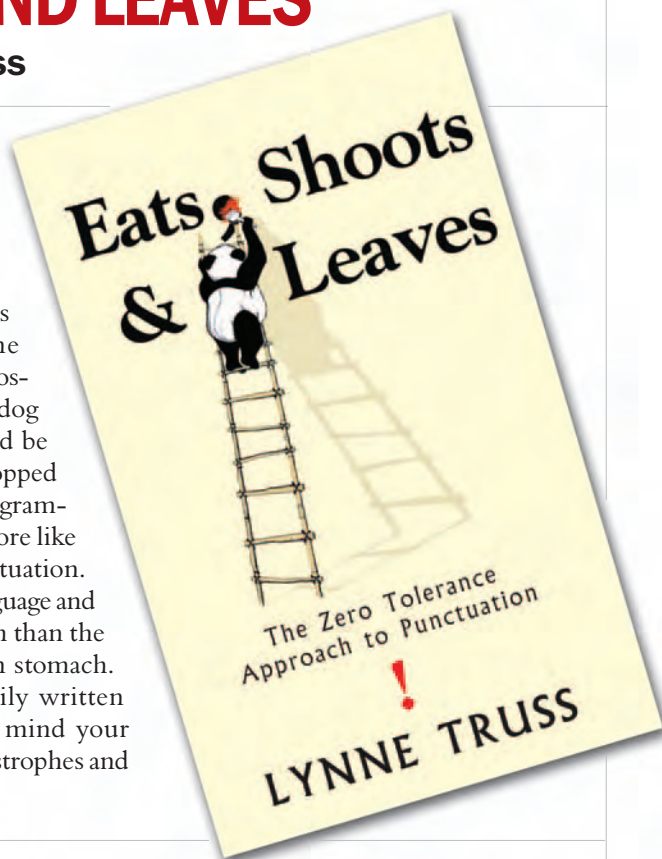
EATS, SHOOTS AND LEAVES

By Lynne Truss

Here's an anecdote you've heard: A panda walked into a café. He ordered a sandwich, ate it, then pulled out a gun and shot the waiter. "Why?" groaned the injured man. The panda shrugged, tossed him a badly punctuated wildlife manual and walked out. And sure enough, when the waiter consulted the book, he found an explanation. "Panda," ran the entry for his assailant. "Large black and white mammal native to China. Eats, shoots and leaves."

This book by writer and journalist Lynne Truss on punctuation aims to keep from people from making exactly such gross errors in punctuation in daily life (leaving out the panda bit maybe). It doesn't do so by explaining the principles of the apostrophe, the comma or the semi-colon. Instead the author em-

ploy a chatty tone sprinkling the text with wit, humor and bits of history on punctuation (like "the first semicolon appeared in 1494"). (At one point Truss recommends that anyone putting an apostrophe in a possessive "its" – as in "the dog chewed it's bone" – should be struck by lightning and chopped to bits.) It's not exactly a grammar book, but is written more like a self-help book on punctuation. Beware though, Truss's language and humor are oft more British than the average English reader can stomach. Overall though this wittily written little book will help you mind your commas, semi-colons, apostrophes and the like. **N**



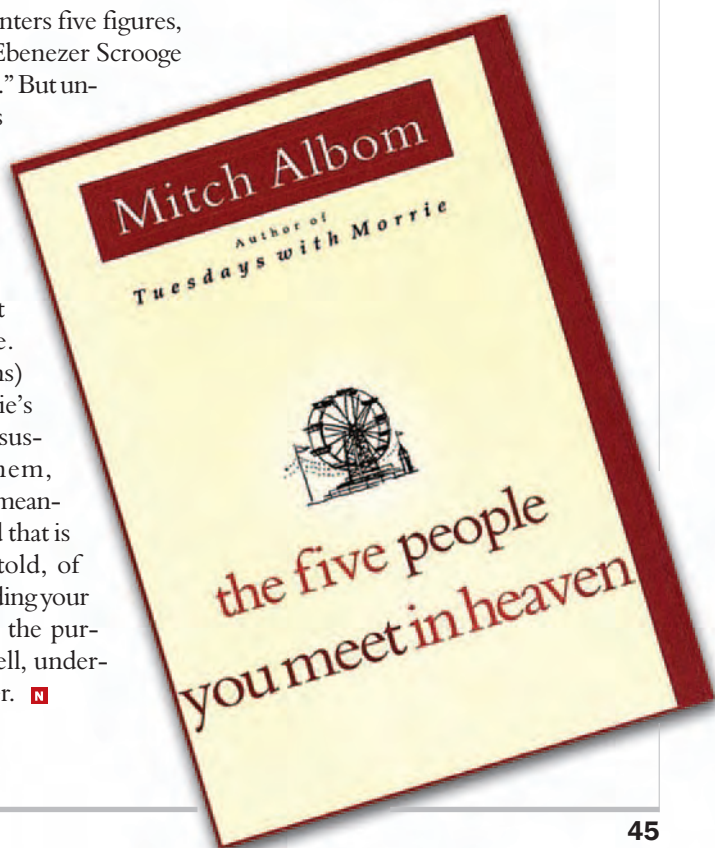
THE FIVE PEOPLE YOU MEET IN HEAVEN

By Mitch Albom

This is the first novel by columnist and radio talk show host Mitch Albom, the author of the #1 International bestseller "Tuesdays with Morrie." This book tells the story of "workingman" and wounded war veteran Eddie, "a white-haired old man, with a short neck, a barrel chest, thick forearms and a faded army tattoo on his right shoulder." He lives an embittered old age, "his days are a dull routine of work, loneliness and regret," working as a maintenance worker at an amusement park. As the story opens, Eddie is only an hour away from his death. His story "begins at the end" with Eddie dying on his 83rd birthday trying to save a little girl. "But all endings are also beginnings, we just don't know it at that time," or so we are told. So begins Eddie's story of life in the afterlife. Eddie reaches heaven and finds out that there are five people you meet in heaven, who explain your life to you.

He sequentially encounters five figures, pivotal in his life, à la Ebenezer Scrooge in the "Christmas Carol." But unlike Scrooge who is given a chance at life again, this fateful meeting occurs after Eddie's life. Each of them was in his life for a reason; only he didn't know it at that time. Their lives (and deaths) were woven into Eddie's own in ways he never suspected. Through them, Eddie understands the meaning of his own life. And that is the purpose, we are told, of heaven: "for understanding your life on earth." Such is the purpose of this book as well, understanding your life better. **N**

Compiled by Yashas Vaidya





Seize The Day

The past three governments—including Prime Minister Deuba's own in 2001—have been guilty of overselling the idea of peace to a gullible public. The dangers of raising public expectations are obvious: when reality bites, you leave the public apathetic to the peace process. No government (or the State) that's fighting for survival can afford that.

Regretfully, all three governments that have sat over the peace processes lacked a clear-cut roadmap of where they wanted to go. Unsurprisingly, it was never clear what they really expected of the Maoists, who at least seemed hell-bent on their agenda: getting the constituent assembly. Almost all the people who have closely followed the two previous peace processes in various capacities tell us this: in the absence of a roadmap, the governments would alternately vacillate from being too soft to too tough, their center of gravity clearly missing. We give a lot of weight to this theory because it is the one consistent message emerging from people of diverse political backgrounds: from Padma Ratna Tuladhar, Bhekh Bahadur Thapa to Deuba's own trusted aide, Minendra Rijal. Indeed, as Thapa puts it, when there is no rigorous homework, the peace process is held hostage to individual whims and fancies. In November 2001, Deuba, was shocked when the Maoists walked out of the first peace process. His close aides now concede Deuba counted heavily on his strong personal chemistry with the Maoist supremo, Prachanda, rather than binding the NCP(Maoist) and the peace process to a mutually agreed roadmap.

Many others believe it was the grand public posturing (by both the government officials and the Maoist leaders) that dealt a mortal blow last year to the fragile peace process, which needed to be nurtured in private. Once opposing sides start taking swipes at each other publicly, the civilized discourse inside the room gets invariably muddled by what transpires outside. The Maoists and the officials, including that of the Royal Nepal Army, were on a warpath, well before the talks broke down on August 27. The peace process was "brain dead," well before the fateful Hapure rounds.

As a newspaper ourselves, we would like to take a critical view of the press coverage too. Much like our gaffe-prone, publicity-hounding, public-posturing politicians, the media seemed to have developed a despicable fixation for playing up rhetorical differences. The cool-headed detachment from the subject at hand, the media's ultimate virtue, was routinely abandoned for the sensational. Indeed, we became part of the problem ourselves; so enmeshed were we in the war of words. Have we learnt our lessons? Perhaps, not. Two recent incidents, both involving Nepali Congress veterans, come to our mind. On his return from a private visit to New Delhi recently, K. P. Bhattarai was asked what he thought of the new four-party government. Bhattarai dismissed the coalition with characteristic banter, only to find his comments land on the front pages the next day. The same goes for Koirala's recent pronouncements that he wants to initiate dialogue with the Maoists, a story that continues to hog headlines. As journalists, are we just fixated with stories that we want to believe?

Nation Weekly brings all this to public realm, not because we don't see the Nepali Congress' role in the peace process. Far from it. We have argued in these pages that support from the political parties, and indeed that of the Nepali Congress, will be crucial if a peace process is to thrive. We decry personal whims and fancies because we have seen the peace process founder due to their strong centrifugal pulls.

While to some extent these things are unavoidable, even desirable, in a democracy, we expect the political parties, the State and the Maoists not to lose sight of the substantive issues at hand. We urge the new government and such key actors, as the Royal Nepal Army and the Royal Palace, to work towards that end: start laying the groundwork for a substantive roadmap. Now that a full-fledged Cabinet has taken office, get on with the job without further ado. Seize the initiative.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor

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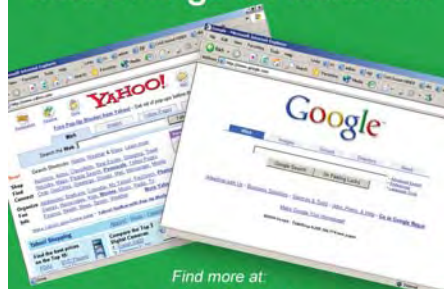
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