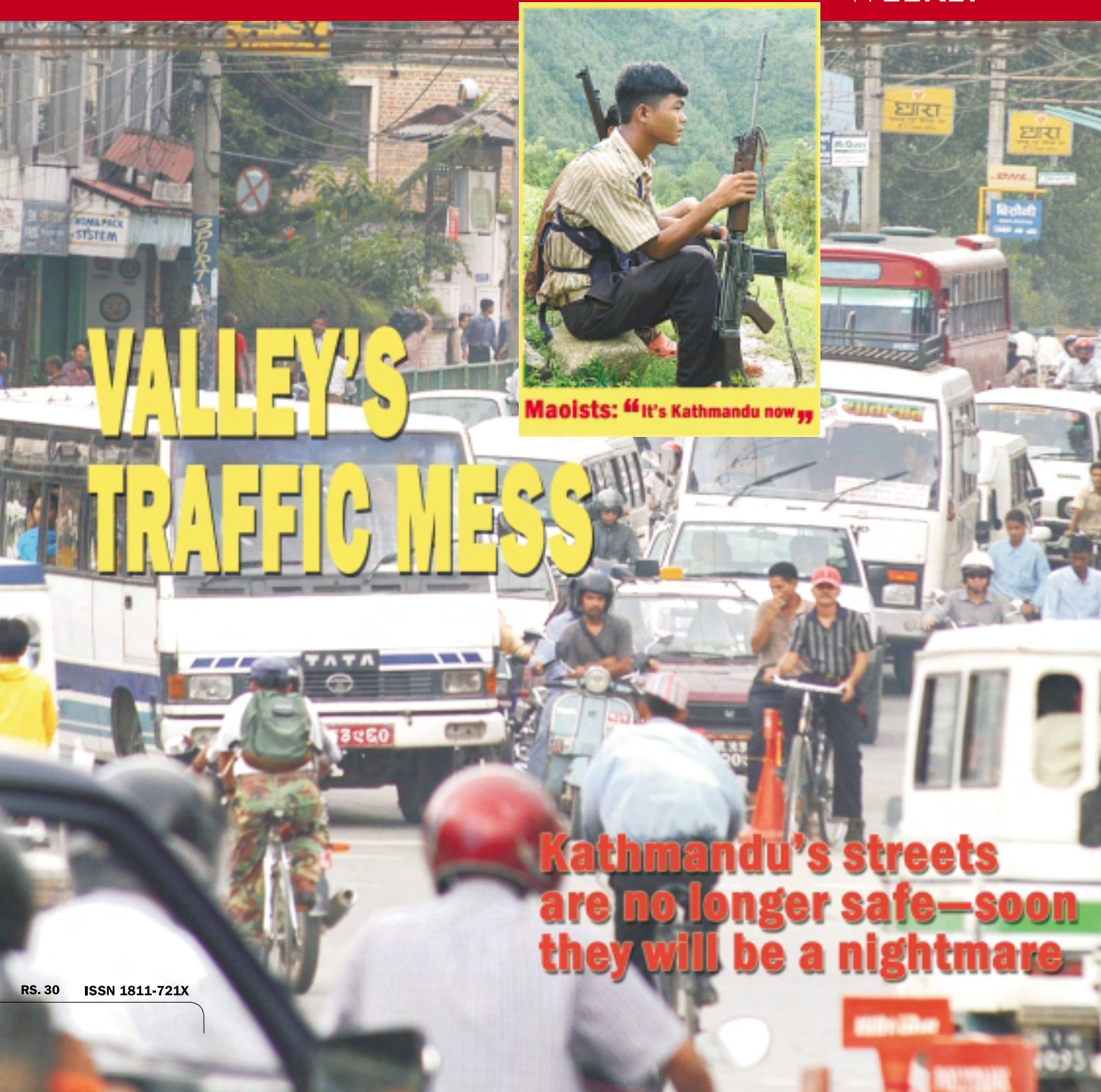


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WEEKLY



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A GREAT NEWSPAPER



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Letters



“ A political leader plays the role of the captain of a ship ”

BANDITA SIJAPATI

Poor picture

THIS IS REGARDING SAGAR SHRESTHA's "Picture of the Week," where Chief of Army Staff Pyar Jung Thapa takes a salute from a fresh woman graduate of the Royal Nepal Army (August 15). All



of my family members have come to look forward to his weekly pictures. But whatever happened to this particular picture? We don't want to see those kinds of "flat" pictures and I hope you will keep that in mind. My eight-year-old son, who otherwise loves the weekly pick, always has something nice to say about "Picture of the Week." Last week, he was disappointed, much like I was. He said, "This is not good. What is so great about this picture?" In saying so, he articulated my own thoughts about why the picture was there in the first place. That, by the way, is the only page all the family members enjoy and my son eagerly looks forward to every Monday morning. Give us something more eye catching and meaningful. It doesn't always have to be just the

people—it can as well be some telling scenes. I am, rather we are, waiting to see more of Shrestha's great work. No weekly routine please.

POONAM MALLA
JAWALAKHEL

Disappointing arguments

WITH REGARD TO DANIELLA A. Ponce's article "Unrealistic Expectations," I too was disappointed by the fact that promising student leaders like Gururaj Ghimire and Gagan Thapa were ousted by the Nepali Congress for voicing opinions that did not correspond with those of the mother organization (Guest Column, August 8). As Ponce points out, this incident indeed signifies the weakness of our polity. But having said that, I find some of her arguments to be fairly unconvincing.

To begin with, Ponce should have spelt out what she means by civil society. By definition, civil society constitutes citizen groups, religious organizations, students' groups, community groups, etc. But, unfortunately, in the



context of Nepal, the mantle of civil society has been appropriated by NGOs, and because in almost all cases they have to rely on donor support to survive, their activities are automatically limited by the donors' mandate. Other civil society groups are equally circumscribed. To take the example of student groups, which could have been the flag-bearers of civil society and which do not face the limitations that I have alluded to. They are so highly politicized by their links to political parties that they are more a part of political society than of civil society. The same is true for various professional organizations in the country. Hence, it seems quite unrealistic to expect "civil society" to act as catalysts of political change in Nepal in the way Ponce prescribes.

Second, Ponce argues that "good leaders" cannot emerge "in authoritative regimes." Again, we need to define what a "good leader" is. Can good leadership be equated with Gandhi and Mandela alone? Or, can perhaps Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir Mohammed be counted as "good leaders" as well? Without endorsing the character of their regimes or their resorting to "Asian values" to cloak their authoritarianism, one has to admit that they succeeded in bringing prosperity to their countries within just one generation. The most powerful slogan used by political parties in Nepal is "*gaas, baas, kapaas*." Singapore and Malaysia have certainly fulfilled those minimal expectations and more. In various dictatorships in Africa, South and Central America and South Asia, "authoritative regimes" have failed thoroughly but that has more to do with leadership qualities than the systems that supported them.

Finally, Ponce claims that the "ballot box performs the ultimate miracle as it votes bad leaders off." Since the saying "Politics is the last refuge of scoundrels" rings very true for countries like ours, where are the good politicians to vote for come election time? Her comment about the need for "a new democratic polity which has inbuilt mechanisms of checks and balances" sounds even more idealistic than the wait for a Gandhi or a Mandela. Chile may be successfully experimenting with its new polity but let us not forget that the country that conceived of these democratic innovations

of checks and balances has George W. Bush leading it after more than two centuries. Or, does Ponce count Bush among the "good leaders"?

Good leadership certainly depends on an interaction between leadership qualities and the sociopolitical situation. I do not think that Nepalis are waiting for a Gandhi or a Mandela to surface and cure all our ills. But it is particularly in such unstable times of popular protests, weak institutions, economic crisis, war, as Nepal is currently undergoing, that effective leadership becomes necessary: something that has yet to be discerned in anyone currently in the political arena, from the Maoists to the King. As Plato observed in "The Republic," a political leader plays the role of the captain of a ship—during times of political upheaval, a good leader guides the political system to a certain objective in the same manner that the captain steers the ship toward a safe port in a rough sea.

Let us not lament Gururaj and Gagan's dismissal too much because it is particularly during these times of political change that political leaders with strong motives, keen perceptions and effective political skills have the greatest opportunity to act decisively and prove their leadership. After all, we need to see if Gagan Thapa and Gururaj Ghimire deserve the credit that students bestowed upon them during the interviews that Ponce conducted.

BANDITA SJPAPATI
KATHMANDU

Above the law?

MANY OF YOUR ARTICLES ARE WELL written and thought provoking. I especially liked the cover story on your August 8 issue ("Not Above Law," by John Narayan Parajuli). The main inference is perhaps how powerless the CIAA is. The other side of the coin: How corrupt is our system where thugs, who have made billions for themselves, are left scot-free? A pity, right? So long as the Special Court's verdict to penalize Chiranjivi Wagle remains in cold storage, we cannot expect much. If you want to make a point, why wait?

AMRIT K.C.
BISHALNAGAR

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only of use there that it may

Of the

pass on and come to

its flower and fruit in manners

in the highest forms of interaction

between people and

their beliefs

For the

— in religion, literature,

colleges and schools —

democracy in all public

and private life. ”

Walt Whitman

By the

POLITICS

SPORTS

ARTS & SOCIETY

OPINION

DEVELOPMENT

EDUCATION

CIVIL CONFLICT

BUSINESS



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THE NOTION
OF NATIONHOOD.

EVERY MONDAY

Picture of the Week



GUILTY: Famed international criminal Charles Sobhraj was given a life sentence by the Kathmandu District Court

nation weekly/Sagar Shrestha



Secretary Of Peace

Under the Peace Secretariat will be an “expert group” and a “peace negotiating team.” The latter, whose members will remain a secret, will do the actual talking with the Maoists.

BY SUMAN PRADHAN

After some dithering, the government has finally decided to form a “Peace Secretariat.” The Cabinet took the formal decision last week.

This is good, for Nepal needs both the peace and the secretariat to push for that peace. But no amount of pushing for peace by any secretariat will give results if political will at the top is lacking. For these reasons, the government was right to put the secretariat under political leadership, with the Cabinet secretary functioning as the point-man between the politicians and the professional peace-mongers housed in the secretariat below.

From what I’ve understood from various government officials, the secretariat is structured along these lines: Top leaders of the four governing coalition partners, plus the King’s nominee Mohammed Mohsin, will form the apex body—formally called the High-level Peace Committee Nepal—of the secretariat which will be led by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. The chief Cabinet secretary will serve as the ex-officio member of this apex body.

Two distinct but different arms will operate just under the apex body. One will be a so-called “group of experts” which will be staffed by politicians, experts, researchers and analysts. The other will be the “peace negotiating team” staffed by actual negotiators who will do the talking with the Maoists. Members of the negotiating team will be kept a closely-guarded secret, lest leaks and posturing derail the peace process.

The composition of the apex body is interesting. Aside from the five major politicians and chief Cabinet secretary, there is also room in it for Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala if he decides to seek membership there. But there is no room, at this moment, for the other opposition politicians from the Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party, Nepal Sadbhavana Party-Anandi and Jana Morcha Nepal. There is also no room for the Hariyali Party, the Samata Party, the Left Front and the dozen or so other parties which purport to be the true voice of the people. This is a bad start because, these “minor” parties may be small but they are big enough to disrupt the peace process if they so choose.

The “expert group” is being envisioned as the workhorse of the secretariat. Its main job will be to do research and analyses on the various causes and shape of the conflict and feed that research to the negotiating team. The expert group is also expected to liaise and coordinate with civil society and other stakeholders so that their point of view is also passed on to the negotiating team. Above all, it is expected to serve as a repository of institutional memory so that negotiators don’t have to start from scratch every time the peace process is derailed. The group of negotiators itself will remain invisible, doing most of their work in secret. Only after the basic grounds of understanding with the Maoists have been prepared, will they come out in the open. Or so the thinking goes.

By the looks of it, this all sounds like a great idea. But I have one question. What if the government changes mid-stream? What if, by some quirk of Article 127, the Deuba coalition is booted out and in comes the Koirala coalition (or any number of other coalitions that can arise out of

Nepal’s bizarre politics)? What if?

What I’m talking about is continuity. An incoming governing coalition usually likes to undo everything done by its predecessors. The temptation to change and re-arrange the group of experts and negotiating team will therefore be strong, particularly when the new coalition will have someone else to please.

Changing and re-arranging the key arms of the peace secretariat may not necessarily be bad, but it would be disruptive. If the disruption occurs during a crucial

stage—say, when Mr. A Bahadur is negotiating a ceasefire with rebel leader Mr. B Kumar, and the new coalition decides to change Mr. A Bahadur—it could be catastrophic. Successful negotiations don’t always occur like a chess game in an aseptic, clinical manner (though in many ways it is a chess game). There is also an element of trust and personal chemistry involved, which can only be built over time. For this reason, making the apex body an exclusive club is a bad idea.

Wouldn’t it be nice if all parties, major or minor, agreed to allow everyone else to be represented in the apex group? Then, even if the unthinkable government-change happens at regular intervals, at least the apex body will remain the same and, hopefully, so will the experts’ group and negotiating team. **N**

suman66@hotmail.com





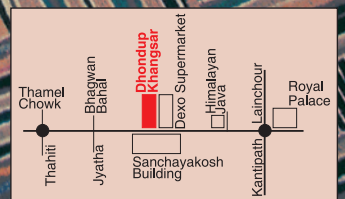
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PIC SPEAK: Bangladeshi photographer Shaidul Alam (right) addresses a workshop on photography

KC in custody

Top leaders of Maoist-affiliated ANNFSU-Revolutionary are in the Army's custody, Kantipur reported, quoting an unnamed source. Former Vice President Krishna KC, General Secretary Himad Sharma and Desh Limbu are reportedly being held at the Bhairabnath barrack. Earlier, when the Supreme Court ordered the Army to furnish the National Human Rights Commission with details about KC's whereabouts in response to a petition filed by KC's relatives, the Army said he was not in its custody.

Children return

The Delhi-based NGO Bachpan Bachao Andolan returned nine Nepali girls rescued from The Great Roman Circus of Gonda, Uttar Pradesh. They were handed over to their parents at the Sunauli checkpoint in Rupandehi. All nine were aged below 14. The organization estimates that there are over 30 Nepali children in the circus. A number of Nepali children who were rescued earlier have already returned to their homes.

NC convention

The Central Working Committee of the Nepali Congress (NC) decided to hold its 11th General Convention from March 2 to 5 in Birgunj. A five-member team headed by the party General Secretary Sushil Koirala suggested the date and venue. The

term of the CWC was extended by a year when the party was unable to organize its 11th convention last year. The extended term expires in mid-February 2005.

Massage parlors

Police raided massage parlors in Thamel and arrested 17 masseuses, 10 clients and four owners, including a Bangladeshi man. The police said they were arrested "red-handed" while they were involved in "illegal activities," meaning they were having sex. A large number of condoms were also seized from the massage centers. There have been reports that sexual activities in the massage parlors were increasing.

VDC resignations

Over 125 VDC secretaries in Dhading and Sarlahi resigned due to Maoist pressure. Ninety-three secretaries from Sarlahi submitted their resignation to the Local Development Officer Shankar Prasad Pandey. Another 32 VDC

secretaries from Dhading also resigned the same day.

Shah's promotion

The Cabinet decided to promote Deputy Inspector General of Police Amar Singh Shah to the post of assistant inspector general of police. Shah joined the police service as an inspector in 1978 and served in a UN peacekeeping mission. He has been posted at the National Security Council for the last eight months.

Metis arrest

Police arrested 39 male transvestites (metis) from Durbar Marg, Jamal and Sundhara, charging them with "immoral activities." Police said that they will be charged with a public offence. Police carried out raids on restaurants, bars and streets frequented by transgenders. All 39 were members of the Blue Diamond Society, a nongovernmental organization that provides HIV-prevention services and engages in advocacy for the rights of sexual minorities. Those arrested have been detained at Hanuman Dhoka police station. On July 12, the Supreme Court ordered the Home Ministry to show why the Blue Diamond Society should not be banned for advocating open homosexual activities. The ministry has still not responded to the court order. The ban would go against the right to freedom of expression and association, The New York-based Human Rights Watch said.

Petrol in Churia

Michael Watts, exploration director of Cairn Energy of England, and Dinesh Chandra Pyakurel, secretary at the Ministry of Industry Commerce and Supplies, signed an agreement to explore the availability of petroleum products in the Churia Range and Tarai. Cairn will invest \$70 million in this six-year project. According to the agreement, Nepal government would own 55 percent share if any discovery is made. The government would receive \$250,000 every year in the form of land rent. The company will have to submit the detailed project report within 30 days after the signing of the agreement and it will have to set up its offices in Nepal within three months.

Life sentence

Kathmandu District Court sentenced Charles Shobhraj Gurmukh to life imprisonment on charge of double counts of homicide—for the murders of one American and one Canadian in Kathmandu in December 1975. The court also ordered the confiscation of all his property. Police had filed the case against Shobhraj 10 months ago. The court, however, acquitted Shobhraj on the charge of using a fake passport. Shobhraj said he would appeal against the verdict at the Appellate Court.

Price hike

The government increased the prices of petroleum products. According to Cabinet decision, the price

of petrol has been fixed at Rs. 56 per liter, aviation fuel at Rs. 46 per liter and kerosene at Rs. 24 per liter. The price of cooking gas has increased by Rs. 25 per cylinder to Rs. 725. The four-rupee subsidy provided on kerosene has been cancelled. This is the first time that the government has increased the price of petroleum product in last 15 months, despite an upsurge in world prices. The International Monetary Fund had been pressing the government to increase the prices.



CIAA does encore

The Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) has filed cases against three former police chiefs—Achyut Krishna Kharel, Moti Lal Bohara and Pradip Shumsher JB Rana and—at the Special Court in Kathmandu. In a petition to the court, the CIAA accused them of amassing property disproportionate to their sources of income and abusing their authority while working as head of the Nepal Police. All three former police chiefs are said to be at large. The CIAA has demanded confiscation of “illegal properties” amassed by these former police chiefs, imposition of fines proportionate to their property and maximum possible jail sentences for all three.

Mine explosions

More than 280 people have died and 676 have been injured in Nepal over last six months due to landmine explosions. Among those killed, at least 120 were innocent civilians. The rest were security personnel or Maoists. Nearly 1,100 people have died in landmine explosions in Nepal since 1998. Both the security forces and Maoists use landmines. Nepal has yet to ratify the international convention to ban landmines.

Corporate Army?

The government has granted permission to the Royal Nepal Army to run industries, setup companies and launch projects in partnership with national and multinational companies. The Cabinet endorsed the RNA Welfare Trust Regulations 2004 allowing the Army to operate industries and companies. As per the regulations, the chief of the Army staff could set up an inquiry committee to probe into the activities of the trust, Spacetime Dainik reported.

Border check

India and Nepal have proposed the introduction of mandatory identification cards for their citizens crossing into each other's country. This they say is to make up for the absence of visa regulations. The step is being taken to check the influx of the Maoists from Nepal into India, news reports said. “We have proposed to introduce a reciprocal system of identification for everyone crossing the border,” an IANS news report filed from Lucknow quoted an Indian security official as saying.

Koshi dam

Nepal and India will establish a joint office in Biratnagar, which will commission a detailed project report to assess the feasibility of a high dam on the Koshi River in Chatara, Nepal. The project, reports say, will lessen floods in Bihar, boost irrigation, produce power and create a waterway between the two countries. The dam would also provide water for irrigating about 300,000 hectares of land in central and eastern Nepal. For Nepal, the project would also offer a waterway, a 165-kilometer stretch connecting

Chatara with Kolkata Port in West Bengal. The Indian government has allocated over IRs. 290 million for the detailed project report, which is expected within 33 months.

U.S. team

A U.S. military team inspected Beni, district headquarters of Myagdi in western Nepal, which saw a major Maoist offensive in March. The team, including a major general of the Pacific Command of the U.S. Army, also discussed the security situation in the region with the officials of the Royal Nepal Army, Kantipur reported. Chief of the RNA at Beni, Tara Bikram Shah, briefed the visiting team about the destruction caused by the Maoist offensive. Dozens of security personnel were killed during the Maoist offensive in Beni on March 20. The U.S. has been providing military assistance to Nepal and training RNA personnel to fight the Maoist insurgency.

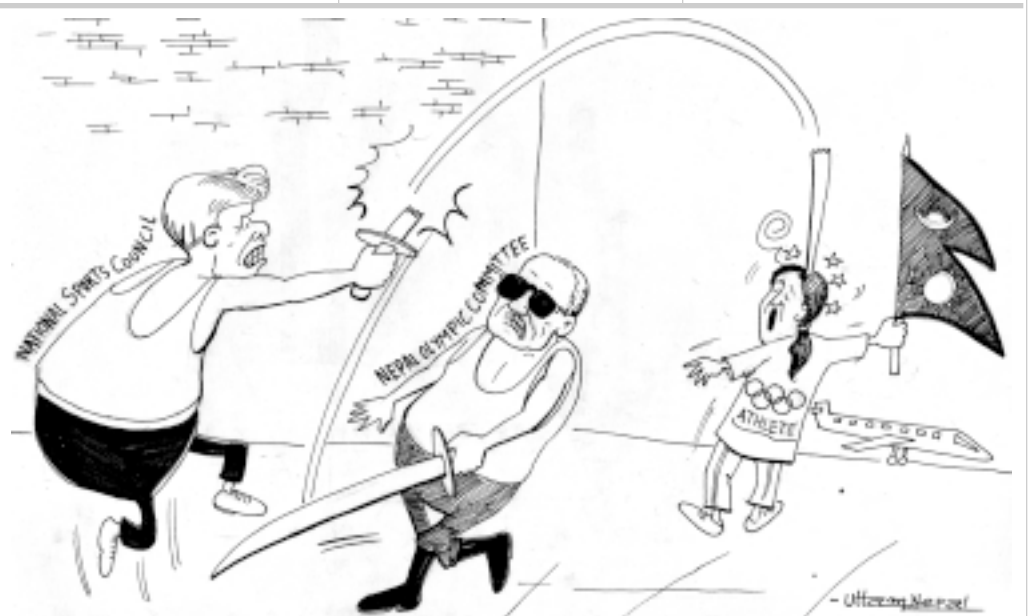
Peace committee

The government formed a high-level Peace Committee represented by top leaders of the political parties in the coalition government. The com-

mittee headed by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba of the NC-D also has CPN-UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal, RPP Chairman Pashupati Shumsher Rana, Information and Communications Minister Mohammad Mohsin and Nepal Sadbhavana Party Chairman Badri Prasad Mandal as members. The committee will coordinate the peace process and finalize the political agendas of the government to be presented at the negotiating table with the Maoists, Mohsin said.

Defense call

The Defense Ministry has called on the Cabinet to intervene in the decision asking the Chief Election Commissioner Keshabraj Rajbhandari to return the vehicle he took while he was the defense secretary three years ago. Rajbhandari was given an official vehicle when he came to the Defense Ministry in 2001. Rajbhandari is using the vehicle for personal use after changing its number plate, reports said. Rajbhandari said the vehicle belonged to the Home Ministry and denied having used it for personal purposes.



DOLPA GEARED UP FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

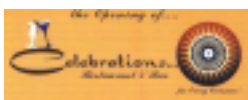
For the first time, a VDC-level Sustainable Tourism Development Committee has been formed in Juphal, Dolpa, through the initiation of Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme. The 15-member committee comprises former DDC member and tourism entrepreneur Chandra Dutta Khatri as the chairperson, Bimal Bhandari as the general secretary and four women. Juphal is the gateway to the Dolpa region. Tourist guides, porters, fresh vegetables, fruits and other necessities are also available in Juphal. The Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme is an important pilot program of the government, working to develop sustainable tourism in 6 districts of Nepal—Taplejung, Solukhumbu, Rasuwa, Chitwan, Rupandehi and Dolpa. It is jointly supported by UNDP, DFID and SNV.

RS. 814 MILLION PROFIT FOR NABIL BANK

Nabil Bank registered an 11.97 percent increase in operating profit for the fiscal year 2003-04 from last year. Cost management, income enhancement and focus on quality of credit have generated the growth, according to the bank. The bank has also invested in human resources and technology in recent years. Nabil Bank, the first joint venture bank in Nepal, recently completed 20 years of operation. The bank has a paid-up capital of Rs. 492 million and general reserves of Rs. 652 million. Total deposits and borrowings of the bank have reached Rs. 14.35 billion and total investments stand at Rs. 6.75 billion.

CELEBRATIONS RESTAURANT & BAR

Celebrations Restaurant & Bar opened at Hotel Yak & Yeti Lane, Lal Durbar, just off Durbar Marg. According to Arif Faizel, Celebrations plans to conduct events like theme parties, birthday



bashes, dance parties and live music on a regular basis. The

events will cater to people of all ages. It also plans to offer executive meals from 12:30 to 3 p.m. to office goers from September onwards for Rs. 125.

GULF AIR HOLIDAYS ANNOUNCES NEW HOLIDAY PROGRAMS

Gulf Air Holidays, the airline's in-house tour operation, recently announced comprehensive holiday programs that offer a wide range of trips to the most exciting cities, exotic getaways



and popular resorts in the Middle East, Europe, Asia and Australia. This year's most popular destinations include the Gold Coast of Australia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Gulf Air Holidays features more than 400 hotels and apartments in 33 countries and over 70 destinations around the world. Gulf Air Holidays has six "Experience" brochures that provide details on destinations, including country and hotel information. The brochures are available from travel agents and Gulf Air offices.

EARL GRAY TEA LAUNCHED

Gourmet Tea and Coffee has recently launched Earl Gray, a unique blend of tea produced in Nepal. The tea is produced in both tea bags and loose leaf, targeting customers from different walks of life. The company is preparing to distribute its product in England and Ireland, in cooperation with local importers and distributors. It has exported certified organic tea to Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom in the past.

NBL NETS RS. 718 MILLION

Nepal Bank Limited has registered a profit of Rs. 718 million for the fiscal year 2003-2004, despite 60 percent non-performing loans and a negative capital of Rs 9.75 million by the end of April 2004. According to Craig McAllister, the CEO of the bank, the restructuring of the bank started in 2002-03, during which the bank had a loss of Rs. 3 billion. He claimed that the bank now has Rs. 35.79 billion in deposits, which is 16 percent of the total banking deposits in the country. According to the contract between ICC Bank of Ireland and Nepal Rastra Bank, \$4.9 million was earmarked for NBL reform including the total computerization of the bank's operation.

NEPAL-BANGLADESH TOURISM

The Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation in association with Nepal Tourism Board and Nepal Association of Travel Agents organized an interaction program recently to promote bilateral tourism between Nepal and Bangladesh. The potential for bilateral tourism to help develop both nations was discussed, and Bangladeshi

travel and tour agents were encouraged to promote tourism. Attractive tourism packages that could be sold in the international market were highlighted. H.E. Humayun Kabir, ambassador of Bangladesh to Nepal said that Bangladesh is working towards establishing a bus service between Kathmandu and Dhaka, which could help increase in flow of tourist.

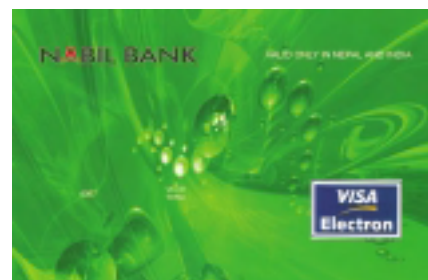
GULF AIR OFFERS 50 PERCENT DISCOUNT ON ALL FREQUENT FLYER REDEMPTIONS

Gulf Air has announced a reduction in the number of miles required for free travel by 50 percent during the month of August. This offer is valid on all redemption flights and flight upgrades to over 50 destinations worldwide. Instead of the usual 48,000 miles normally required to fly from the GCC to European destinations like London, Paris or Frankfurt, only 24,000 miles will be required. The redemption offer is available only until August 31, and all travel must be completed by this date.

Workshop on bilateral

NABIL VISA ELECTRON LAUNCHED

Nabil Bank recently added to its range of NabilCards products with the launch of its debit card, the Nabil Visa Electron. Cardholders can make purchases of goods and services from over 500 supermarkets, stores, hotels, restaurants and travel agencies in Nepal and 100,000 places in India. The card can also be used to withdraw cash from over 5,000 ATMs in Nepal and India that accept Visa cards. There is no charge for using the card for purchases and at Nabil Bank ATMs. Any Nabil Bank personal accountholder can obtain the Nabil Visa Electron card.



Crowned

Contestant number 17. Her number came at the very end among the 18 participants. But in the grand finale, Payal Shakya came out on top. With tears rolling down her cheeks, she stood stunned on the stage crowned as Miss Nepal 2004.

She is a comeback kid. When she failed to win the Little Lady Beauty Queen in 1996, it didn't hurt her. It inspired her to contest for higher laurels. Eight years down the road, she will be participating at the Miss World 2004 in China. Shakya says that both the "Miss Photogenic" and "Miss Nepal" titles were bolts from the blue, and she didn't have high hopes of winning the crown.

Shakya is a television anchor and wants to have a foot in the media all through her life. After being crowned, she made it a point to stress that she was well aware of her responsibilities as a Miss Nepal. Always one to spot something different about herself, Shakya says she hasn't been quite able to discover her real "self." Her grooming sessions for the China pageant will start after one month.

As for her thoughts on the protests against the beauty contests, she believes everyone has the right to put forth their ideas. "But violence is simply not the answer."

Shakya blames the lack of cooperation between individuals for the country's sorry state of affairs. According to her, development is all about teamwork, and only when Nepalis realize the true value of their country will they actually strive to make it better.



Proposed Revised Flight Schedule
(Covering remote sectors)
Effective from 25 JUN-15 SEP'04

| From | To | Flight Nto. | Days of Operation | Dep. Time | Arr. Time | Rupee Tariff One way | Dollar Tariff One way | Remarks |
|------------|------------|-------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| Kathmandu | Lukla | YA 111 | Daily | 0630 | 0705 | 1665 | 91 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Lukla | YA 101 | Daily | 0635 | 0710 | 1665 | 91 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Lukla | YA107 | Daily | 0810 | 0845 | 1665 | 91 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Lukla | YA113 | 1,2,3,4,5,7 | 0815 | 0850 | 1665 | 91 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Rumjatar | YA 221 | 2,4,7 | 0950 | 1025 | 1245 | 61 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Phaplu | YA 181 | 1,3,5 | 0955 | 1030 | 1480 | 85 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Manang | YA 601 | 6 | 0815 | 0915 | 2995 | 122 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Simara | YA 147 | Daily | 1135 | 1200 | 970 | 55 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Simara | YA 141 | Daily | 1300 | 1325 | 970 | 55 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Simara | YA 143 | Daily | 1430 | 1455 | 970 | 55 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Bharatpur | YA 173 | Daily | 1115 | 1140 | 1160 | 61 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Bharatpur | YA 175 | Daily | 1400 | 1425 | 1160 | 61 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Biratnagar | YA 151 | Daily | 0700 | 0740 | 2585 | 85 | SAAB 340B |
| | Biratnagar | YA 153 | Daily | 1040 | 1120 | 2585 | 85 | SAAB 340B |
| | Biratnagar | YA 155 | Daily | 1620 | 1700 | 2585 | 85 | SAAB 340B |
| | Pokhara | YA 131 | Daily | 0905 | 0930 | 1710 | 67 | SAAB 340B |
| | Pokhara | YA 135 | Daily | 1530 | 1555 | 1710 | 67 | SAAB 340B |
| | Bhadrapur | YA 121 | Daily | 1200 | 1250 | 2950 | 109 | SAAB 340B |
| | Nepalgunj | YA 177 | Daily | 1245 | 1345 | 3500 | 109 | SAAB 340B |
| | Bhairahawa | YA 163 | Daily | 1425 | 1500 | 2220 | 79 | SAAB 340B |
| Biratnagar | Kathmandu | YA 152 | Daily | 0800 | 0840 | 2585 | 85 | SAAB 340B |
| Biratnagar | Kathmandu | YA 154 | Daily | 1140 | 1220 | 2585 | 85 | SAAB 340B |
| Biratnagar | Kathmandu | YA 156 | Daily | 1720 | 1800 | 2585 | 85 | SAAB 340B |
| Pokhara | Kathmandu | YA 132 | Daily | 0950 | 1015 | 1710 | 67 | SAAB 340B |
| Pokhara | Kathmandu | YA 136 | Daily | 1615 | 1640 | 1710 | 67 | SAAB 340B |
| Bhadrapur | Kathmandu | YA 122 | Daily | 1310 | 1400 | 2950 | 109 | SAAB 340B |
| Nepalgunj | Kathmandu | YA 178 | Daily | 1405 | 1505 | 3500 | 109 | SAAB 340B |
| Bhairahawa | Kathmandu | YA 164 | Daily | 1520 | 1555 | 2220 | 79 | SAAB 340B |
| Lukla | Kathmandu | YA 112 | Daily | 0720 | 0755 | 1665 | 91 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Kathmandu | YA 102 | Daily | 0725 | 0800 | 1665 | 91 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Kathmandu | YA 108 | Daily | 0900 | 0935 | 1665 | 91 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Kathmandu | YA 114 | 1,2,3,4,5,7 | 0905 | 0940 | 1665 | 91 | DHC-6/300 |
| Rumjatar | Kathmandu | YA 222 | 2,4,7 | 1040 | 1115 | 1245 | 79 | DHC-6/300 |
| Phaplu | Kathmandu | YA 182 | 1,3,5 | 1045 | 1120 | 1480 | 85 | DHC-6/300 |
| Manang | Kathmandu | YA 602 | 6 | 0930 | 1030 | 2995 | 122 | DHC-6/300 |
| Simara | Kathmandu | YA 148 | Daily | 1215 | 1240 | 970 | 55 | DHC-6/300 |
| Simara | Kathmandu | YA142 | Daily | 1340 | 1405 | 970 | 55 | DHC-6/300 |
| Simara | Kathmandu | YA144 | Daily | 1510 | 1535 | 970 | 55 | DHC-6/300 |
| Bharatpur | Kathmandu | YA 174 | Daily | 1155 | 1220 | 1160 | 61 | DHC-6/300 |
| Bharatpur | Kathmandu | YA 176 | Daily | 1440 | 1505 | 1160 | 61 | DHC-6/300 |
| Nepalgunj | Dolpa | YA 717 | 1 | 0630 | 0715 | 1315 | 85 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Simikot | YA 711 | 4 | 0630 | 0730 | 1800 | 96 | DHC-6/300 |
| Dolpa | Nepalgunj | YA 718 | 1 | 0730 | 0815 | 1315 | 85 | DHC-6/300 |
| Simikot | Nepalgunj | YA 712 | 4 | 0745 | 0845 | 1800 | 96 | DHC-6/300 |
| Surkhet | Jumla | YA 713 | 2 | 0705 | 0740 | 970 | 63 | DHC-6/300 |
| | Rara | YA 715 | 3 | 0705 | 0745 | 1800 | 96 | DHC-6/300 |
| Jumla | Surkhet | YA 714 | 2 | 0755 | 0830 | 970 | 63 | DHC-6/300 |
| Rara | Surkhet | YA 716 | 3 | 0800 | 0845 | 1800 | 96 | DHC-6/300 |

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GLACIAL PROGRESS

It's hard to tell whether establishing a Peace Secretariat or the calls for U.N. intervention will amount to much. The administration has barely started down the road to peace.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

THE GOVERNMENT SAYS IT IS serious about restoring peace. Ministers from the prime minister down are trying hard to give the impression of action by announcing the establishment of the Peace Secretariat. Ev-

lution and the agitating parties are bitterly divided over the issue of U.N. mediation, or even of facilitation. Marred by contradictions within and squeezed by competing forces from without, can this government restore peace?

"The last two peace processes have failed over the key question of the con-

government's ability to deliver peace. Deuba was the prime minister when the first peace talks with the Maoists were held in 2001. Many still hold him accountable for failing to convert the peace talks into a permanent peace; that he relied heavily on his personal chemistry with the Maoist leaders rather than working out a systematic peace process to address mutual interests.

Prime Minister Deuba insists he has learnt his lessons. Even parties, who opposed Deuba's appointment, agree that peace initiatives must be supported. "If this government restores peace, why should we oppose it?" says Ram Sharan Mahat, a senior leader of the Nepali Congress.

Prime Minister Deuba has promised what any other prime minister at this juncture would: to restore peace. But the progress seems glacial. It's hard at this point to tell whether the Peace Secretariat or calls for U.N. participation will amount to much, since the administration has barely started down the road to peace.

But it is a start: The Deuba government last week announced the formation of an apex political body overseeing the proposed Peace Secretariat. Officials indicate that many subordinate committees of the secretariat are in the offing. Asked to comment on the Peace Secretariat, Minister of

State for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat brushed off the question: "I don't want to comment on that." While the minister remained tight-lipped on the structure of the secretariat, others had some reservations.



eryone takes it as a positive step, but many doubt if it is the critical prerequisite to a lasting peace that the government claims it is.

The United Nations has been visibly more active in Nepal, but the ruling coa-

stituent assembly," says Shiva Hari Dahal, executive director of National Peace Campaign. "I doubt if this government carries the mandate to offer constituent assembly to the Maoists." Many share Dahal's apprehension about the Deuba

PEACE HYPE

"The government could have given continuity to the Peace Secretariat we had formed," says Prakash Chandra Lohani, finance minister in the Thapa government and a member of the government's negotiating team that held talks with the Maoists. Critics accuse the Deuba government of excessively politicizing and hyping the formation of the Peace Secretariat. They allege that the government lacks seriousness and clarity on the issue of negotiation. Not just the critics, even those who are campaigning for peace remain doubtful.

"The Peace Secretariat maybe helpful," says Subodh Pyakurel, president of the Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC). "But only if it is rightly constituted with broad representation." There seems to be genuine disagreement on the composition of the secretariat with various interest groups and stakeholders wanting to have their say in the future negotiations. "It is possible that a Peace Secretariat could be helpful in institutionalizing peace, if, and when, the government achieves it, but there is no guarantee that the secretariat will ever lead to that goal," says Peace Campaign's Dahal.

The secretariat and all the wrangling over its composition may have little relevance if the Maoists don't constitute a parallel body. There is still no indication from the Maoists as to what they think of the secretariat, or whether they will reciprocate the gesture.

The idea behind the Peace Secretariat is to largely institutionalize peace by collecting and documenting all information about the peace talks and agreements. "It will provide the right input to strengthen the peace process," says Minister Mahat. INSEC's Pyakurel agrees, but warns it has to be done right.

The international community seems impressed by the idea behind the Peace Secretariat. The Americans have already promised financial support. Initially some donors and embassies had called on the government to appoint a non-political chief for the secretariat. Officials and some civil society leaders, however, argued strongly that appointing a non-political person to head the body could seriously undermine the secretariat.

The government already has earmarked Rs. 20 million for the secretariat. But the consensus is limited, and the modalities of achieving peace have, apparently, barely been discussed. Some public figures have called for U.N. mediation, while others deplore the idea. The Maoists are in favor; but the government seems opposed.

The Maoists have chanted the mantra of U.N. mediation loudly in recent months. "For a peaceful solution to the turmoil," said Maoist supremo Prachanda in July, "the government would have to agree to a new constitution as well as U.N. mediation." The United Nations seems to have geared up. The U.N. secretary general's special envoy, Samuel Tamrat's visit early this month has fuelled the speculation that the United Nations may be in touch with the Maoist leadership in a bid to narrow down the difference between the two warring parties. Analysts agree that the United Nations' quiet diplomacy can go a long way in nudging the government and the Maoists toward a settlement—even if it is not invited to mediate. Government officials hint that they are aware of the developments but contend that the United Nations is not going to do anything without its consent. An official with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs says, "They aren't going to force us, are they?"

Like the previous prime minister, Deuba has ruled out immediate U.N. involvement. The government's position has been bolstered by two powerful countries' opposition to U.N. intervention. The United States and India have repeatedly said that Nepal is capable of solving the problem internally.

Critics, however, point to two rounds of failed peace processes. But government officials insist that they have learned lessons from the past and that they don't need help. If the officials do

not offer public explanation for their opposition to U.N. mediation, it may be because the government fears that U.N. involvement would provide the Maoists undue legitimacy.

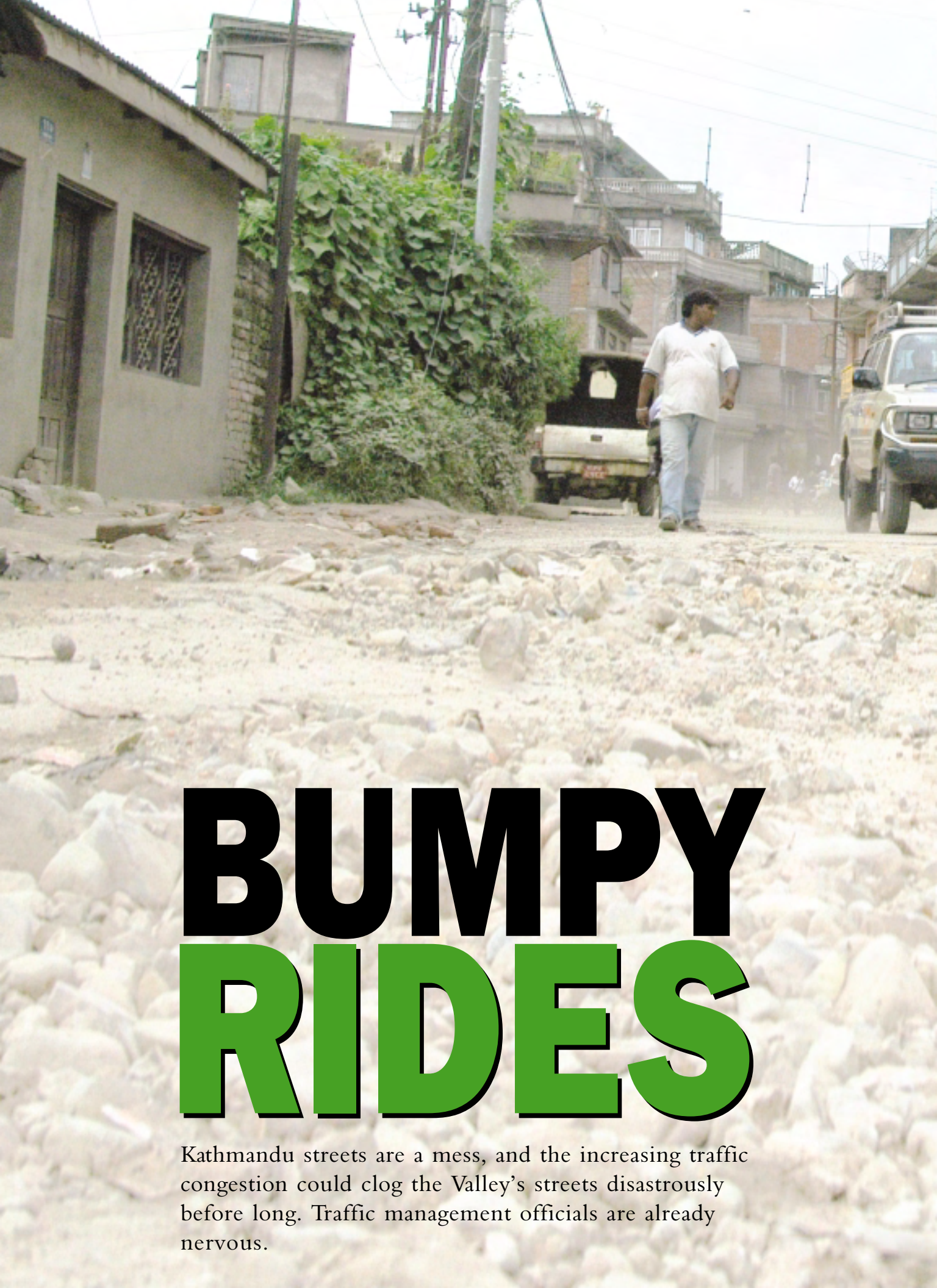
"U.N. mediation may be tantamount to recognizing the two-regime theory," says NC's Ram Sharan Mahat. But doesn't a parallel government already exist? "I don't think there is another parallel government. It is just there by default," he insists. There is an additional fear. U.N. mediations can get overly high profile and the whole peace process may get engrossed in details. Mediations can drag on for years without any conclusion.

Critics of the United Nations say it cannot mediate; that it has too many



mouths to speak with one voice. They say the United Nations lacks resources needed for political leverage and that it diminishes the credibility of its own promises by its incoherence. U.N. negotiators have tried for years to resolve or reduce conflicts in Angola, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia, all with little or no success, they say, adding U.N. mediation in these countries has extended or even aggravated the disputes.

"The government says it's ready to talk with the Maoists," says Peace Campaign's Dahal. "But where is its bottom line? It still has to come up with one." **N**



BUMPY RIDES

Kathmandu streets are a mess, and the increasing traffic congestion could clog the Valley's streets disastrously before long. Traffic management officials are already nervous.



rw/Sagar Shrestha

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

IT'S NEVER A SMOOTH RIDE on Kathmandu's roads these days. In front there's likely to be a huge traffic jam. On the right, motorbikes are crammed together, each furiously trying to move an inch forward and get the better of one another. On the left, pedestrians veer off the footpath because street vendors have filled it. Behind, 10 vehicles have left their lane to overtake the jam.

"And there are protests everywhere for any number of reasons," says banker Bhubal Rai, who drives a Toyota Sonata. "Forget urgent appointments," he says. "It's most likely the traffic will not allow you to keep them." He adds with frustration, "Even if you are driving safely, the other vehicles can still crash into you.

Something seriously has gone wrong with Kathmandu's traffic."

The story is the same for all drivers. Kathmandu streets are a mess, and authorities say the increasing traffic congestion could clog the Valley's streets disastrously before long. Traffic management officials are already nervous about the figures. "There are at least 25,000 additional vehicles on Kathmandu streets each year, but there's barely 25 kilometers of roads being built annually," Deputy Inspector General of Police Ashok Shrestha told a seminar on traffic management last week. All junior officers present nodded in approval.

According to the Department of Transport Management, a total 392,565 vehicles, about 270,000 of them motorcycles, are currently registered in the Valley. The Department of Roads data

shows there are 465 kilometers of road in Kathmandu, which means there are close to 850 vehicles for every single kilometer of the road. "Multiply the total number of vehicles by four, to include to-and-fro office and frequent shopping trips and you will see how many vehicles are on the road at a given time," says Senior Superintendent of Police Surendra Bahadur Pal, the Valley's chief traffic cop. "To manage that traffic, we currently have only 550 traffic police, with outdated equipment." That is, roughly one police per kilometer, an equation that doesn't quite help the traffic managers, especially during the rush hour and public demonstrations.

When taxi drivers created havoc and brought traffic to a standstill by parking their taxis at major intersections early this month, the Valley Traffic Police Office



had one single crane to tow away the vehicles.

But is the problem just about the high number of vehicles and ill-equipped traffic personnel? More than one expert tells us that it's primarily the poor coordination between government agencies that manage the roads. Our random survey revealed that tens of lanes and by-lanes in the Valley were dysfunctional due to poor sewage and drainage facilities. Except the major arteries, just about every single road is routinely dug out and left unattended for days and weeks on end.

"The Roads Department paves the roads, and the next day there is either the Telecom or Sewerage Department digging the same roads all over again," says Kesav Kumar Amatya, a pavement specialist, who also teaches at the Institute of Engineering in Pulchowk. "We do not have a general practice of timely maintenance, due to lack of budget or whatever, even though the Roads Department has among the best qualified civil engineers in Nepal."

Amatya has worked on a number of Department of Roads projects. He says that "sealing" a small pothole could initially cost Rs. 1,000, but the cost multiplies exponentially if left unattended. It also leads to traffic congestion. In narrow lanes, pedestrians jostle for space, and safety, with motorists.

Amatya's engineering students recently examined Ward 34 in Baneshwore. Their study showed that bad drainage contributes substantially to road damages and air pollution in Kathmandu. "A bad drainage clogs rainwater and damages roads quickly. The rainwater makes the streets muddy and this results in pollution when the street dries up," says Mohan Raj Panta, a final-semester civil engineering student at the Institute of Engineering. "A proper drainage system could reduce the current problem of poor roads in Kathmandu by almost 50 percent," he claims.

Panta and his colleagues found that the Department of Roads almost always gets its priorities wrong. "The Roads Department fixes roads leading to ministers' residences instead of going by the rule of first fixing roads where the traffic is the heaviest," he says.





'Roads Are Too Small'

Senior Superintendent of Police **Surendra Bahadur Pal**, the Valley's chief traffic cop, talked to Nation Weekly.

How bad is the traffic situation in the capital?

The last time traffic police were allocated according to road requirements was in 2048 saal [some 13 years ago]. The number of vehicles since then has increased four times; the roads by five percent. You have to remember that most of the roads in Kathmandu were constructed in the Rana era for carriages. Most of them have been expanded but have not been scientifically studied as per present needs. Going by the present trend, some roads need four to five lanes, but we have only two lanes.

But isn't traffic mismanagement as big a problem?

That is partially true. But the major problem under the given condition is the roads. There are no alternative routes, either long or short. This makes it difficult for us to manage. For example, where can we divert the traffic if there's a jam in Tripureshwore? There is a Ring Road but there are no service roads that connect with it. The network of roads in the inner areas is nil. For example, I may place five or 10 traffic cops in Narayan Gopal Chowk in Maharajgunj to avoid traffic jams, but all they can do is blow whistles and not allow vehicles to stop on the sides.

What about the modern traffic lights and equipment?

That has been very helpful. But we need that in at least 60 more points. The Japanese government built 11 for us. If

the government had its own capability, it would have built them on its own. I don't see that happening in the near future. Look at the traffic lights in Maitighar. They broke down eight or nine months ago and haven't been repaired yet.

Is the infrastructure that bad?

Our roads are just too small and are not properly maintained. Stray cattle, scattered construction materials, workshops taking up almost half of the roads and the pedestrians' lack of civic sense don't help our cause. It takes almost one and a half hours to clear the mess left behind by one single problem in Kathmandu.

You plan to launch traffic awareness week starting August 18...

Yes, the special program is being held with three objectives. First, we want to make traffic movement smoother inside the Valley. Second, we want to involve the concerned agencies to build better rapport among themselves. Third, we want to make law enforcement

better. This will make our job easier and has come through a directive from the home minister.

You hold a traffic week almost every year. Has it really been helpful?

Definitely. Violating traffic rules is a bad habit. People need to be reminded again and again. I wish we had the budget to conduct similar programs at least four or five times a year.

The Nepal Police's traffic department has been accused of massive corruption?

Look, I am ready to take action if the charges are based on facts and solid evidence. I have no comments to make if these charges are twisted into political slogans and propaganda. I cannot guarantee there isn't corruption, but I have said I am ready to take action if there is a proof. But you have to remember, the ones giving bribes are just as guilty as those who accept them. **N**

These researches conducted by engineering students could be very useful to municipalities, who now have the authority under the Local Development Act to manage their own roads. But all municipalities still have to depend on the Department of Roads for constructions.

One easy solution to the Valley's congestion is to police the limited roads better and give preferential access to the vehicles that carry higher number of people. "The best solution would be to allow only organized mass transit systems such as buses inside the Ring Road," says Mukunda Raj Satyal, executive chief at Sajha Yatayat, who is also one of Nepal's few transport economists. "That allows a large number of people to travel easily within the city without creating much clogging."

Smaller vehicles such as tempos and micro busses should be displaced to the Outer Ring Road once the project is complete, he suggests. "Then the focus could be on running environment friendly, large buses inside the Ring Road to control pollution."

But like so many other government plans, the Outer Ring Road exists only on paper and may not be a priority for competing agencies.

Commuters like Rai will continue to take bumpy rides; traffic jams in Kathmandu will only increase and head to a standstill. **N**



nm/ss

TECHMEDIA HOUSE

This week talking about IT education in special episode with Kathmandu Engineering College.

Presents

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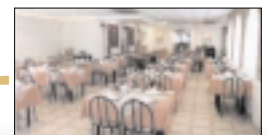
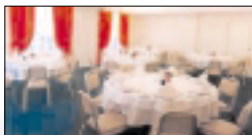
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CHOKEHOLD

The Army has pooh-poohed Maoist claims that they are ready to strangle the capital, but the rebels appear both serious and committed

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI
IN CHALTI, MAKWANPUR

WHEN THE MAOISTS ANNOUNCED their “village people’s government” in the area they call District 6 (northern Makwanpur and southern Dhading) in the presence of 19 journalists, it was evident that they were looking for headlines about their presence so near to the capital.

A central party leader who identified himself as Comrade Anup met with us before the announcement. “Our *Jan Sena* have been positioned on the arcs for your protection,” he said to journalists who were resting on a *gundri* on the top floor of a two-story village house just above the Shree Saat Kanya Primary School where the program took place. “You can see there was no government or military presence in areas you have been escorted from. The people are independent, and you can ask on whose side they are on,” he added confidently. “The party (CPN-Maoist) now has a new slogan to enter the new phase of strategic counter offence and to rise up to the new phase of revolutionary transformation.”

The slogan seems to be “final assault.” The Maoists now say they are concentrating around the capital in a bid to strengthen “ring committees” that cover the districts surrounding the Kathmandu Valley. Their new plan: target schools, businesses and highways to paralyze the capital and undermine the limited security forces and government

representatives in town areas. Security forces say Makwanpur, where the press conference was held, has been strategically important to the Maoists. It provides easy mobility from the capital to Tarai and access to India through Bara, Parsa, Rautahat and Sarlahi.

The Army maintains the Maoist plan to paralyze Kathmandu is just hot air. “We had already demolished their ‘ring’ when 1,000-1,200 of our troops took the Maoists by surprise throughout Makwanpur immediately after the ceasefire in 2003,” says Army spokesman Rajendra Thapa. “They (Maoists) were

under the assumption that we could never take them on in Dandabas, as it is strategically located at a height.”

The Army may have taken Dandabas, but they don’t hold it. One of the two journalist teams invited to the program, including representatives from Nation Weekly, were welcomed by the Maoists in Dandabas a few days before Thapa spoke. The village center is about three hours uphill walk from Palung along the Tribhuvan Highway.

When Comrade Uttam greeted us in Dandabas and shook our hands, we noted his “intercom set,” which looked like a cordless phone in a plastic bag on one arm. He was dressed like all other villagers: cotton pants folded up to the knees, blue-checked shirt with its tail out, and slippers. Villagers said an Army patrol had arrived there the day before but left after a few hours.

Comrades Himal and Purva escorted us from Dandabas to Jagdanda for the program. “The nearest Army barrack is in Palung, and the other is in Gajuri (along the Prihivi Highway),” said Purva, who carried socket bombs on a cloth belt tied around his waist and always walked last in the formation. The trip was on a treacherous trail, and we spent a night in Baseri of Agra VDC before reaching Jagdanda. The other group of journalists started from Damechaur, along the Tribhuvan Highway, and walked for five or six hours.

In Jagdanda, where the program took place, half a dozen armed *Jan Sena* carrying .303, SLRs and SMGs guarded about 50 people present. None of them wore battle fatigues. The Maoists mostly looked like young students and said they were all locals of Makwanpur. They had a lot to say about their war against the Army.

“We leave our *aadhar chetra* (base area) when the Army comes in, but we immediately come back, as the Army cannot stay for long,” said



nw/ss

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1 & 4. Armed Jan Sena outside the school in Jagdanda where the Maoists announced their "people's government"
2. An unnamed member of the Himshikhar Cultural Team, who was identified as the sister of Rudra Bahadur Pakhrin, shot dead by the security forces in January
3. The Himshikhar Cultural Team performs the welcome song
5. The Palung valley as seen from the Tribhuvan Highway. Dandabas was a three-hour walk away
6. A member of the Jan Sena takes rest at a vantage point overseeing the aadhar chhetra (base area)
7. The "people's government" taking oath



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7

Comrade Himal. Himal led the group throughout the trek, which included crossing rivers, corn and paddy fields, as well as staying in local village houses. We were fed black tea and rice with soup made from local vegetables—beans, potatoes and grams, and even *dhido* made from maize flour. We came across no resistance from villagers, most of whom were Tamangs. In various places, the Maoists who escorted us spoke in Tamang dialect to ask about the Army's mobility in the area.

"We place ambushes, and the Army immediately returns after a few of them are either injured or killed," said Comrade Himal. He was later announced chief of Tishtung, Palung and Agra VDCs at the program in Jagdanda. The same program felicitated relatives of those "who had died in action" against the Army and the journalists present with garlands and vermilion. On announcing their "village people's government," the

Maoists claimed the district party had formed an election commission and it had come out with names to lead the VDCs by taking suggestions from the locals during the previous two months.

The Maoists openly admit they had lost some members of their "ring committees." A key member Bharat Dhungana was shot dead in Dhading and a few others, including Hit Bahadur Tamang, were arrested in Patna, India.

But they claimed that they are steadfast and ready for battle again. "We are in a ring and are surrounding the enemy's capital," said Lekhnath Neupane, president of the Maoist student wing ANNFSU-R, which has closed schools over demands that include free education and information about their comrades who have disappeared in state custody.

"We may even lose in the final stage of our battle, but we will never, ever be defeated," added Neupane while speaking

at the Shree Surya Barahi Primary School in Chalti of Agra VDC a day after the program in Jagdanda. He added, "People say we (Maoists) should sit for talks with the government, but what else is there to talk about when we have already held talks about a conditional constituent assembly?"

On our return to Palung, a young Maoist who was escorting us identified himself as Comrade Binod. The boy, who looked much younger than the 17-18 years he claimed to be, said the Maoists were determined. "We have a cause," he said, claiming he could handle any weapon the *Jan Sena* was carrying. "The Army will think of their family and relatives while firing a single bullet. They're fighting for money."

"We either do or die," he added, as he fixed the Goldstar shoes he was wearing and kept moving uphill while keeping a watchful eye on us in the misty Chisapani. ■

'The King Heads All Three Regimes'

Nation Weekly talked with **Lekhnath Neupane**, president of ANNFSU-R, the Maoist student wing, at Shree Surya Barahi Primary School in Chalti-3, Agra VDC.

Are you preparing for a deadlier *andolan*?

We made concrete demands to the Education Ministry such as the scaling down of school fees and addressing the issues of the arrests and killings of our comrades. Our strategy is to sit for talks very aggressively, and our negotiating team will also include those who are in government custody. But our mediators have told us the govern-

ment doesn't want the top leaders on the talk team. That shows they aren't serious about our demands. We will launch our *andolan* from mid-Bhadau (early September).

As a student organization you have included political demands such as that of a constituent assembly.

Many in the party have shed their blood, and even we as a student union have to be answerable. The government should take us more seriously and that will open doors for peace talks with the party... The major parties have hinted they are ready for constituent assembly but have left a lot of loop-

holes. The parties have to keep in mind that new demands could come from us. We could demand for a republic assembly once we start our counter-offensive.

What is preventing you from talking?

What is the use talking when there are both active civil and military administrations? The Army wanted to remove terrorist tag from only those students who regularly attended college, and not because they were *Krantikaris*. We didn't agree to that. The government also wants to declare schools a zone of peace. That is a conspiracy, as our working areas are concentrated in schools in the villages.

Your party has been abducting students...

It is part of our unified military command. It is not my responsibility. Our union decided to bring in a political campaign that includes political training for teachers and students. It is a campaign aimed at interaction.

What about peace talks and UN mediation?

We are open to that. The pressure should be on the government in-

stead. But what is there to talk about when we've already talked on conditional constituent assembly... The contact agents such as the United Nations and other dollar-earning agencies are just displaying a *Gajatra* in the name of conflict resolution.

Parties are claiming they are in contact with your party for talks...

At our level, we are exchanging direct and indirect contact with students and teachers unions including the five vice-chancellors, representatives of PABSON and the guardians associations.

Do you want to talk directly with the Palace?

The King heads all three regimes—he controls how people think, he has control over the "physical" regime that includes the Army and also administrative (the government). We also have all three. The rest is up to the party to answer. ■



IRAQI-LAHURES

The government's plan to study Iraq as an employment destination is too little and too late. Tens of thousands of Nepalis may already be there and many more are stranded en-route.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

EVEN THOUGH THE GOVERNMENT has yet to open up Iraq as a labor market for Nepalis, recruiting agencies are sending a flood of workers there. Sources at the capital's leading manpower agencies say recruitments are announced daily. The agencies describe the labor destination as Kuwait, Oman or Qatar instead of Iraq. When interested workers make enquiries, they are told the true destination, sources say. The best the government can do is claim ignorance. When asked how so many Nepalis made it to Iraq without government knowledge, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat said lamely, "It's difficult to stop people." That says a lot about the government's effectiveness in regulating the overseas labor market.

An agent working with Moonlight International in Kuponhole says such incidents are old news to him. The agency reportedly tried to send 37 Nepalis to Iraq via Jordan. Most of them were stranded in Jordan and have started returning. They are now crowding the company's office, trying to get their money back.

"We have been sending people to Iraq for the last six months," says middleman Kumar Karki. "But we don't guarantee that everyone will reach Iraq." A company charges each individual from Rs. 120,000 to Rs. 150,000 for employment in Iraq. A middleman gets anywhere between Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 30,000 as "commission." An official with the Nepal Foreign Employment Agencies Association estimates that 17,000-20,000 Nepalis may have already made it to Iraq. Another 30,000 are reportedly stranded in Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, Jordan and Kuwait.

Indeed, many Iraq-bound Nepalis are stuck in India. Most were recruited

illegally by touts operating from Indian cities. Early this month, a shocking tale emerged. Fifteen thousand Nepalis were left high and dry in Mumbai while they were headed to Iraq. Some were supposedly learning to swim after the agents led them to believe that it was necessary for them to be able to work in Iraq. The agents told them that oceans surround Iraq. The stranded Nepalis plunging into the breakers off Mumbai's beaches were so desperate for jobs that they were willing to take any risk and believe any tale if

it might lead to a job and a chance to support their loved ones back home.

"They are cashing on Nepalis' willingness to take risks," says Bishnu Rimal, vice chairperson of the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions. The risks are real. On April 8, one Nepali was kidnapped along with two Indians and three Turks. It was the first known kidnapping involving a Nepali in Iraq. All six were released on April 12, according to news reports. On April 9, two Nepalis working as security guards for the British private security firm





Global Risk Strategies were killed in a landmine explosion in Iraq.

Despite the danger, big money is an irresistible lure. The wage difference in Nepal and Iraq is enormous. A semi-skilled worker like a mason, helper or cook can earn Rs. 60,000-80,000 per month in Iraq, 10 to 20 times higher than back home. Most Nepalis are either recruited for the construction sector or are employed as security guards by private British and American Security firms like Global Risk Strategies, Custer Battles and Armor Group. Wages in construction or security can be as high as Rs. 125,000 per month.

That is enough to attract people despite the attendant risks. Trade-union official Rimal says, "Even people with a certain level of awareness are taking the plunge into war-torn Iraq." Even a central committee member of one of the trade union's affiliated organizations has gone. He is reportedly stranded on the Iraq-Kuwait border.

The crippling lack of opportunity at home compounded by the insurgency leaves people no choice. Nepalis are streaming towards Iraq, and many more would go if it were legal. Overseas employment agencies say that if the government opens up Iraq as a labor market, more than 125,000 Nepalis could get employment. They also argue that it would help curb illegal recruitment by unscrupulous agents and middlemen.

Even Labor Minister Raghujii Pant indicated last week that he was in favor of exploring the idea of Iraq as a labor destination. "The government has not yet decided to open up Iraq for Nepali workers," says Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat. Even so, trade unionists are already voicing their opposition. "The risk factors are high," says Rimal. "We are not in favor of opening up Iraq for now; instead the government must concentrate on further exploring the existing labor markets."

Kathmandu's elite circles have taken up the debate with glee. Meanwhile, ordinary people are selling their homes, possessions and jewelry to become "Iraqi-Lahures." The ones who make it are in grave danger, but the ones whose hopes have been shattered by unscrupulous brokers and agents are worse off: jobless, penniless and marooned in a foreign country. **N**



LURE OF LUCRE:
Nepalis are willing to go far

Fig. No. 005/042/043
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KATHMANDU

CONTOURS OF CULTURE

BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

A KATHMANDU DWELLER READS of the theft of works of art that lie strewn around his ancient city. He reads that these religious artifacts are hacked off from temples, from pedestals in public places and smuggled out of the country for sale in the west, where there are buyers willing to pay exorbitant prices for them. He is outraged. He understands these works of art to be objects of reverence to the majority of the Nepali people and perceives this theft as a mutilation of the public consciousness, inflicted by aberrant criminal impulses in an otherwise still traditional and reverential society.

The truth is that he himself has little use for these objects of worship. He may go to temples every once in a while, but an English education and modern ways have made his devotion lukewarm. He may go to Pashupatinath, but once he gets into the central compound, he is in a hurry to shove through to the inner precinct, to clasp his hands in a gesture of supplication and hurry out again. He has never paid attention to or reflected on the many images of deities that lie around the temple area. He will not notice the disappearance of any of them.

Unlike his ancestors he does not live in the value-systems within which the works of art in the Valley were made. His education has not even taught him appreciation of these works; his soul has no need of them.

Though he has no use for these works, he is a Nepali and is aware that

these artifacts are and have been an integral part of Nepali culture, the manifestations of the spirit of his ancestors, and that the responsibility for their preservation lies with each generation. He feels deep affinity for the soil of Kathmandu. Though intellectually he doesn't share the old value system, by instinct he does, to a degree. That instinct, of being bound to the soil, of being connected to everyone else with the same language and culture is responsible for his going to worship at Pashupati as well as his being outraged at the theft of sacred objects. For the Kathmandu dweller, there is no distinction between pride in the country and his religious beliefs. Both have at their roots the same instinct, of self-affirmation by connection to something larger than himself, a sense of participating in a larger whole.

However, this feeling is momentary. Usually he goes about his daily tasks with no use for the products of his culture

and only thinks about them when he needs confirmation for the antiquity of his heritage. The thought affirms in him a human need: a sense of history. When foreign visitors arrive he takes them to the old parts of the city, to Hanuman Dhoka, to the Patan Museum, not to show them

precisely what is great about his culture but to say to them: "Look! We too have a past. Our ancestry goes back and back and is responsible for the creation of all this."

When the word *sanskriti* is translated into English, which is increasingly common, as "culture," it loses a lot of its weight and significance. With *sanskriti* we

see from within, we see ourselves connected to generations of accumulated experience and wisdom that gives our life significance with a connection to history, to a larger self. With the word "culture" we see from without, as foreigners. The Kathmandu dweller is thrilled when foreigners are interested in the "quaintness" and "exoticism" of his heritage and take pictures of the carvings on the various temples. Seeking to justify his heritage to himself, he thinks like a travel agent: He believes that the institution of the Kumari should persist because it is a unique attraction that sets his culture apart from all others.

To convert our banal vanity into a humbler but more enriching appreciation of our traditional art, to receive the beginning of an education, there is no finer museum in town than the one at Patan. One appreciates the quality of

*With sanskriti
we see from within,
connected to
generations of
accumulated
experience*



work and devotion that has gone into its creation even when one has barely ventured into the opening gallery where arranged in glass cabinets are metal representations, objects of worship, classified and accompanied by diagrammatic explanations. From the ways in which to identify various deities to the significance of their different gestures and postures, we are guided through the figures in a manner both comprehensible and illuminating. To this extent, we owe sincere gratitude to the various non-Nepalis, the scholars and the architects involved, who are mostly responsible for the creation of the museum.

However, one gets the distinct impression that the museum is meant more for foreigners than for the Nepali people. Even though the entrance ticket is significantly cheaper for Nepalis, one rarely encounters a Nepali face among



the collection. The rare Nepali that does come in belongs to the English-educated class, wanders with the dim awareness of a foreigner and leaves with a vague satisfaction at having acquired some “culture.” All the more important, the captions and explanations, so necessary for an understanding of the works of art, are in English; one cannot imagine, nor does one see, the locals of Patan, who are found in abundance right outside the museum sitting on the steps of temples in the Durbar Square chatting or idling away the afternoon. It is, however, they who possess the deepest connection to traditional culture; it is they who have the most claim to the works on display. When art-theft has provoked reactions from the press, it is they who are referred to as the people from whom the sacred object has been taken, for these representations of deities are most sacred to

them. The Patan museum is no place for these people; it does not offer them an education. How can it be when they cannot even read the placards?

One could say that they never possessed a genuine understanding anyway, that even traditionally genuine understanding was reserved for an elite minority, now very much on the decline. One could say that they should visit the Hanuman Dhoka Museum, which, though inferior to the one at Patan, is a place where they can perceive royal regalia as they do the Kal Bhairab statue: with blind belief, awe and reverence. What the displays say about our attitude towards our past is that most of us have no need for a genuine understanding of the past. The irony in this implication is that for those of us who do have a desire to understand, it is only possible by means of mastery of another’s language, a language that was responsible for our separation from traditional culture in the first place. **N**



PATAN MUSEUM

JOINING THE PARTY!

Joining SAFTA, WTO and now BIMSTEC without a roadmap will not take us anywhere. It is all good joining the party. But what use is it if you haven't got the right clothes or the moves to strut out on the dance floor?

BY BIPUL NARAYAN

IT IS NEVER A GOOD REASON TO do something just because everybody else is doing the same. Unfortunately, our decision makers seem to think otherwise and we are now part of three multilateral trading agreements—WTO, SAFTA and BIMSTEC—without a fair knowledge of what we have gotten into and without the mandatory preparations to make best use of them.

Admittedly, free trade agreements are beneficial to everyone in principle. The logic is simple: Free trade arrangements allow countries to specialize in

their comparative advantages, and the system as a whole makes gains because of that. If country A is better at making one commodity/services and Country B is better at making another commodity/services, under a free trade agreement it benefits both to just concentrate on making the goods/services they make well and trade with each other. More of both commodities will be produced and both will cost less. Based on this logic, studies estimate a boost of \$290 billion to \$520 billion to the global income through lowering of trade barriers agreed under the Doha round of the WTO, with well over half

of these gains going to the developing countries.

But the reality is a lot more complex. Despite the recognized benefits of free trade, despite the proliferation of free trade arrangements and despite the WTO, there still remain a whole array of restrictions, both tariff and non-tariff, to the free movement of goods and services. Moreover, these restrictions remain strictly aligned against the poorer countries of the world.

The rich nations of the world hand out nearly \$300 billion in subsidies to their farmers, more than six times the amount they spend on foreign aid. Aver-

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is down



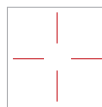
WTO: The rich get richer?



age agricultural tariffs in rich countries are many times higher than those on manufactured goods. In Japan, for instance, tariffs on rice are up to 1000%. This lavish support distorts prices and blocks market access for poor countries that are natural exporters of farm products. For instance, America is the biggest exporter of cotton even though its costs are much higher than those of African producers such as Mali or Burkina Faso. America's 25,000 cotton farmers receive \$4 billion in subsidies for producing \$3 billion worth of cotton. These subsidies push down the world market prices, hurting millions of farmers in these poor countries.

The rich nations while advocating free movement of goods also continue to put irrational and unrealistic barriers to the free movement of people—a key area of comparative advantage for developing countries. Developing countries with their young and growing population are in a great position to provide a

wide range of services to the aging and stagnant populations of the world. However, rich countries continue to stonewall entry of people from the developing world into their economies.



ECONOMIC FOCUS

what is often believed. They are usually fruits of thorough homework and tough negotiations where each country must play hardball. To negotiate well, a country needs to be aware of its strengths as well as its vulnerabilities—and this is where our government has failed in a major way.

Our negotiators have overlooked key vulnerabilities of our economy. After seven years of conflict, our industrial and manufacturing base is in tatters. With less than average private investment and negligible foreign investment during this period, do we have industries that can compete in the international market?

The gains from free trade agreements are neither guaranteed nor automatic contrary to

Despite the policy reforms initiated in the early 90's, our economy remains mired in red tape, inefficiency and low productivity. Will we have deepened and widened reforms to make our industries more competitive before our economies become more open to international competition under the conditions of these agreements? Our comparative advantage, at least in the short run, remains in the services sector. Shouldn't we negotiate to increase access and opportunities for migrant labor in overseas economies? The government gets more than a third of its revenue from trade tariffs and the reduction of tariff rates will reduce government revenue. Where will we then get money for our development expenses, given that the country is already so aid dependent?

These are clearly questions that deserved more attention before we hastened to join the trading arrangements. It is all good joining the party. But what use is it if you haven't got the right clothes or the moves to strut out on the dance floor. **N**

Catalyst For Changes

Women's groups are effecting change in small but meaningful ways. If they can overcome political and ethnic divisions and traditional thinking, they can make much bigger changes.

AJITBARALPOKHARA

After the 1991 Constitution guaranteed the freedom of association, many Aama Samuhas have been formed all over the country. In Pokhara alone there are now about 40 of these "Mothers' Groups," which try to improve local neighborhoods through direct action. The movement is so popular that there are as many as four of the groups jostling for recognition in some neighborhoods. The growth rate is just one sign of the small and meaningful but often-overlooked changes they make.

Aama Samuhas usually start out small by cleaning up their neighborhoods. Then they branch out to bigger and more meaningful work. They pave roads and build pauwas, chautaris, temples and taps. Some turn to social action: they stop deforestation and cigarette smoking. Enterprising groups may police their localities, for ex-

Only a few days ago, members of the Gyanmarg Swatantra Mahila Samuha made a series of raids on houses of drug peddlers. They confiscated shoes, clothes and mobile phones pawned by drug users who had no cash. Their repeated requests to the police for action against the drug peddlers had gone unanswered, so they took matters into their own hands.

Aama Samuhas are also actively promoting culture. They organize and participate in Dohari Geet, Ratauli and Balan Nach competitions. They do Bhajan Kirtan on religious occasions and play deusi-bhailo at Tihar. They also do street performances on occasions like Janmaastami. The cultural and religious performances are not done purely for the promotion of culture: It's about money too. Saraswoti Aryal, president of the Ujjol Aama Samuha, Budhibazaar, says, "Cultural performances are our main source of income."

barely literate and easily cowed by men have started to talk confidently, defend themselves shrewdly and become better at developing interpersonal relations. Laxmi Kayastha, president of the Gyanmarg Swatantra Mahila Samuha, says, "My involvement in the Samuha has wiped out my inhibitions and made me more forward."

But divisions in Aama Samuhas cut deep. Some are drawn along ideological lines, others on ethnic grounds. Aama Samuhas aren't immune to politics either. Prakash Ghimire, theatre artist and teacher at Kanya School, says, "The division in Aama Samuhas turns unsavory during the election time. Aama Samuhas seem more stable now because there haven't been elections for quite some time." Aama Samuhas so far haven't been able to turn themselves into a broader alliance of women coming from different castes. That's why more than one Aama Samuha might be started in *atole*, doing the same work the other Samuha has been doing and wasting valuable resources in the process. In Tulsi Ghat, for example, two pauwas have been built, one by a Bahun Samuha and the other by a Gurung Samuha. Ghimire says, "If Aama Samuhas can cut across party politics and racial lines, they can effect significant changes in our society."

Social divisions limit how effective the groups can be, but so do old-fashioned ideas. Many Samuhas are guided by a narrow concept of their dharma. Providing scholarships to poor girls, helping women oppressed by men or providing skills-development training to the poorest rarely qualify. Instead, Aama Samuhas often spend a lot of energy and income on building temples and organizing Mahayagyas. "The majority wanted to build a mandir, not a water tank," says Aryal.

Saroj Baral, secretary of the Participatory Development Center, which has been organizing leadership training to women, says, "Aama Samuhas are formed without defining any specific objectives. So they start building patis, pauwas, mandirs and chautaris because these are the easiest things to do, and more visible, too."

"Once educated women start participating, the energies of Aama Samuhas will be directed towards institutional development and substantive social works," says Baral. **N**

ample by banning the playing of cards, which they call an unproductive and expensive pastime among Nepali men. A number of women's groups have been successful in making their neighborhoods alcohol-free. The anti-alcohol efforts get a lot of support from women, who are, more often than not, the victims of alcohol-related abuses, and they also get media attention.

A member of the Gyanmarg Swatantra Mahila Samuha, who retired after 32 years of service at the Gandaki Regional Hospital, says, "I had thought my quota of social service was over after my retirement. But after joining the Samuha, I have found a new sense of mission." This mission has given women something to feel good about. Women who were





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By The Fireside

His explorations into *tantra* took him to a point of madness and instability where he seriously contemplated suicide. His spiritual rebirth happened when he re-discovered the art of sculpture as a grown man.

BY SANJEEV UPRETY

A boy, about four years of age, was playing with clay. He dug his fingers deep into the brown mud, trying to shape the material in his little hands into little toys, creating figures of men and women, and gods and monsters. As far back as he could remember, he was always fascinated by the texture of clay. He loved the way soft pliant mud was so malleable in his hands, the way it took strange shapes as he played with its soft, wet texture.

The boy was born into an extremely poor family. Later, as he grew up, he became aware that he was blessed, or condemned, by powers of divination, of prediction. He often surprised his family and relatives by pronouncing exactly

how much money each one of them had in their pockets, an ability that often drew censure and punishment rather than praise. An awareness of such an innate, though unexplained, faculty prompted him to study *tantra*, to draw *mandalas* upon mud, to study the unexplained energies that pervaded the universe and to try directing the lives of other people around him. His explorations into *tantra*, however, took him to the edge, to a point of madness and instability where he seriously contemplated suicide.

His spiritual rebirth happened, however, when he re-discovered the art of sculpture as a grown man. His childhood interest in clay resurfaced as he sculpted forms of Ganesh and images of love from the undifferentiated mass of clay. He formally studied art at the Fine Arts Cam-

pus at Bhotahiti, won a number of awards and honors—including the first prize in the annual arts and crafts exhibition at NAFA in 2052 B.S.—and became known in the art circles of Nepal by the name of Gopal ‘Kalapremi’ Shrestha with a number of solo and group exhibitions to his credit.

After completing his bachelors in arts, Kalapremi studied a number of themes—including that of Ganesh, a hypothetical woman called Kumudini and of love, ambition and joy—through the medium of clay. He also opened a shop at his house at Panipokhari to create commercial sculpture, while at the same time pursuing his more serious work—sometimes defined as postmodern—in the quiet of his studio upstairs. His

tireless explorations into the mysteries of clay drew foreign interest. Now his work is displayed in the private collections all over the world.

Kalapremi experimented with different techniques of sculpture. Not only did he work with different types of clay to create coiled, mounded or pinch shapes, but also played with different types of glazes, thin glassy coatings that are melted upon the surface of the clay pieces to make them non-porous. No matter what techniques he used, however, his art remained deeply influenced by the themes of spiritual quest, by an awareness of innate unexplored energies residing in his, perhaps everyone else’s, soul. In a modern world increasingly bereft of magic and wonder, he tried to rekindle magic for himself by recalling the half understood intimations of his childhood upon the mass of clay and pieces of stone.

Few months back, I visited Kalapremi as he was firing his clay pieces by using the technique of *Raku* at the roof of his house. His students, Praveen, GK Shrestha, and friends like the painter/sculptor duo of Sunita and Sudarshan Rana accompanied him by the fireside, actively helping him in the process by which images in clay were given their final form. The images had to undergo the test of the fire—more than 1040 degree Celsius in the kiln—before being reborn as complete works of art.

As the evening arrived, the air became cold and thick. Oblivious to the passing time, however, Kalapremi and his comrades were solely intent upon the procedures of *Raku*. Taking the “fired” images of Gods and Goddesses and men and women from the unbearable heat of the refractory chamber, they covered these images with sawdust, before immersing them into water. Passing through both fire and water the clay pieces—tinted variously by base glazes and additional metallic oxides—emerged finally as finished pieces, some bluish, others green or red or white. As the evening thickened, they lay smoldering before our eyes; not as dead objects of art but as living things suffused with hidden, unexplained energies. Perhaps the fields of *tantra* and art were not exclusive of each other, after all. ■

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Nothing To Say

Why do shows like Miss Nepal need to be conducted in English? Most NTV viewers would feel more comfortable with Nepali.

BY DEEPAK THAPA

I suppose I was not alone in cringing with embarrassment while watching the Miss Nepal show some days back. It had been years since I had sat down purposefully to view “the paragons of Nepali beauty” prance around on the stage. Having suffered through a couple of episodes in the past, my hope was that in the intervening years the proceedings had evolved to become a standard act. The media hype preceding the grand finale was partly responsible for the optimism. That was why the disappointment was so real.

“Beauty with a purpose” is the slogan coined by the organizers of the Miss World contest, to which our own pageant is affiliated. I can only guess that the purpose here was for the beauty queens to make fools of themselves. Fortunately for them, and unfortunately for us viewers, that distinction also extended to some on the judging panel. Dumb questions were rewarded with even dumber answers. We were treated to the rather distasteful sight of the beauty queens getting their teeth examined: If only there were some way of checking out their brains as well!

Since it was simply torturous to watch beyond the first round, I would not know if the other rounds were any better. But I doubt it. The question uppermost in everyone’s mind is why these shows have to be conducted in English. It is not as if Nepal is an Anglophone country, as could be said of India or Sri Lanka. Most viewers of NTV would surely have felt more comfortable had the proceedings been in Nepali. Since the majority would not have been able to follow what was going on, all they would have seen is “beauty,” while the “purpose” would certainly have eluded them.

It was difficult to say whose English was worse, the beauty queens’ or, barring a couple of exceptions, the judges’. The diction was appalling and the formulations atrocious. The thrust of both questions and answers were convoluted. Admittedly the judges had no choice but to use English to ask their questions since the beauty queens insisted on it. But since most of them were not comfortable with English, they could have used Nepali to begin with and switched over if requested to. At least reading from a prepared text is easier, although even then there were some boo-boos.

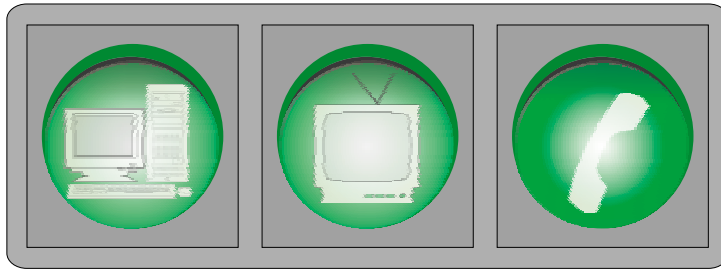
Staying on the subject of English, one wonders if the beauty queens are led to believe that speaking English provides a better shot at winning the title. That cannot be the case since one is reminded of the elegant Ruby Rana, the first Miss Nepal, or the coy Neelima Gurung a few years later, wowing the crowds with their chaste Nepali. So, why is it that the most of the girls prefer English even though their command of the language is far, far from perfect? Was that just a pretension to being “hep,” as the more uncharitable would like to think? That is a possible explanation, although I believe it has more to do with the backgrounds the beauty queens come from.

It was clear from their accents when they spoke English that they most likely have attended private schools. That would have made them quite at home with using English in everyday conversation. But given the kind of education these schools impart, once they were led to topics that required some cerebral activity, they stuttered and stammered as they tried to make themselves understood. Why not speak in Nepali then? The plain and simple reason probably is that they would not be able to do justice to Nepali either. Their English-medium schooling would have ensured that they have even less facility with Nepali as a medium of any serious discourse. And we laugh at the poor girls for putting up a brave face before the world as they struggle with their answers, when all along we should be blaming the schools for producing a generation that is halfway between English and Nepali, conversant at both but with mastery over neither.

I have serious problems with the arguments by anti-beauty-contest protestors that these shows demean women or that they are a commercialization of beauty. I asked a couple of quick questions to gauge the



views of the women in my family, and there was general agreement that there is nothing wrong with beauty contests, that they are yet another way to celebrate womanhood. Yet, I have to admit that if after 11 years the pageant is still at this level, perhaps the organizers owe it to us viewers, as well as the would-be queens, to put the Miss Nepal contest on hold for a few years and save all of us the trouble for now. **N**



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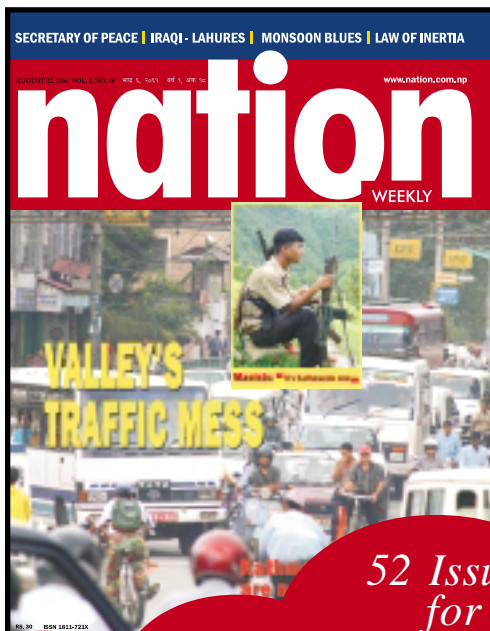
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Massage Parlors

We can't let the tired trekkers go limping back to their countries, can we?

BY KUNAL LAMA

Mountain ranges in Nepal extend from east to west; the Himalayas are in the far north. The brutal realization dawns quickly: to take delight in the beauty of the mountains, one has to do a lot of ascending and descending on unforgiving trails, both on the way up and down. Back on the relatively level streets of Kathmandu, an exhilarated but exhausted trekker's requirements are simple and immediate: a hot shower; clean clothes; a hearty meal; a soft bed and, often, a tendon-tenderising, ligament-loving, muscle-mothering, relaxing body massage.

Thamel, that one-stop tourist and trekker's Mecca in the heart of Kathmandu, does not fail to deliver. From a jangle of signboards, "Himali Trekker's Ayurvedic Centre MASSAGE" sounds just the ticket, shouting out its list of restorative cures for every ache a trek-weary veteran of the Himalaya requires: Accupressure! Shiatsu! Ancient Thai! Ayurvedic! MASSAGE (for a strange reason, the word "massage" is always capitalized)! In fact, you quickly notice that massage parlors sprout out from almost every single building in almost every lane. It's a simple economic reaction: Where there is demand, supply. However, one does start to get slightly curious, and even suspicious, when signboards begin to proclaim insidiously: "Alternative Healing Centre MASSAGE," "Complementary MASSAGE Clinic," "Monalisa MASSAGE Parlour." When it gets to "Mount Trekking MASSAGE Steam Bath" and "Sabai Dee Body Care Herbal Oils MASSAGE" the penny, or the paisa, finally drops. There is definitely more to massages than meets the eye. How right you are!

On the evening of August 9, the local police mounted a raid on eight massage parlors in Thamel—17 masseuses were arrested, along with 10 clients, and four proprietors of these places. Their crime? Rather than therapeutic, relaxing, stress-reducing massages, the masseuses and their clients were found to be engaged in, umm..., "immoral activities." In other words, and to put it plainly, they were caught red-handed enjoying commercial sex.

Oh, what a silly to-do! Of course, everyone knows that this is happening. The proprietor knows because he (more likely she actually) owns the place! And he knows sex definitely sells better than shiatsu. If you have ever had a *shiatsu*, you would agree too. Imagine an extended origami lesson except, instead of a piece of colorful paper, your body is the thing being pulled and manipulated into joint-crunching folds. What cheek to call it relaxing!

The masseuse knows because she works there! When she is only 16 or 17, far away from home, skills and education limited, and jobs

hard to come, hey, would you say "no" if: the money is good; the hours are decent; all the clients demand only one thing which, more or less, comes so naturally to everyone, no training required; and the bosses are so nice that they even introduce you to their friends? Plus it's so easy to get a taxi back home from Thamel after the shift is over.

The client knows because that is why he goes there! After a day of facing the rigors of modern living, what better way to regain mental equilibrium than to surrender to the smooth administrations of a nubile young thing. The quarrel with the wife in the morning? What quarrel? The run-in with the boss at work? History! The empty hours after college and the raging hormones? Done, and so much better than the mindless loafing around New Road or chatting at Nepalnews.com because this is the real thing!

The police know because they also go there! They are human after all. With wives far away at home, and all the beating they get from the rioters in the streets, their hearts and limbs ache too. And we know because we keep seeing guys of all guises going in and out with their helmets on AND visors down. They don't look very much like tourists either. In fact, they look like your father, your uncle, your husband, your nephew or even your brother.



Now the campaign is on to close massage parlors, to rid society of these morally corrupting dens of vices from the face of the earth. Well and good, but what about the investments of the owners? Where will all those poor girls go? How will the husbands, office-goers and hopes-of-the-future get their stresses, frustrations and tensions peeled away with such concerned care? And those tired trekkers? We can't let them go limping back to their countries, now can we? In a country where guests are on par with gods, that would simply not be the done thing! **N**

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At Home In The Village

BY PRAGYAN SUBEDI

MAHABIR PUN HAS RECEIVED substantial exposure since he developed the idea of connecting five remote villages in Myagdi to each other and to the outside world by installing wireless Internet access. It is hard to imagine him enjoying the limelight: Instead he takes every opportunity to minimize his role. “My position in the village is always [that of] a volunteer,” he told us in an e-mail sent from his village of Nangi last week, when

we asked him a series of questions about himself, “and the village leaders are formally taking the full responsibility for keeping the school and other projects [operating].”

The Internet is the only means of communication available to the villagers. Students are using Internet, and a teacher has been put in charge at each Internet center. Internet, though, is only one of many ideas that have changed the villagers, in ways big and small. That is thanks to Pun and others, who want to develop their community and also preserve their traditional ways of life and customs.

Nangi is remote even by western Nepal’s standards. The only way to reach there is to first take a three-hour-plus journey by bus or taxi from Pokhara to Beni, and then another eight to 10-hour walk. The village is close to the Annapurna and Dhaulagiri ranges.

Pun’s father, a retired soldier of the British Army, who could only read Romanized Nepali, impressed on Pun the value of a good education. But getting one was still an uphill task. Pun spent his childhood unaware of modern developments of every kind. He recounts how his imagination was fed by stories from far away; once when he heard from a soldier that some people “in a place called America” had managed to “walk on air” by sending a rocket into space. Another recollection is of when he first saw a radio. When nobody was around, Pun sneaked into the room where the



radio was and tried to look into the “talking and singing box to see the people inside.”

Although not very well educated, Pun’s father made sure that his children went to school. Pun considers his father to have been a “man of vision,” as he understood the importance of education at a time when almost nobody in his village even considered sending their children to school. Considerable sacrifices were made to educate the children of the family, which moved to Tarai for the purpose of Pun’s schooling. Nostalgically, Pun remembers this migration as a turning point in his life, when he had to give up the pleasures of grazing sheep and cattle with his grandfather and playing games with his friends on the surrounding slopes.

By the time Pun had finished high school, his family was in a financial mess. Pun decided, against the wishes of his father, to start out as a teacher instead of going to college. He taught for 12 years and helped his siblings attend school. In the late 1980s, he decided he wanted to continue his education and wrote persistently to colleges in the United States. Finally, in 1989, he was accepted at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, where he received an M.A. in education.

Pun says that it was during his time in the United States that he decided to go back to his birthplace, Nangi, and make efforts to provide educational opportunities to children there so that others could avoid the sufferings and deprivations he had gone through as a child. In 1992, he returned to his village in the mountains. It had been 24 years since he had last set foot there, and nobody recognized him. Pun spent a few months quietly, observing the village and thinking of ways in which he could contribute. The villagers thought he was only there for a vacation, and didn’t believe him when he told them that he wanted to teach in the local school.

Some retired soldiers had started the school after World War II. Until 1992 the school only offered classes up to middle school level. In 1992 the villagers, with

substantial help from Pun, decided to develop a high school as well: Himachal School was born.

Since 1992, Himachal School has undergone many developments due to the efforts of the villagers. Now the school has students not only from Nangi but from the surrounding villages as well. Each family in the village supplies unpaid labor for the school, and many soldiers give portions of their salaries and pensions. The students themselves are required to provide labor. Pun has managed to receive funds from various sources, and foreign volunteers come regularly to Nangi. The long-term goal of Himachal School is to expand into a multi-purpose institute that will include a research institute for educational and rural development, a training institute for teachers, a vocational training institute for rural people and a professional training center for development workers.

The twin goals of making the school self-supportive and the community self-sufficient are high on the priority list. With this in mind various agricultural and tourism programs have been initiated. For instance, the community raises yaks and rabbits, farms poultry and keeps bees so they can sell meat and honey to villagers. Camping grounds have been built where tourists can spend the night for a small fee. The villagers plan to set up three mountain resorts. The Himachal High School Project, after all, is aiming at developing the whole community. The idea is to make the community self-reliant by using its natural resources while finding ways to protect them.

Though Pun is responsible for some of the ideas implemented in the village and for bringing volunteers to the village, he insists he is “just a volunteer and not a leader.” He says “...it is true that the international volunteers who come to the village communicate with me before they come.” He then adds with customary modesty. “It is mainly because I can communicate in the English language with them...”

He says: “The only thing outsiders can do is help them [villagers] from behind the scene, encouraging the villagers to move forward and holding them from ‘falling.’” Other village leaders are taking full responsibility for making the projects run, and in the long run Pun expects that his responsibilities will be all taken over by other members of the village. **N**

(For further details on Mahabir Pun’s projects, visit <http://himachal.org/index.html>.)



CITY ThisWeek

EVENTS



nw/DB

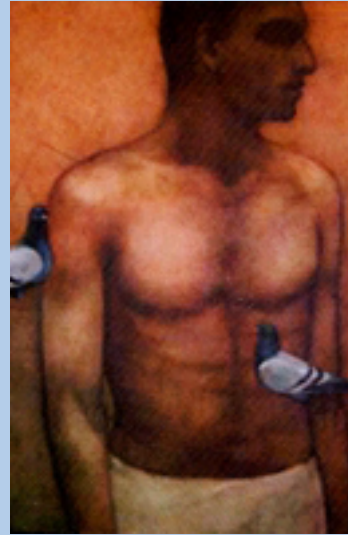
Bagmati Eco Challenge

With an aim to establish Nepal as a top adventure sports destination and also to give the Valley an international event of its own, the Nepal River Conservation Trust and the Sustainable Tourism Network is organizing the first ever Bagmati Eco-Challenge. The race is a team event with seven member teams comprising of a manager, two runners, two bikers, one raft guide and one kayaker. This being the first year, individual contestants will also be

entertained. The organizers will themselves find teams to fit the single contestants. Runners will run a mini-marathon of 13.5km, bikers will pedal along a 27-km route and the rafters and kayakers will paddle a 7-km stretch of the upper Bagmati. The starting points for each of the different events are: Chobar for the mini-marathon, Balaju for mountain biking, and Sundarijal for rafting and kayaking. Date: August 20. Time: 6 a.m. Final date for

ART EXHIBITIONS

CONTEMPRORY EXPRESSIONS FROM INDIA



Siddhartha Art Gallery and Gallery Beyond, Mumbai, in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of India present "Contemporary Expressions From India." Celebrating the 58th Independence Day of India, 20 Nepali and Indian artists will be featuring their paintings at the event. The Charge d' Affaires of the Indian Embassy, Mr. V.P.Haran will open the exhibition. At the Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal. Opening: 5:30 p.m. on August 19. Till August 30. For information: 4438716.

registration: August 17. For information: 4435207.

This week at Martin Chautari:

AUGUST 17
MANGALBARE DISCUSSION
Topic: Availability of Water in Kathmandu Valley. Pundit: Laxmi Prasad Devkota, geo-technical Engineer. Time: 5 p.m.

AUGUST 19
MEDIA DISCUSSION

Topic: Peace Journalism. Pundits: Mohan Mainali, Centre for Investigative Journalism and Hasta Gurung, Nepal Press Institute. Time: 3 p.m.

AUGUST 22
POLITICAL DISCUSSION
Topic: Contemporary Politics. Time: 3 p.m.

Cine Club
Movie: Nikita(1990). At Alliance Francaise, Tripureshwor. Free admission. Date: August 22. Time: 2 p.m.



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Inter-Cultural Film Society

The Inter-Cultural Film Society shows a film at the Nepal Tourism Board in Bhrikutimandap, Kathmandu every month. The films are mainly from southern countries, in their original lan-



guages with English subtitles. This month:

LE PRIX DU PARDON (THE PRICE OF FORGIVENESS)

This is a film by Mansour Sora Wade of Senegal in 2001. The story is played out in a fishing community where the sea supplies whatever the inhabitants need for life. The threat comes in the form of a strange fog which hovers over the village and coast, but no prayer and sacrifice is able to disperse it. Mbanickrisks the wrath of the spirits and brings back the sun. Date: August 22. Time: 5:30p.m. For information: 4481659, 5549386.

ONGOING

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New look JBC

Catch Hits FM award winning singer Dimple & his band Full Circle Live. Venue: The Bakery Cafe,

Jawalakhel. Every Friday. Time: 7 PM Onwards. For information: 5522949.

Afternoon jam session

Bringing the best of R&B and House. At Club Platinum, Yak & Yeti Hotel. Attire: Smart Casuals. Every Saturday. Time: 2 - 7 p.m. Tickets: Rs. 300 (Ladies), Rs. 400 (Gents), Rs. 500 (Couple).

Splash spring BBQ

At Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu. Every Wednesday and Friday evenings. Time: 6 p.m.

THE AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY FILM ROADSHOW 2004

The Australian Embassy Film Roadshow is a festival of contemporary Australian films to be held in conjunction with the Australian Film Commission. Coming to Kathmandu for the third year in a row, the Film Roadshow will feature six recent Australian movies. These will showcase the development of the Australian cinematographic industry and highlight the country's history, culture and contemporary values. From August 20 to August 22 at the Russian Culture Centre, Kamalpokhari. Profits made will be used for a charitable cause. Tickets: Rs. 50, available at the Australian Embassy, Bansbari, 4371678; Hotel Radisson, Lazimpat, 4423888; Himalayan Java, Thamel, 4416692. Movies featured:

THE MAN WHO SUED GOD

When lightning strikes and sinks Steve Myers' fishing boat (and home), the insurance company declares it an Act of God and refuses to pay. No man can prevail against the might of the multinational. Angry and hung over, Steve sees no way but to sue the other party—God himself. Cast: Billy Connolly, Judy Davis, Wendy Hughes, Billie Brown. Di-

rected by: Mark Joffe. Date: August 21. Time: 11 a.m.

BLACK AND WHITE

"Black and White" is based on the real life story of Rupert "Max" Stuart's arrest and trial for the rape and murder of a young girl in Cenuda, South Australia.

Cast: Robert Carlyle, Charles Dance, Kerry Fox, Colin Friels, Ben Mendelsohn, David Ngoombujarra. Directed by: Craig Lahiff. Date: August 21. Time: 2 p.m.

THE BANK

"The Bank" is a political thriller set

in the world of high finance, a modern day story of alchemy.

Cast: Anthony Lapaglia, David Wenham, Steve Rodgers, Mandy McElhinney, Sibylla Budd, Mitchell Butel. Directed by: Robert Connolly. Date: August 21. Time: 4 p.m.

CRACKER JACK

When dwindling membership and increasing overheads make a local bowling club a prime candidate for takeover, it's all hands on deck to save the club. Young meets old, greed meets good and people rise to the occasion in extraordinary circumstances.

Cast: Mick Molloy, Judith Lucy, Bill Hunter, Frank Wilson, Monica Maughan, John Clarke. Directed by: Paul Moloney. Date: August 22. Time: 11 a.m.

THE TRACKER

Three men are led across Australia by an aboriginal tracker in the hunt for a black man accused of murdering a white woman. The year is 1922 and, if caught, the man will be assumed guilty and hanged for his crime, as he has no right being an indigenous.

Cast: David Gulpilil, Gary Sweet, Grant Page, Damon Gameau, Noel Wilton. Directed by: Rolf de Heer. Date: August 22. Time: 2 p.m.

LANTANA

"Lantana" is a study of relationships, honing in on the issue of trust. While avoiding contrivance, it explores four marriages, which are in various states of disrepair. A psychological thriller, it's about the mistakes we make, the consequences we suffer and the attempts we make to fix things up.

Cast: Geoffrey Rush, Anthony LaPaglia, Barbara Hershey, Peter Phelps, Vince Colosimo. Directed by: Ray Lawrence. Date: August 22. Time: 4 p.m.



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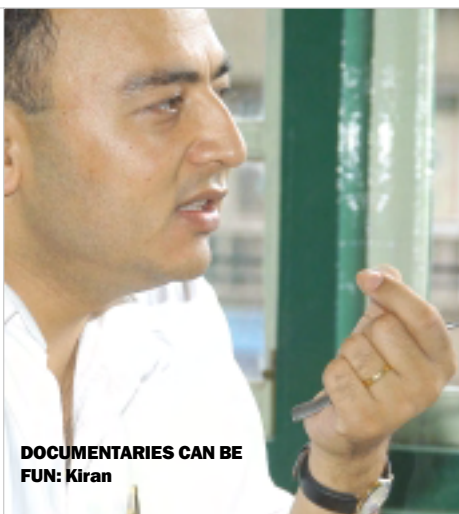
**BHEDAKO OON
JASTO: In search
of a song**

SETTING THE Screens ABLAZE

“Fahrenheit 9/11” has been a grand success in America. So it turns out in Nepal.

BY YASHAS VAIDYA

A few weeks ago, Michael Moore made a statement in Nepal. Not him actually, he let his film do the talking for him. As the presidential election heats up in the United States, Moore’s latest film “Fahrenheit 9/11,” aimed squarely at dethroning President Bush, was shown for the first time to Nepali audiences at the Baggikhana hall, Patan Dhoka. The polemical documentary—or non-fiction film, as some people would prefer to call it—generated heat and controversy. And not just because of its content. The film drew a huge turnout, and the organizers, pressed for space, were not able to accommodate all those who turned up, even after repeat showings. The illegal copy of the film used for the screenings didn’t earn the organizers much praise either.



**DOCUMENTARIES CAN BE
FUN: Kiran**

Controversies aside, the fact that Moore’s film generated that much interest here, far away from the battleground America, points to something larger. More and more people in Nepal are watching documentaries.

A decade ago the Film Himalaya’94 was organized to promote documentaries. In 1997, Himal Association followed up with Film South Asia. “In the first FSA, we started with half-empty halls,” recalls Manesh Shrestha, festival director of Film South Asia. The crowd would have disappointingly few Nepalis. Fast-forward to 2003 and to the fourth FSA: Many screenings had a full house. This was true not only for Nepali flicks. Most of the documentaries, including those from outside Nepal, were sold out too, some well before the screenings. And this time, it was Nepalis who had outnumbered the non-Nepalis.

The demand has helped promote local documentaries. The documentary is gradually losing its reputation of being too serious for its own good and “only for intellectuals.” The 2003 edition of FSA featured a film that has been immensely successful by documentary standards, “Bhedako Oon Jasto.” The film is about journalist Narayan Wagle’s quest in search of an elusive tune by the same name as the film. This simple tale about Wagle’s journey, along with filmmaker Kiran Krishna Shrestha and a few Nephathya band members, to Langtang premiered at the closing ceremony of FSA 2003 at Jai Nepal Hall—again to a full house.

It became the first documentary in Nepal to be screened in a commercial cinema hall. The tickets sold out like hot cakes: On the day of the screening, many were left outside trying desperately to get a seat. Inside the packed hall, even the aisles were filled, and audiences watched the movie in pin-drop silence.

“People came up to me and said that my movie was not a documentary at all,” says Shrestha, “because documentaries are not supposed to be that fun.” Shrestha’s documentary ran for a week at the Jai Nepal. After that it went on a tour of the country to 11 different locations—again a first for a documentary.

Even though viewers are warming up to the idea of watching documentaries, Shrestha is skeptical about whether the documentary as a genre has yet established itself in Nepal. He says, “Independent filmmaking is yet to be established in Nepal. I mean the kind of independent film-making where the filmmaker doesn’t feel any kind of pressure,”

he says, in reference to market and funding pressures the movie-makers in Nepali feel. "Not even the pressure of self-censorship that they feel, say, when they produce a movie on a political issue."

With all that, Manesh Shrestha (no relation to the filmmaker) believes that a documentary-watching trend is slowly taking root. "We need more regular screenings," he says, stressing that "but first the documentaries have to be made."

This gap between production and demand may well be filled by the younger generation, which is slowly beginning to take interest in documentary making. What has certainly helped is the cost, which has come down

substantially over the years. With access to small video cameras and computers, some of them are now making documentaries for private viewing. Parag Satyal, an A-level student, says, "Though I do watch movies, I love documentaries. They tend to be more 'real.'" Satyal finds the entire process of making documentaries—the shooting, editing and juxta-

posing of clips to create a film—very creative.

Other aspiring young filmmakers are coming up with serious films. In the near future, look for Kesang Tseten's "On the road with the Red God: Machhindranath." Tseten follows the chariot of Rato Machhindranath from its construction along its winding procession through ancient Patan. He records as the chariot gets tangled up in electric wires and is dragged, pushed and pulled through Patan's streets.

Coming back to Michael Moore and his movie. You may agree with him or not, but he certainly has made documentary history. The question now remains: Was the large turnout at Baggikhana the other day a lasting trend, the sign of the coming of age of documentary-watching in Nepal? Or was it just due to the hype surrounding "Fahrenheit 9/11"? We will be watching. **N**



NO MASALA FILM THIS: Shekar Kharel's "Kathmandu Odyssey"



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Monsoon Blues

Nepal's premier football league plays during the monsoon. The players' fancy footwork is often just an attempt to remain upright on the slippery field.

BY SUDESH SHRESTHA

An Englishman visiting his Irish friend was disturbed to find his friend's roof leaking, and that the friend was oblivious to the flood the leak had caused in the house. Confused, the Englishman politely asked his friend why he hadn't bothered to plug the hole in the roof. "Don't you see it is raining now?" replied his friend. It was a fair enough response. It really wasn't possible to work on the roof on a wet day.

When the Englishman went to see his friend again, the sun was shining. He again suggested that his friend fix the roof. But his friend, again, would have none of it. "I don't need to," said the Irishman. "It's not leaking now."

The old English joke sums up Nepali football officials' approach to a perennial problem. The final matches of the country's premier football league, the Sahid Smarak Football League, were played in the middle of monsoon last month, and the football ground inside Dashrath Stadium resembled the paddy fields outside. The mess is the same every year, but the country's football gov-

erning body, ANFA, has so far been unable to do anything about it.

Of the 94 matches played this season, at least a dozen saw players more concerned about falling on their faces rather than fighting over the ball. All this certainly hasn't helped ANFA's overarching goal: to get a full house at the stadium, like during the 1970's and 80's.

"Only two or three matches were postponed due to rain this season," says an official with ANFA, which itself does a balance-beam act each year. The league has had to schedule games so as not to clash with other events in the over-used stadium. Even in the rainy season, the stadium costs ANFA Rs. 7,000 per day. Last year, the Shahid Smarak was played between June 2 and August 11; this year between May 17 and July 18. Pre-monsoon would be an alternative, but it gets too hot to get the best out of the booters.

Still, ANFA should be given credit for introducing some smart plans this season. The move to increase the prize money to more than Rs. 1 million, including half a million to the league winners, galvanized the participating clubs as well as football fans. Despite some

drab encounters, the competition remained fierce until the very end and produced a string of unexpected results. Competitions in the past often used to see the league title wrapped up well before the end of the season. This time, Three Star had to wait until the final game to clinch its second league crown with a scoreless draw against Mahendra Police Club in front of 20,000-odd spectators.

For the country's football administrators, concerned about declining crowds, it was a dream come true. "We're planning to double the prize money for the next league," declares Ganesh Thapa, ANFA president. ANFA officials say there is a strong possibility that the Sahid Smarak League may begin in September next season, well after the monsoon rains have gone and the muddy pitch has turned dry. Also, some games could be played at venues other than Dashrath Stadium, to protect the pitch.

One person who is keen to maintain the current tempo is the Three Star president, Lalit Krishna Shrestha. His club is organizing a musical show at the end of this month. "Being the league champion helps," he says with a smile. He most certainly will be happy that football will largely be a dry affair next season. That is, if ANFA keeps its word. **N**

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Snapshots

BY DHRITI BHATTA

The Nepali Bandhu

Let's admit it. Not many people these days dedicate themselves to the progress of the Nepali language. But for **CHUDAMANI BANDHU**, it is a matter of intense interest and pride. A linguist and a lifelong member at the Royal Academy, Bandhu has several books of linguistic research and Nepali literature under his belt. Already the winner of the "Madan Pursakar," he made it to the podium once again: as the winner of the "Mahakavi Devkota Puraskar-2060." "I believe I finally have received the one award I deserve," said Bandhu. And indeed, he's right. He has written the longest life history of Devkota and also several books compiling the great poet's stories, poems and songs. The Nepal Literature Academy, which hands out the award, has certainly chosen the right man.



Enter The Dragon

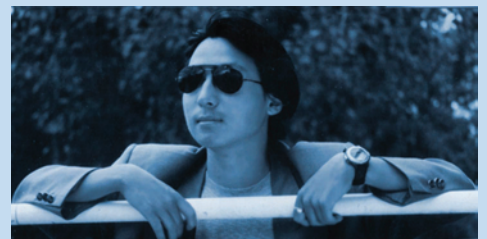
Fighting before a crowd of 40,000 fans avidly supporting you adversary must certainly provide an experience of a lifetime. Ask **DEV KUMAR GHIMIRE**, who fought against an 118-kg South Korean opponent in Seoul at the K-1 World GP-2004—a combination of martial arts practices including karate, kickboxing, taekwondo and kung fu. Ghimire was not able to overcome his opponent. But the participation in itself was achievement for Ghimire. The three-time Kyokushin karate champion became the first Nepali ever to participate at the K-1 World GP. Ghimire is not optimistic about his career in K-1, but says, "With proper training maybe, but without that it's impossible for Nepal to produce professional K-1 players." Let's hope the right people are reading.



WRITER IN THE RAI

Pop icon **DHIRAJ RAI** is in the habit of reinventing himself. Last year the documentary featuring him, "Itihas Jitneharuka Laagi," received critical acclaim at Film South Asia. He is now coming out with a book, "Pop Biteko Pandra Barsa," which talks about his long singing career that started with the hit song, "Luki, Luki." "It's high time we prove even singers can do a lot more than just singing," says Rai,

reflecting on his versatile approach. Rai wants people to read his new book to see for themselves.



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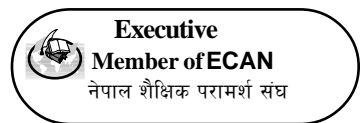
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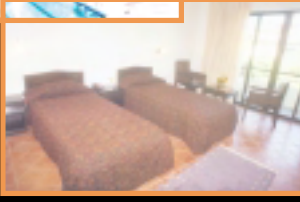


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The Law Of Inertia



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Professor Udayaraj Khanal is a much-respected member of the faculty in the Physics Department at Tribhuvan University in Kirtipur. An active researcher, Khanal has a reputation for questioning such established scientific equations as Einstein’s Theory of Relativity. While intellectual quests, often far from the beaten track, keep him excited, the sorry state of scientific research in Nepal hounds him to distraction. The country’s

mediocre and deeply-entrenched leadership in the field of science, he says, is deliberately bringing scientific development to a grinding halt. Khanal talked with Sunil Pokhrel about the state of scientific research in Nepal and how it’s largely been a zero-sum exercise for decades.

How does science contribute to a society’s development?

Science cannot be limited to a single definition. It has been an integral part of human civilization. No society can develop without appropriate use of scientific techniques. The development of a country depends a lot on how advanced its scientific researchers and their outputs are.

Does Nepal have scientists involved in research?

No. Science is a method of learning by trial and error. Unfortunately, that’s never been the case in Nepal. In fact, a significant percentage of our scientists saw that their future lay in following the politicians rather than the rigor of lab research. These cliques of scientists, who have received political patronage over the years, have become an impediment to learning through research. They have now become incapable and fear that research would expose their shortcomings and cost them their reputation. This feudalistic mindset of Nepal’s leadership in science is to be blamed for the sorry state of science in Nepal.

Is it fair to put the blame entirely on the leadership, which, after all, is a reflection of the individuals?

Nepal’s leaders in science have in fact been rewarded heavily, if you take into account the mistakes they have made. In

fact, those who have failed to make their mark end up as leaders. These people, naturally, get the priorities wrong and do not have the capacity to reflect over their actions and correct themselves. More than anything else, their ineptitude for more than two decades has never been questioned. A leader has to have a vision.

“Publish or perish,” the bedrock of a vibrant academia, doesn’t seem to work in Nepal.

You are right. Those who are in the top posts with a responsibility to advance science don’t seem to be involved in scientific studies. But if you look at the Indian leadership, everyone in a leadership position is actually a working scientist. It is just the opposite in Nepal. The one who can please the political parties most is given the position—no matter how unproductive the person is.

Outdated, non-working scientists should sideline themselves and give way

Isn’t RONAST playing the role as catalyst for advancement of scientific researches?

I am not aware of a single outstanding contribution by RONAST to the advancement of science in Nepal. It is collaborating with a good number of foreign scientific institutions but the links are all underutilized. And it is all deliberate. I don’t know a single aspiring scientist who has received help from RONAST for research. RONAST’s incompetence is evident with the way it has been handling the data from high al-

titude labs in Solukhumbu. Numerous foreigners have completed their doctorates using the data from the lab, but for Nepali researchers it’s been of no use.

How about the Ministry of Science and Technology?

It was established to accommodate political aides during rough political times in the recent past. The Ministry of Science and Technology has failed to change the face of science in Nepal.

Are the science faculties of the universities performing any better?

Unfortunately no. I have always tried to make a point: The focal point of research activities should be the labs of the universities. The research at places other than universities simply dilutes the resources and denies much needed research opportunities to the university students.

Did we ever have a golden era in Nepali science?

Gahendra Shumsher during Chandra Shumsher’s rule in the Rana regime researched indigenous technology and devised several useful instruments despite resource constraints. That may be the golden era for Nepali science.

How can you and the scientific community change this doomsday scenario?

Firstly, outdated, non-working scientists should sideline themselves and give way to the aspiring young people to work on their vision. Secondly, there should be political determination to take Nepali science to a new height, revamp the present setup where incompetent people are lording over competent people. **N**

Poor Performance

The mainstream papers failed during the emergency

BY PRATYOUSH ONTA

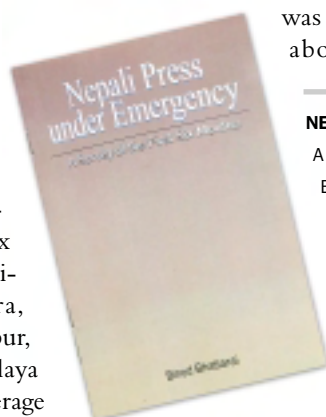
Given the enormous growth in Nepali media since the end of the Panchayat era, it is natural to ask how well it is serving its constituency, the people of Nepal. The question has been asked in the public sphere from time to time, and various exercises to find answers, some academically rigorous and others not so, have been held. In some of these exercises, the analysts have even fine-tuned the question itself by asking how the mainstream media has performed at particular moments of crisis, for example, the Royal Massacre, or under a period of formally declared stress such as the Emergency of November 2001 to August 2002. Binod Bhattarai's short study falls in the latter category.

For the sake of manageability of research, Bhattarai has included in his sample only six Nepali-language broadsheet dailies, Nepal Samacharpatra, Gorkhapatra, Rajdhani, Kantipur, Spacetime Dainik and Himalaya Times, and looked at the coverage in detail for only four of the first six months. He has looked at editorials, op-ed articles, news reports and "people stories," and he also paid attention to language (for example, the labeling of Maoists as "terrorists") and the use of sources. Following a brief background chapter, the main analysis is arranged chronologically by month and suffers from a repetitive narrative structure. He ends with a brief conclusion which says: "In the final analysis, however, it was clear that under pressure the mainstream papers failed to fulfill their responsibility."

Bhattarai reached this conclusion by borrowing the criteria of "good journalism" employed by media analyst Ross Howard in his handbook on conflict-sensitive journalism. The basic building blocks of good journalism are accuracy, impartiality and responsibility.

During the period studied by Bhattarai, the Nepali mainstream press was particularly wanting in terms of both accuracy and impartiality. Relying mostly on government sources, the reporting in the first months of the emergency was both inaccurate and obviously pro-state in its content. Near the end of the six-month period, sources had become more diversified but factual errors continued to plague the reporting.

After the imposition of the emergency and the promulgation of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention and Control) Ordinance on 26 November 2001, most editorials took a pro-state stance. There was hardly any discussion about what the emer-



NEPALI PRESS UNDER EMERGENCY:

A Survey of the First Six Months

Binod Bhattarai

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gency would make possible beyond repetition of clichés that suggested that once some of the fundamental rights of the Nepali people had been curtailed, the Royal Nepal Army could tackle the Maoists militarily without distractions. Once influential newspapers promoted such a position, they stopped being a forum for debate regarding the government justifications of the need of a state of emergency.

Why did most newspapers give the benefit of the doubt to the government and the Army in the initial stage of the emergency? One would have to conclude that the imposition of the terrorism act and other restrictions at the time of the declaration of emergency largely met with approval because of a confluence of several factors. First a society that had effectively resisted the imposition of a similar act in 1997 (see

Mary Des Chene's 1998 article in Himalayan Research Bulletin for details) had, by the end of 2001, experienced the Maoist insurgency at such a scale that its erstwhile confidence in the ability of the civil government to tackle the insurgency had greatly diminished. Hence, there was a willingness to give the benefit of doubt to the Army as it joined the war. In late November 2001, the Army was the only untested institution as far as the state's armed responses to the Maoists were concerned.

Second, patriotism and nationalism, never in short supply in Nepal, were marshaled to do away with any sense of doubt and skepticism regarding the Army's ability to deal with the Maoists. Their longstanding self-description as the last bastion of Nepali nationalism seems to have sufficiently influenced media opinion in their favor in the initial days of the emergency. Third, there was confusion in the minds of those leading the Nepali press. Languishing in its own confusion regarding what it ought to do to safeguard the civil liberties and other rights of the Nepali people at that moment, the media failed to adequately interrogate the powers that be and their rhetorical theatrics.

As the readers are told in chapter one, part of the limitations of this study arises from the fact that the author was not involved in the overall design of the research, which was done as part of the "emergency-watch" project by the Centre for Investigative Journalism with funding from the Denmark-based International Media Support. While Bhattarai's analysis was completed in early 2003, the manuscript was filed away for a whole year until it was hurriedly processed as a book under the Centre's subsequent "conflict and media" project funded by the GTZ. As happens with rushed work, the book is sloppily copyedited by the standards of Himal Books and contains several errors including one in the name of the donor that initially funded the study! Despite its faults, this short book contains enough insights for it to serve as a launching pad for further work on the subject. **N**



Pipes Of Peace

The government is busy talking up peace. The Maoists are busy trashing the government's core condition that it believes will make the negotiations productive: no compromise on constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy. Privately, though, Cabinet members from the CPN-UML speak a different language from that of their NC-D colleagues. UML ministers stress on the need for an immediate ceasefire and approaching the talks with the Maoists without any condition. They give the impression that they are determined to go far to make the Maoists join the political mainstream. They also assert that the 1991 Constitution will have to go if that makes the Maoists happy. And they seem open about debating ways to go about that.

Not everybody in the government, certainly not Prime Minister Deuba, prescribes to a no-holds-barred approach to negotiations. But Deuba's is a four-party government and differences are inevitable. They are healthy too. So long as they are managed within the confines of the Cabinet and not brandished publicly as some ministers are already doing. Over time, the leaders get trapped with their own rhetoric and their posturing muddies the overall atmosphere, eventually making both the opposing parties to the conflict think war is the only way to settle their differences. This is no theoretical science.

Two peace processes collapsed as much due to differences over the core issue—of constituent assembly—as due to the attendant theatrics. We call on both Mohammad Moshin, the Royal appointee in the Cabinet, and UML heavyweights outside the government to tone themselves down. General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal is understandably worried about the rightward

pull his party feels. But he will do well to come up with a more judicious ways to influence the government than venting his frustration every time he meets impressionable party cadres outside Kathmandu. Toward that end, we hope the newly constituted Peace Secretariat will help UML and NC-D see eye to eye.

A Maoist student leader, Lekhnath Neupane, told our reporter Satish Jung Shahi early this month that the Maoists are all set to “ring” the Kathmandu Valley. But Neupane kept short of pronouncing whether they were going ahead with their indefinite economic blockade of the capital, starting August 18. At a clandestine press meet in a Makwanpur village, Neupane said the Valley was gradually being “ringed” by the Maoist *Jan Sena* in adjoining districts of Dhading, Nuwakot, Rasuwa, Sindhupalchowk and Makwanpur.

Maoists, however, conceded to Shahi, who spent three days with them, that the “ring” command had suffered some heavy reverses last year after the ceasefire broke down. Still, they insisted that they had regrouped themselves. It will be very hard to establish the veracity of such claims. What we know for sure is this: The more the two parties to the conflict keep away from the negotiating table, the military establishments on either side get that much more entrenched. And the prospects for peace will recede that much further. Eight years of conflict has taught us as much.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor

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