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WEEKLY

CONFUSION

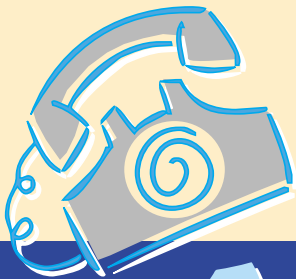
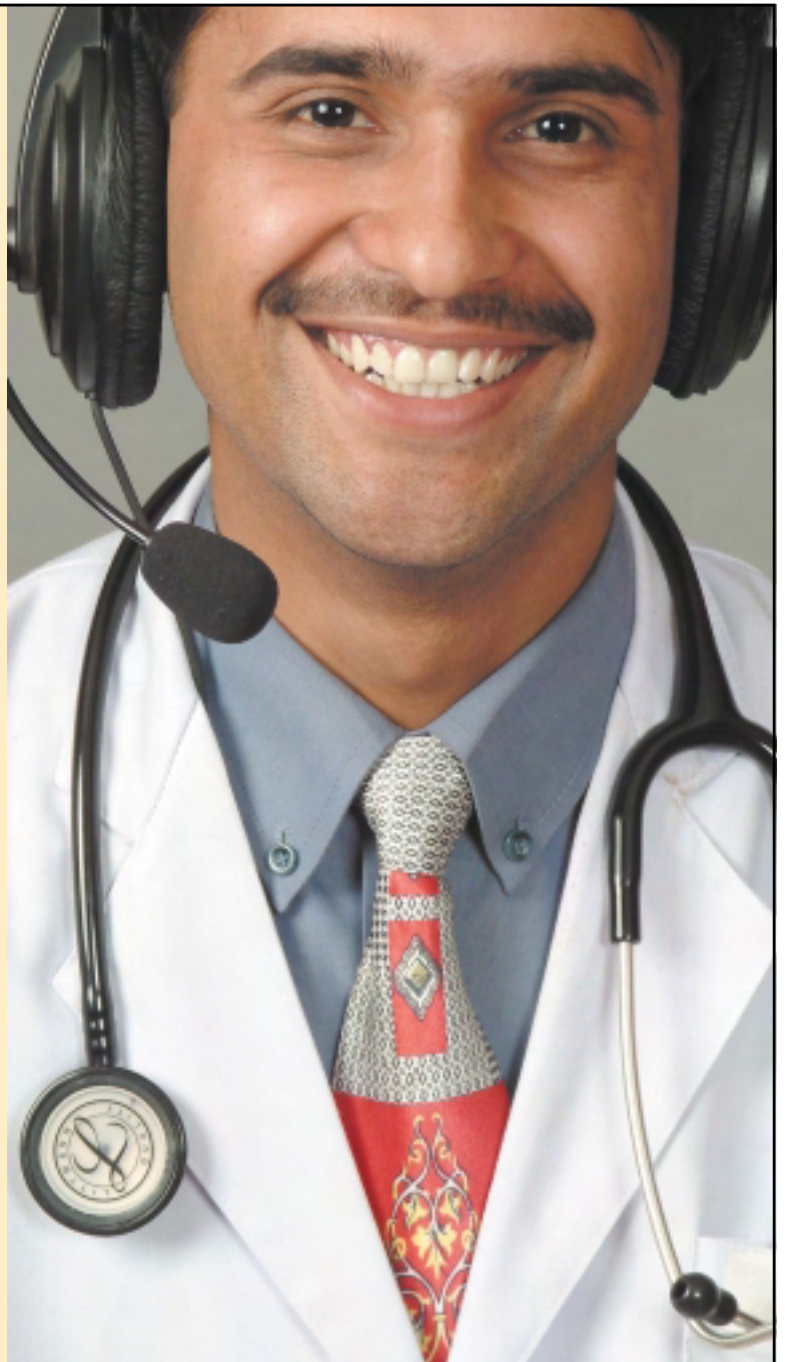
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By Satish Jung Shahi and Aditya Adhikari

Statements from the government, the Maoists, the parties and peaceniks are conflicting and confusing. What's clear is that the clock is ticking for Prime Minister Deuba, and neither peace nor elections seem any closer.

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Letters



“Both parties to the conflict rule through the barrel of a gun”

JAGANNATH LAMICHHANE

Press in peril

“PRESS IN PERIL” RELAYS HOW FAR the security forces and the Maoists have gone to muzzle the press (Last Word, September 26). Both parties to the conflict rule through the barrel of a gun, and the unarmed public can only watch helplessly. My thanks to the press for going a long way in protecting civil liberties. It has won a lot of public trust in the bargain.

JAGANNATH LAMICHHANE
TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY, KIRTIPUR

Science and RONAST

I FEEL IN PART HAPPY THAT MY views in your Khula Manch (August 22) provoked a response from the slumbering (white?) mammoth that is RONAST, transmitted in the name of Dinesh Bhuju (Letters, September 12). Although Chandra Shumsher brought electricity, established the first college, abolished slavery and burning of widows, etc., I never said that his was a golden era. Why does praise of Gahendra Shumsher’s courage in standing up to

the autocrats to usher in science upset RONAST? Maybe because it contrasts sharply with the present scientific leaders who stifle independent opinion to pander Lysenkoism in the name of science. Only these neo-Lysenkos are graced by the title of scientist. Those who toil in the lab to keep alive a semblance of research are never recognized. This was admitted at a seminar by a VIP from RONAST, who said he had abandoned his rightful place in the lab for the post that offered him better perks. So my “flat no” about scientists in Nepal was for the leadership, and I am sorry for any misunderstanding.

Reveling in distributing the taxpayers’ money as awards and grants at a very large overhead, the RONAST letter rues my Young Scientist Award, as if it was given to silence me. Claiming credit for the 25 or so physics students that are finding opportunities for higher studies in the United States every year, RONAST turns a blind eye to the many who roam the streets of Kathmandu in search of a livelihood. Had Abdus Salam’s public offer



of a high-tech center for Nepal been accepted, we would be way ahead in the fields like IT, biotech, materials, etc.

It is praiseworthy that a numerical record of my publications is maintained. I plod on for personal entertainment and am not as prolific an author as RONAST's stalwarts. But, I am most likely the first Nepali whose papers were accepted by the prestigious journal *Physical Review* in 1980. My paper accepted by the same journal in 1982 was the first from Nepal. Einstein's relativity was based on the electromagnetic wave equation, whose version in conducting medium has been known for long. A general solution I found admits faster than light propagation. A committee of experts thought it worthwhile to publish my results in the *International Journal of Modern Physics* in 1998, another in its *Letters* the same year, then a third time in 2000. RONAST does not tire of ridiculing my efforts as a challenge to the genius of Einstein, mocking me to make discoveries like his.

An outstanding scientific contribution is something that furthers the current knowledge or some application that greatly improves the quality of life. Countries neck to neck with us 30 years ago forged way ahead by using science. Where does our umpteenth-fold increased scientific manpower hide when the riversides are turned into garbage dumps—or does this portend the science policy that RONAST is busy formulating for two decades?

Crying hoarse about the vast water resources, the experts remain oblivious to the parched throats of the majority, supplying drinking water full of germs and pollutants to the fortunate few, and producing the most expensive electricity. Almost the whole country faces famine conditions.

RONAST finds glory in its history of strikes, lockouts, defilement of its own CEO, etc., to paint a rosy picture. Yet this bastion of Nepali science gets swayed to the breaking point by the little wind that I have made.

UDAYARAJ KHANAL
DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS
TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Army reservations

THE DIRECTORATE OF PUBLIC Relations (DPR) of the Royal Nepal Army expresses strong reservations on certain portions of the article "Elusive

Peace" (by John Narayan Parajuli, September 19). Parajuli's intentions are not clear in the article and the DPR feels that the contributor has unjustly tried to tarnish the image of the Army.

He has accused that the Army is against peaceful solutions. One must not forget that the terrorists have raised arms against the state and the people, and that they are responsible for the current chaos in the country. The Royal Nepal Army, like any other army in the world, is just a tool of the government and is used as per the situation. The Army, along with other security forces, is shedding its own blood to bring peace by forcing the bloodthirsty armed terrorists to move towards the mainstream.

The soldiers are sacrificing their lives for the preservation of democracy and the fundamental freedom of the citizens, like Rokka and Parajuli, of the country. Therefore the efforts to bring Army into such controversies through a well reputed and balanced weekly like yours surprises us. We ask Parajuli if he has done any homework to verify what he heard from his ghost friend, quote "in Thapa's government" unquote, and Hari Rokka's baseless imagination with no supportive facts.

Secondly, in the article, Rokka has been quoted as saying that the Army's accounts have not been audited since 1999 by the auditor general's office. The auditing by the auditor general's office is a continuous process and it never ceases. From the first month of the current financial year, the auditing of the previous fiscal year automatically begins. For Rokka's information, the auditor general's office had finished the auditing of the fiscal year 2059/60 in Puosh 2060 and the auditing of 2060/61 fiscal year, which finished on Ashad 2061, has just started from this Bhadra only.

The Army, as stated earlier, is fighting to preserve the fundamental rights of the citizens of our country and respects the freedom of expression too. But this freedom should not be misused to unjustly tarnish the upright image of the Army. We request that facts are verified and steps taken to prevent such unsubstantiated reports appearing in your esteemed magazine again.

BRIGADIER GENERAL RAJENDRA THAPA
DIRECTOR, DRP, ROYAL NEPAL ARMY

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THE NOTION
OF NATIONHOOD



JOINING HANDS FOR PEACE: Hundreds kept a candle-lit vigil at Mandala, Maitighar, to mourn the deaths of more than 10,000 people in the nine years of conflict

nation weekly/Sagar Shrestha

Delhi Runs And Strong Men

Deuba did not sign away national sovereignty or get robbed of his shirt or soul in New Delhi, as some had feared

BY SAUBHAGYA SHAH

The nation is finally beginning to let off a collective sigh of relief as no new untoward fate has befallen our motherland as a result of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's recent visit to New Delhi. As if the Valley's resident political pundits had discerned a sinister omen, all kinds of dire consequences were being predicted about Deuba's Delhi jaunt. From the way the warnings were being sounded, one would have been excused for believing that our unsuspecting prime minister was walking into a den of thieves to be robbed of his shirt and soul rather than paying a routine visit to a close neighbor. "While in Delhi, Deuba's going to sign away national sovereignty": The alarm bells started ringing. The shrill ones insinuated that the prime minister was going to sell the remaining Nepali rivers and other national resources to India while the politically savvy analysts vouched that the visit was meant to pave the way for Indian takeover of Nepali security. The amazing thing behind the whole hysteria was that it was not only the usual suspects—the knee-jerk nationalists and habitual India baiters—but also those for whom enduring Indian goodwill, fair play and enlightened avuncular guidance is a cornerstone of political faith.

Pray, what was the reason for such a heightened sense of apprehension among the citizenry? The Nepali penchant for self infantilization simply knows no bounds. Some experts noticed that Deuba had not done sufficient "homework" for the trip. As a result, it was argued, he was bound to be hoodwinked by the ever-so-clever Indian *babudom*. Deuba was certainly not going to Delhi to sit for a college admission exam before Dr. Manmohan, the Oxfordian. Nor are deals between states primarily determined by the amount of diligent homework. They are the outcomes of the relative bargaining strength of the two sides. And this strength is not only size or might, it is more a reflection of how coherently and unitedly the national position is articulated. But more of this later. The second concern was that being an appointed prime minister without the support of all the political parties, Deuba would be too weak to stand up to various Indian shenanigans and pressures at the negotiating table.

Even a cursory glance back at the last six decades would have shown us that all of these misgivings were more or less misguided, if not outright conceited. Strength is a relative term, but such prime ministerial "strength"—whether democratic or otherwise—seems to have mattered very little in securing fair and honorable treaties with India. In the last sixty years, perhaps no other Nepali premier was more powerful than Mohan Shumsher Rana, the scion of an autocratic dynasty. The Treaty of Peace and Friendship, the absolute ruler signed in 1950 with India, is still viewed by many as a deal which put serious fetters and constraints on Nepal's independent options. The revolutionary government that was formed after the defeat of the Rana regime was no less powerful: One of the first deals the new prime minister, Matrika Prasad Koirala, made with India was the agreement regarding the Koshi River. Eight years later in 1960, the first elected prime minister, Bisheshwor Prasad Koirala, whose Nepali Congress had absolute majority in the short-lived Parliament,

concluded the Gandak River Project treaty with India. Both of these deals have since become exemplars of "unequal treaties" in the Nepali psyche: Most of the hydroelectric power and irrigation benefits of the joint projects accrue to India, while Nepal is left with all of the human displacement, land submersion, ecological degradation and the attendant economic ruin.

After the demise of the Partyless Panchayat system we had two more "strong" prime ministers. After taking over as the morally and politically powerful interim prime minister in 1990, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai flew to Delhi to sign new accords and understandings that some observers have say are more detrimental to Nepal's interests than the one by the last Rana prime minister in 1950. A year later in 1991, the newly elected Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, with a commanding majority in the Parliament, made the same run to Delhi to ink the controversial Tanakpur Hydro Project Agreement which has since become a document of shame for many.

What can explain this paradoxical correlation between "strong" prime ministers and such cheap sellouts at the negotiating table in New Delhi? In contrast, "weak" prime ministers, such as the Marichman Singhs of yore, have proved far less costly in this respect. The absence of a bottom line and a consensus-driven national foreign policy towards India among the various political parties and forces in Nepal is at the root of this paradox. Nepal is perhaps the only country in the world where the various parties and constituencies have their own autonomous foreign relations with their most important neighbor, relations which compete with and subvert the national foreign policy agenda. This state of affairs has given rise to a market situation characterized by a single foreign buyer and competing local sellers. It is only natural that when the hawkers are trying to outbid each other and undercut their domestic rivals, the sole buyer will ask for bargains that can only be met by a "strong" party. Kathmandu critics should therefore not only cry wolf when our prime ministers fly south, they should also beware when other political luminaries make the same pilgrimage—often mixing business of a serious nature with health checkups or family visits—to hammer out the finer details of this unique bilateral relationship away from the glare of the not-so-inquisitive media.

When all is said and done, despite the jumbo size of his retinue, Deuba's present visit proved to be less onerous on the nation than the ones by his illustrious predecessors. In fact, it was much better than the Mahakali River Project he brokered as the prime minister of a powerful coalition involving all the major political parties in 1996. If the only thing Deuba did was sample the famed Indian hospitality, taste the exotic fare of *biryani* and *tandoori*, and contribute to our age-old goodwill over a dessert of succulent *rasgoola*, it is still a first step in the right direction for our "strong" men.

When King Gyanendra does the Delhi round next month, he will hopefully take it upon himself to rectify the legacy of the 1965 security treaty his father concluded with India. All that has done so far is to breed insecurity for the Nepali people. **N**

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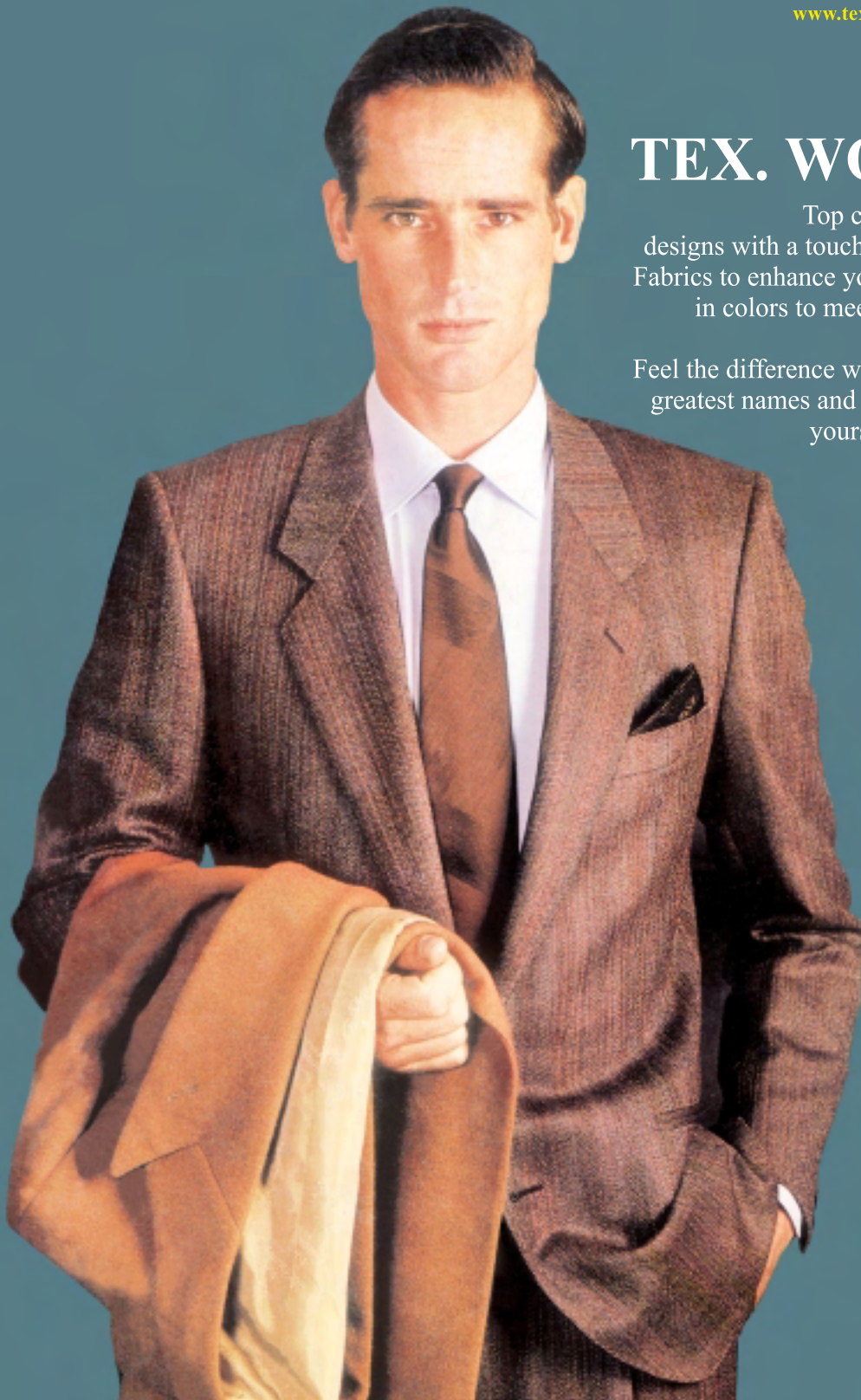
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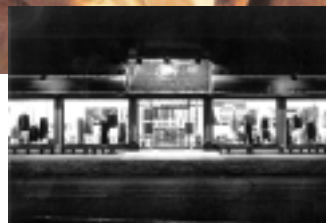
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CENTER-STAGE: Amrit Gurung, accompanied by a few members of Nepathya, sings for peace on the International Day of Peace on September 21.

Koirala summon

The Supreme Court ordered Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala to be present in the court within a week to explain in writing his public comments about the court. Justice Bhairab Prasad Lamsal issued the order to Koirala. Seven lawyers representing ProPublic, a public advocacy group, had filed a writ against Koirala for making remarks against the apex court that amounted to “contempt of court.” Koirala’s disparaging remarks about the court came after it quashed petitions filed by the former prime minister and ordered him to answer the CIAA’s summons.

Deuba’s call

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba officially called on the Maoists for peace talks following the first meeting of the high-level Peace Committee, headed by the prime minister himself. Deuba said that talks with the Maoists would be held discreetly and with proper preparation. The government formed the high-level committee in August to support the Peace Secretariat. The government believes that the secretariat will go a long way towards institutionalizing peace initiatives. Other members of the committee are CPN-UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal, RPP Chairman Pashupati Shumsher Rana, NSP Chairman Badri Prasad

Mandal and Minister Mohammed Mohsin, a royal nominee to the committee.

On death row

A Nepali, Indra Bahadur Tamang, is facing a death sentence in Indonesia, according to Amnesty International. The group has appealed to Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri and Attorney General Muhammad Abdul Rachman to withdraw the execution order issued to 10 convicts, including Tamang. Tamang and the others who are on death row face imminent execution after their appeal for presidential clemency was rejected in June, Amnesty said.

Jobs abroad

The number of Nepali workers going abroad for jobs, which had come to a complete halt after the September 1 riots, has risen sharply. The Department of Labor and Employment Promotion has been providing preliminary approval to 700 to 900 job seekers daily, which is about the same number as prior to September 1. The department issued final approval for 3,354 Nepalis to work abroad in the last 10 days. The manpower agencies have resumed work after the government decided to provide them with compensation.

Robinson case

The British drug peddler Gordon William Robinson was believed to

have been arrested by police in Dharan, a day after the Supreme Court acquitted him on April 23, newspaper reports said. The local police in Dharan had informed the police headquarters and the Judicial Council Secretariat in Kathmandu separately about Robinson’s detention at the time. The police say that Robinson is not in their custody.

Maoist abduction

The Maoists abducted over 600 students and teachers from two secondary schools of Putali Bazaar, the headquarters of Syangja. The two schools were Kalika Higher Secondary School and Panchakanya Secondary School. Reports quoted the Maoists as saying that the abducted students and teachers would be released after a week of militia training. The abductees were taken towards neighboring Parbat.

Anti-measles drive

The first phase of the national measles prevention drive aimed at children between nine months and 15 years of age began in 35 districts of the Eastern and Central Regions. Over 40,000 immunization posts and about 8,000 trained volunteers are involved in the campaign. The campaign will be completed in three phases. The World Health Organization and UNICEF will provide \$6.2 million, while the government will bear Rs. 7 million for the cam-

paign. Each year over 5,000 children die of measles in Nepal.

SC orders

The Supreme Court ordered the offices of the prime minister and the Cabinet, the Home Ministry, the Defense Ministry, the Army, the Nepal Police and the Armed Police to make public the whereabouts of 14 people. The 14 were said to have been taken into custody by the security forces on suspicion of being Maoists from different parts of the country on different dates. Amnesty International in its recent report said that Nepal had the highest rate of cases of disappearances in the world. According to Amnesty, more than 600 cases of disappearances by the state have been reported.

Maoist reply

The Maoist supremo Prachanda responded to Prime Minister Deuba’s call for peace talks with a list of questions. The questions ranged from whether the government would be able to get the political parties on board for fruitful talks to the issue of constituent assembly. He also questioned whether the government had any control over the Army. In a related development, the Supreme Court asked the government to clarify why the CPN-Maoist had been banned as a political unit.

Photo competition

Nepali sports photographer Mukunda Bogati bagged first prize in an international photo competition organized by Asea Brown Boveri, an energy company in Switzerland. The theme of this year’s competition—“Responsibility, Respect and Determination.” Among 700 photographs from 45 countries, Bogati took the top prize of \$1,500 for the best photograph in all categories.



Bogati’s winning photograph

Protests again

The four agitating political parties began another season of their protest against “regression.” Demonstrations of the four parties—the Nepali Congress, the People's Front Nepal, the Nepal Peasants and Workers Party, and the Nepal Sadbhavana Party—AD—converged into a rally in Ratna Park, chanted anti-government slogans and marched past Bagbazaar, Putalisadak, Bhadrakali, Shahid Gate and Bhotahiti. The four agitating parties announced new rounds of agitation after almost two months of lull during the monsoon.

Border vigil

Nepali and Indian security officials have agreed to tighten security along the border. Reports said the security officials of Nepal and the Indian state of Bihar have agreed in principle to step up their vigil along the border from Janakpur to Mechi. Security forces from both sides have started security checks. The meeting between the Nepali security officials and DIG of Bihar Police Ram Prabesh Singh decided to keep security forces on both sides of the border on a state of alert. During the meeting both countries decided to exchange intelligence on Maoist activities. Top Maoist leaders have been arrested in Bihar in recent days.

RNAC valuation

A team of consultants from the International Civil Aviation Organization has valued Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation's total assets at Rs. 4.56 billion. The valuation comes as a surprise, as a similar study done by a task force, under the coordination of former Chief Secretary Damodar Gautam, had assessed RNAC's property at Rs. 8 billion. The team evaluated RNAC's 14 ropanis of land at New Road at Rs. 1.4 billion and two Boeing-757s owned by the national flag carrier at Rs. 1.13 billion, Kantipur reported. RNAC

owns 35 ropanis of land and a number of buildings at prime locations in various parts of the country, plus a 12.5 percent share of the Soaltee Crown Plaza. The government had asked the ICAO consultants to assess the properties of the RNAC as part of its plan to privatize the ailing corporation. The valuation, however, does not include the credit and monetary worth of traffic rights from RNAC's bilateral air service agreements with several countries.

Coffee in Parbat

Highlands Coffee Company, a Nepali venture, is exporting coffee produced in Parbat to Japan and the Netherlands. Coffee worth Rs. 175,000 was exported to these countries last year, and coffee worth Rs. 200,000 was exported in first five months of this year. With the increase in the exports, farmers have been attracted towards the cash crop. Presently 35 families in the district are involved in coffee farming.

Dacoit encounter

Two villagers were killed and three injured in Lahorthokari VDC of Parsa in an encounter with Indian dacoits, reports said. The villagers had retaliated when about 50 of the robbers raided the vil-

lage. Two villagers were killed by the dacoits; both of them shot dead. The deceased are Najib Miya Dhobi of Lahorthokari-1 and Bahadur Miya Jolaha of Lahorthokari-2. The injured are at the Narayani Sub-regional Hospital Birgunj. The dacoits made off with cash and jewels worth more than Rs. 500,000, Nepal Samacharpatra reported.

NEA in court

The Nepal Electricity Authority is to file a case against the contractor of the Kali Gandaki A project, Impregilo Spa, at the International Chamber of Commerce Court, according to Kantipur. The NEA has decided to move to court, as efforts to seek settlement through mutual understanding failed, the daily quoted an NEA official as saying. The contractor had demanded \$4.5 million from the NEA and a pledge that the NEA would not withdraw any amount from contractor's deposit in Banca Intesa, an Italian bank, for there to be an out-of-court settlement. Negotiations failed after the government tried to withdraw the deposit. Two months ago, Impregilo Spa filed a case against the NEA at the international court demanding the amount of project construction.

Fund management

The Ministry of Health handed over management of the Global Fund to the United Nations. A memorandum of understanding to this effect was signed in the last week of August. According to the agreement the United Nations will oversee the management of the fund and of Nepal's overall HIV/AIDS strategy for the next two years. The move comes after the government was unable to find a management support agency for the operation of the grant. Nepal has so far received \$53,000 from the fund as a first installment.

Kharel bail

The Special Court set a bail of Rs. 10.5 million for former IGP Achyut Krishna Kharel. It had earlier remanded the former police top brass to judicial custody. He was taken into custody on the request of the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority to complete his interrogation. The CIAA had filed a case against Kharel on charges of amassing wealth disproportionate to his income during his service as police chief. He was reported to have absconded after the case was filed last month, but later appeared before the court.



SOCIAL INNOVATORS: Lucky Chhetri (left) and Bir Bahadur Ghale, elected as Fellows by Ashoka, an organization that supports entrepreneurs whose ideas bring about far reaching changes in the society. Chhetri is working to empower women in rural areas through education while Ghale works on micro-hydro power projects in high-altitude communities.

NTB AND RNAC PROMOTE TOURISM

Nepal participated in the international travel fair that concluded on September 19 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The fair is the number one consumer travel show in Malaysia. The Nepal Tourism Board and Royal Nepal Airlines jointly participated in the fair to promote Nepal as a tourist destination. The Malaysian Association



of Tour & Travel Agents organizes the event every year to promote Malaysia and other destinations as well as to sell tourism packages. More than 85,000 visitors visited this year's fair, the 18th, and more than 15,000 visited the Nepali stall. The fair was held in an 11,500 square meter area comprising four halls with 633 booths. The national tourism organization, state tourism boards, airlines, hotels, resorts, theme parks, tour operators, travel agencies, cruises and other travel related companies exhibited and sold their products and services.

MARTIN AIR TO RESUME FLIGHTS

Martin Air will resume flights to Kathmandu starting October 3. Martin Air flies directly from Amsterdam to Kathmandu during tourist seasons. The resumption of the flights for the fall will hopefully send a positive signal to the international community that Nepal is still a preferred destination.

ECONOMIC FIGURES FROM ADB

Nepal's economic growth is projected to be 3.7% in the fiscal year 2004-05 according to an Asian Development Bank report. Earlier, the figure had been put at around 5 percent. The report said that the

economic growth remained unchanged from that of the previous year mainly due to the continuation of the internal conflict and the attendant negative impact on manufacturing, transport and tourism. The expected figures of growth for different sectors in FY2005 are as follows: an increase of 3.7 percent for agriculture, 3.8 percent for services and 3.3 percent for industries. The report said inflation for the FY2005 would stand at 5.5 percent.

STC TO EXPORT HONEY

The Salt Trading Corporation is all set to export honey and is encouraging the production of honey in the country. STC has extended its services to the agricultural sector, and it is starting a honey business with the objective of providing benefits to farmers engaged in beekeeping. STC will set the standards and quantity of honey and will sign agreements with farmers' associations.

DIRECT AIR LINKS TO KOREA

Nepal and South Korea have signed an air service agreement for direct air links between the two countries. According to the agreement, both countries have access to multiple designations, and the agreement allows four passenger flights and three cargo flights per week between the two countries. Lava Kumar Devkota, secretary at the ministry of civil aviation, and Park Sang-Hoon, ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Nepal, signed the agreement at the ministry on behalf of their respective countries.

KRUNZALOOZ AND PEPSI

Fast Foods Nepal has launched a combo offer of a Phuchche Pepsi free with the purchase of a pack 35g Krunch Aloo. This combo is priced at Rs. 22.

NYEF OPENS BRANCH IN BIRATNAGAR

The Nepalese Young Entrepreneurs Forum opened a branch office in Biratnagar in cooperation with the

Morang Industry Organization. The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry promotes the forum of young entrepreneurs, established last year, to bolster young entrepreneurs. The forum is also the youth wing of federation; it encourages young entrepreneurs and works for the socio-economic development of the country.

GOOD LIVING!

Global Exposition and Manpower Services, Management Events and VoxPop Production are jointly organizing the second Good Living Expo from October 13 to 17 at the Birendra International Convention Centre. The expo will exhibit furniture, furnishing, housing, interiors, cosmetics and new items produced by local and multinational companies. Management Events is also organizing the Bada Dashain Festival at the same time.

SPICE GETS MOBILE LICENSE

The Nepal Telecommunications Authority issued a license to Spice Nepal to operate cellular mobile services in the country. Until now Nepal Telecom was the only license holder for mobile services in the country. Spice Nepal must start operations within nine months and deliver services to 10 municipalities in the country to fulfill the terms of its license.

PSA APPOINTED FOR UNITED AIRLINES

President Tours and Travels was appointed as the Passenger Service Agent (PSA) for United Airlines, a leading U.S. airline that flies to many destinations around the world. This is the first time that United has had a PSA in Nepal. President Tours and Travels will develop an online reservation system for United in Nepal.



Peace Mark

Puskar Shah, a 34-year-old cyclist, reached his 62nd country, the tiny South African nation of Mauritania, on his one man-mission to spread the message of world peace and love. Shah set out on the world cycle tour in 1998 and has covered over 100,000 kilometers, riding across Asia, Australia, North and South America, and Africa. Last week, he arrived in Mauritania from Morocco.

Born in 1970 in Makaibari, Dolakha, Shah saw his father, an Indian Gurkha soldier, killed during an attack by the separatist BODO rebels in Assam. During the 1990 Jana Andolan, Shah was arrested numerous times and even received a gunshot wound. Shah began his journey with just Rs. 100 given to him by his mother. But as word of his one-man mission spread, help came from different quarters. He has been using the donations to purchase airline tickets to cross the seas and oceans.

Shah has taken his message of love and peace to 22 Asian, 14 Caribbean, four South American, six Central American, two North American and many African countries. It hasn't been an easy ride though. Bandits looted his goods in the Barbados, and his bike and belongings were stolen in New Zealand, where Sir Edmond Hillary came to his aid. Hillary helped him get a new bike and other supplies for his journey. Actress Sharmila Malla has helped Puskar raise funds from business communities. Other known figures like former Speaker Daman Nath Dhungana have coordinated efforts to form a national support group for this lone cyclist's journey.

Puskar still wants to cover 85 more countries. He expects to complete his one-man peace mission in 2009. After that he wants to scale Everest and write a book.



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WEEKLY

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SCARECROWS

The rule of law is in danger. Some of the worst abusers are those who created the law and those appointed to uphold it.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

ANOTHER SEASON OF RATNA-park-centered protests has dawned. As in the past, there will be plenty of talk about democracy, the rule of law and the people's sovereignty. Despite the high rhetoric, it is worth asking whether our political leaders really care about the rule of law.

"I don't want to generalize," says Kedar Khadka of ProPublic, a public-

advocacy group, "but some of them seem to care very little about the law." Some even take to bullying; what better shows their sense of impunity, he asks, referring to the recent vilification of the Supreme Court by Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala.

When the Supreme Court quashed the writ application filed by Koirala on September 15 against the decision of the CIAA to summon him for an inquiry, Koirala turned his back on the court, condemned

the judiciary and suggested that the court be shifted to the palace. Koirala's verbal salvos against the court show how little regard he has for the law and the institution of the judiciary, which he himself helped to build after the restoration of democracy in 1990. "Any person who claims to be a democrat and believes in the rule of law," says former Foreign Minister Bhek Bahadur Thapa, "is at odds with himself if he questions the decisions taken by the [judicial] institutions." Speeches and statements of leaders have immediate and lasting effects on the perception of the people who see them as role models. And when role models give the wrong impression, it has a significant effect.



“Political leaders give the impression that they are above the law,” says senior advocate Janak Bhandari. “This is setting a bad example.” Worse, leaders are also setting a precedent of bad interpretation.

Some leaders have totally mixed up the concept of civil disobedience and gross violation of law out of contempt, says Jogendra Ghimire, a lawyer and columnist with Nation Weekly. Civil disobedience is taking of the law into one’s own hands temporarily, in order to declare what the law should be. “It is a declaration that there is incongruence between the law and humane values,” writes Professor Howard Zinn in his book “On the War.” Leader of the Nepal Majdoor Kissan party Narayan Man Bijuchhe Rohit tried to blur the line when he suggested that those who oppose this government needn’t be bothered by the laws this government implements.

Rohit was defending Koirala during a protest rally in Ratnapark last week over Koirala’s tryst with the law. But while some leaders want to personalize the matter, there is a consensus in the society that Koirala’s badmouthing of the Supreme Court was a mistake. Law professors and legal experts lament the tendency among the leaders to disparage people and institutions when decisions don’t go their way. “You can’t just vilify the court if it doesn’t decide in your favor,” says Professor Bharat Bahadur Karki, professor of law at Nepal Law Campus. “The law doesn’t give that kind of leeway to individuals, whoever they are.” But in recent days a series of events has undermined the law and the institution of the judiciary.

The Robinson scandal tarnished the Supreme Court’s prestige. “This is the most damaging incident in the [Supreme] court’s history,” says Ghimire. This incident will definitely erode people’s faith in the apex court, says Professor Karki. Critics of the apex court say it has failed to display foresight. They say the court must sort out irregularities and inconsistencies within the judiciary to be able to command continuous respect from public. An incident like the Robinson saga gives anarchists and detractors ammunition. Apologists say the wrong actions of some judges should not be generalized to defame the whole judicial system that the Supreme Court



nw/ss

COURT BATTLE: Koirala showed little regard for the apex court in his latest outburst



FREE FOR NOW: The Supreme Court freed Wagle until it decided on his application for bail

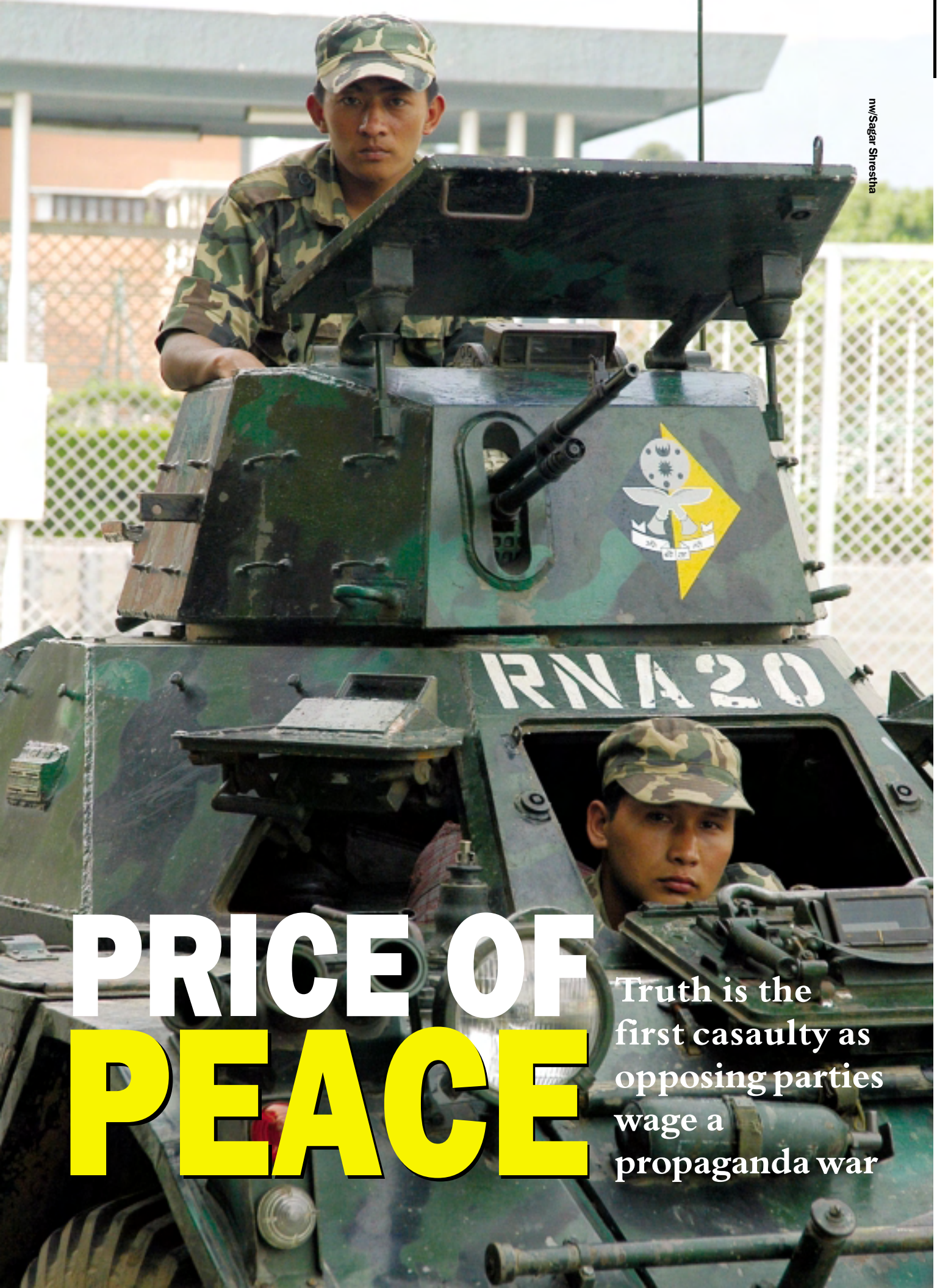
heads. They say the prestige of the court, once defiled, would be hard to restore. “How will those who vilify the court today restore the lost respect of the court tomorrow when they come to power?” asks one legal expert, preferring anonymity. Despite the controversy, the Supreme Court is still vital.

“The Supreme Court must play an expedient role when the country is going through a period of crisis,” says Karki. The Supreme Court is the last remaining feature of the post-1990 democratic system that is fully functional. Many believe it can play a lead role in solving the current political crisis, if only it displays foresight. Before that, the first task is to sort out the

Robinson affair. But however bad that turns out to be, abuse of law by politicians is much worse.

Leaders in every government since 1990 have done more to undermine the law than uphold it. When the Special Court convicted former minister and the prime minister’s close associate Chiranjivi Wagle, the police under Home Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka, a close friend of Wagle’s, displayed little interest in implementing the verdict of the court, allege critics. The police cited red tape for the lack of action. When the Kathmandu District Court asked the police to put Wagle behind bars, the government said that Wagle had fled. A few days later Wagle turned up dramatically at the Supreme Court to appeal the Special Court verdict. “Individuals take undue advantage of the loopholes in the law,” says Professor Karki, referring to Wagle episode.

As the controversies and abuses continue, they will gradually erode people’s faith in the state and make the rule of law a straw man—as Shakespeare notes in “Measure for Measure” about the extent of lawlessness in Vienna. He says that laws are like scarecrows. They are initially installed to scare the birds. Once the birds realize that the scarecrow is a harmless doll, they build their nests on it. What was true about Vienna 500 years ago may also be true about Nepal today. **N**



PRICE OF PEACE

Truth is the first casualty as opposing parties wage a propaganda war

Statements from the government, the Maoists, the parties and peaceniks are conflicting and confusing. What's clear is that the clock is ticking for Prime Minister Deuba, and neither peace nor elections seem any closer.

**BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI
AND ADITYA ADHIKARI**

Dashain is just around the corner, and talks of peace have peaked. As the country held vigil on the International Day of Peace, September 21, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba went on record once again to state his government's commitment to a lasting peace and fruitful peace talks. But this time, he said, the talks would take place "secretly," far from media glare, unlike the two previous rounds.

"You will not even know when the talks [with the Maoists] will take place," he told the media after the meeting of the high-level Peace Committee, comprising the leaders of the four parties in the government, called the Maoists for peace talks. A day later, the Cabinet endorsed the invitation.

Despite the formal nature of the call and the attendant fanfare, what the prime minister said is what he has been saying since King Gyanendra appointed him on June 2. And he has gotten the same reply from the Maoists each time. Maoist supremo Prachanda issued a statement Friday evening, saying that his party was ready for negotiations if the government creates "a conducive envi-



FACILITATORS FOR PEACE: Rights activists have called both parties to the conflict to lay down arms

ronment" for talks. The statement asked the government to answer six questions, not so different from those the four parties protesting on the streets are asking (see Box).

"Our party believes it is important to make public the masters of the old regime who are behind the curtains for talks, keeping in mind the current mistrust and suspicion," said Prachanda. He claimed recently that the conflict has

entered into the stage of strategic offence: The Maoists now feel they are equal in power to the state.

Independent analysts say the claim is demagoguery and that the state has much greater military power. The demagoguery aside, as recently as last month the Maoist leadership went on record to say that they want to hold talks directly with the King's representatives and not the government in office. This led many to wonder if the Maoists were finally showing their true dual character.

The Nepali Congress president, Girija Prasad Koirala, contributed his bit to the peace process and the ensuing confusion when he claimed that he had met the underground Maoist leaders recently and that they had been asked by the King to join hands with the Palace. The Maoists, Koirala said, rebuffed the call.

If these stories are any indication, there seem to be countless parallel peace parleys going on; it's hard to decide which holds substance. Prime Minister Deuba defends his government vigorously, saying his is a legitimate government since the four parties in power held a clear majority in the dissolved Parliament, the closest thing to a popular mandate. He says he has the mandate to broker a lasting peace, a claim that doesn't go down well with everybody.

The increasing military budget and plans to expand the Royal Nepal Army have led many to question Deuba's com-

THE MAOIST QUESTIONS

1. Is the government in a position to return to the status quo before October 4 or otherwise correct regression?
2. Is the government in a position to involve the political parties in fruitful peace talks "against the desires of the Palace and Army generals"?
3. Is the government in a position to punish those who have conducted political killings? Can the government punish the killers of UML cadre Hem Narayan Yadav, whose party is in the present government?
4. Is the government willing to discuss constituent assembly and actually grant sovereignty to the people?
5. Is the government open to bringing in an international human rights group for talks rather than "begging" India for arms?
6. Is the government able to perform at least one gesture to prove that it holds control over the Army?



SOLIDARITY: People showed up at gatherings (here at Maitighar and Boudhanath, below) marking the International Day of Peace to voice their calls for peace



is a general feeling that all parties, including those in the government, those outside and the Maoists, have used the peace card for their own benefit, and most Nepalis are confused as to which way the peace process will go and whether talks will take place at all.

Truth is always the casualty in a propaganda war. "Even I am confused [with the current developments]," says rights activist Padma Ratna Tuladhar, facilitator for the previous two

rounds of peace talks. "There are serious charges that all parties are fighting for the credit for resolving the Maoist issue and are playing games in the name

of peace talks." Tuladhar himself has been charged of making one too many public statements on what the Maoists want, even when he has hardly had any official contact with the Maoist leadership.

Nowhere is the game more evident than on the streets of Ratna Park. Protests against "regression" are fueled by charges from Nepali Congress President Koirala that the Palace and the Maoists are joining hands to sideline the political parties. With the apex court giving the go ahead to the CIAA to investigate corruption charges against him, Koirala has even gone public in accusing government bodies of giving in to the Army and the Palace to push his party into the government. That's demagoguery, but the

mitment to peace, despite security officials' argument that military strength is key in pressuring the Maoists into talks. Disagreement on the issue aside, there

PROPAGANDA: Maoists often invite journalists (here at Jagdanda, Maknapur) to their “aadhar chetras” to show their presence through the media



government's lack of progress and lack of specificity about the talks make the prime minister's statements look equally hollow.

None of the government ministers we talked to would give us concrete in-

formation on the peace talks, or the timeline for one. All they said was that they were looking forward to “concrete discussions.” “The modalities will be discussed soon and will be made public at the right time,” was the most common

answer. It either means the government was in the process of doing something “concrete,” or had done nothing “concrete,” or that it would be asked to formalize the “concrete” agenda, which is still in the works.

Tuladhar is convinced that the government is merely stalling. “The announcement [of the high-level Peace Committee] to take institutional initiative for talks only proves that nothing concrete has actually taken place,” he says. “The responsibility of the government does not only end by calling the Maoists for talks. They must also come up with concrete, well researched proposals.” Editor of the left-leaning Mulyankan monthly Shyam Shrestha says the government call for talks is just a “drama” and that it hasn't done enough homework to make the upcoming peace talks, if they happen at all, any different from the previous two rounds.

It certainly didn't sound like talks were uppermost on Prime Minister Deuba's mind when he returned from a five-day India visit on September 12. While his carrot and stick approach to the Maoists wasn't unexpected, it was still undiplomatic of the prime minister to trump up his “stick” card before giving the “carrot” a clear chance.

The prime minister declared he was ready to take a hard stand against the Maoists—a move many believe he won support for in meetings with senior Indian officials. But left-leaning intellectuals like Tuladhar and Shrestha think the government has taken a wrong direction. They suggest that the government should instead go for such confidence-building measures as removing the terrorist tag and the Interpol red corner notices slapped on the Maoists, as was done during the previous talks.

The move, they believe, could be a key step towards what Prachanda de-

PIECE OF PEACE THIS WEEK

September 21: Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba asks media and rights activists to pressure the Maoists for peace talks.

September 22: The high-level Peace Committee invites Maoists for peace talks; Deuba says talks will be held secretly.

September 23: The Ministerial Cabinet endorses the invitation to the Maoists for talks; the CPN-UML says the terrorist tag and Interpol red corner notice should be scraped.

September 24: Maoist spokesman Krishna Bahadur Mahara declines the govern-

ment offer in an interview to Communications Corner; Maoist supremo Prachanda repeats Mahara's line later in the evening but says he is ready for talks if the government creates a “conducive environment” and answers the six questions he has asked.

Ceasefire Timeline

Talks 1

■ Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba declares ceasefire on July 23, 2001, four days after his appointment replacing mentor-turned-foe Girija Prasad Koirala.

■ **Talks 1, Round 1:** Five government talk-team members led by Chiranjibi Wagle and three Maoists led by Krishna Bahadur Mahara meet at Godavari Village Resort on August 30, 2001. Rights activists Damanath Dhungana and Padma Ratna Tuladhar act as facilitators. Other government team members are Bijay Kumar Gachchhedhar, Chakra Prasad Bastola, Mahesh Acharya and Narhari Acharya. Top Bahadur Rayamajhi and Agni Sapkota are the two others in the Maoist team.

■ **Talks 1, Round 2:** The government and the Maoists meet for two days at Tiger Tops Jungle Resort in Bardia, starting September 14, 2001. The Maoists say they want an interim government, constituent assembly, a new constitution and steps to institute a republic.

■ **Talks 1, Round 3:** The government and the Maoists meet at Godavari Village Resort on November 13, 2001. The government deactivates public security regulations and releases 68 Maoists. The Maoists' demand list boils down to constituent assembly, which is rejected by major political parties.

■ Maoist boss Prachanda calls off negotiations and sets up a 37-member Joint Revolutionary People's

Council on November 21, 2001, to be led by Baburam Bhattarai. Maoists launch attacks in Surkhet, Dang, Syangja and Salleri, including on Royal Nepal Army barracks. King Gyanendra declares a State of Emergency on November 26, 2001, and the Army is deployed to tame the Maoists.

Talks 2

■ Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand declares a ceasefire on January 29, 2003, about 72 hours after Maoists assassinate Armed Police Force IGP Krishna Mohan Shrestha.

■ **Talks 2, Round 1:** Six government talk team members led by Badri Mandal and five Maoists led by Baburam Bhattarai meet at the Hotel Shanker on April 27, 2003. The facilitators are Damanath Dhungana, Karna Dhoj Adhikari, Padma Ratna Tuladhar and Shailendra Kumar Upadhyaya. Other members of the government team are Anuradha Koirala, Dr. Upendra Devkota, Kamal Prasad Chaulagain, Narayan Singh Pun and Rameshnath Pandey. The Maoists are Dev Gurung, Krishna Bahadur Mahara, Matrika Yadav and Ram Bahadur Thapa, alias Badal. Narayan Singh Pun is said to have brokered the peace talks with the help of D. R. Lamichhane and Dr. Birendra Jhapali.

■ **Talks 2, Round 2:** The government and the Maoists meet for talks at the Hotel Shanker on May 9, 2003. Both sides speak publicly of

a 22-point code of conduct, including a clause restricting the Army to within 5 kilometers from its barracks. The government agrees to release Maoist central committee members Bamdev Chettri, Mumaram Khanal and Rabindra Shrestha. Another central member, Krishna Dhoj Khadka, and his wife, Rekha Sharma, are also released from Gorkha.

■ Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa is appointed on June 4, 2003 after Lokendra Bahadur Chand resigned on May 30, 2003 for failing to garner support from political parties. Prime Minister Thapa expresses commitment to continue the talks, and the Maoists remain positive.

■ **Talks 2, Round 3:** The government and the Maoists meet for three days, beginning at the Hotel Sneha in Nepalgunj on August 15, 2003 and then at a private house in Hapure, Dang. The new government talks-team comprises Prakash Chandra Lohani and Kamal Thapa only. The government presents a paper to address issues raised by the Maoists and says it is ready even to rewrite the Constitution. The Maoists stick to their demand for a constituent assembly. The government insists the talks will resume, but the Maoists say there is no need for further talks.

About 19 Maoists are killed in Doramba, Ramechhap by the Army as the talks are taking place.

■ Maoist supremo Prachanda pulls out of the talks on August 27, 2004. **N**

scribed as a "conducive environment" to sit for talks.

"The Maoists sat for talks last time only after the government assured them of their security in writing," says Tuladhar. The CPN-UML agrees; their standing committee on September 23 asked the government to take the terrorist tag off the Maoists and repeated their call for a unilateral ceasefire to create a positive environment for talks.

Last week hundreds of people gathered at Maitighar, Basantapur Durbar Square and Boudhanath to express their solidarity with the Nepalis affected by the conflict and to mourn for the 10,000 deaths in the "people's war." A gathering of rights activists in Nepalgunj marking the International Day of Peace made an appeal to both the government and the Maoists to call for a ceasefire starting Dashain.

The government should be feeling the time pressure too. The King, while appointing Deuba as prime minister, gave him a clear mandate to hold elections by April 2005 and broker a lasting peace with the Maoists. He, however, gave no hint where his priority lay. Elections in Kashmir, which Prime Minister Deuba frequently cites, are a poor example to emulate. Even in the best of times, Nepal just doesn't have the overwhelming state resources that India commands, and the Kashmir problem is far from over despite the elections.

So the government alternately goes hot and cold over elections and peace talks. Last week, its spokesman Mohammed Mohsin once again resorted to the usual rhetoric, "Nepalis are getting killed. There should be no reservations or conditions on the main agenda of peace. There should now be only war of ideologies, not might." He appealed to the media to pressure the Maoists to sit for peace talks.

Minister Mohsin's words and the government's formal call to talks may just be the "carrot" to match the "stick" of the prime minister's tough talk and increased military aid. But even the prime minister knows that the stick alone won't achieve his goals by April. The carrot just might. He will have to show that substantive talks can be held despite the rhetoric and propaganda that now dominate the issue. Much the same applies to the Maoists as well. **N**

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AN EARNED RIGHT

As the debate on providing British citizenship to Gurkhas gathers momentum, the Blair government is under pressure. Even though it acknowledges that the Gurkhas have made a strong case, the British government seems undecided about what to do.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

ON SEPTEMBER 1 MORE THAN 400 retired Gurkhas took to the streets in Liverpool. The reason: They were demanding the right to a British passport, which even the British say is long overdue. The Gurkhas, based mainly in Kent—the majority live in Folkestone and Hythe—demonstrated outside the Home Office Immigration Nationality Directorate in Liverpool, where applications for British citizenship are processed.

“It is very difficult when we have no status as citizens,” said Tikendradal Dewan, chairman of the Brigade of Gurkhas Welfare Society, addressing the demonstration. “If we leave the country to visit family in Nepal, we are afraid that we will be denied re-entry to the U.K.” Dewan, a retired Gurkha, is spearheading the campaign for the right to citizenship for Gurkhas at par with citizens from Commonwealth countries. He has had some initial success. Gurkhas who fought loyally for the British Empire might win their latest battle: The British public and politicians seem to realize the basic fairness of the request. Support has come from many quarters.

The support is growing too. Charles Kennedy, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, the opposition party in Britain, and his party members have stood firmly behind the Gurkhas. “Gurkhas soldiers who have fought for Britain should not have to fight for citizenship as well,” said Kennedy, commenting on the demonstration. “The Gurkhas should be granted British citizenship as a right of service.” In another development on September 22 councilors of Warwickshire County voted unanimously in favor of granting residential status to former Gurkhas. “Citizens from

Commonwealth countries are eligible for British citizenship after only four years of service, but we are denied it even after 15 to 25 years of service,” says Prem Bahadur Bega, an ex-Gurkha. “This is gross injustice.” Bega served with the 3rd Royal Gorkha Regiment before his retirement in 1999 after 15 years of service.

The British public also agrees about the injustice of the situation. As the campaign gathers momentum, the British government is now hard pressed to make a decision quickly on an issue it has avoided for almost seven years. Finally the government announced a review of the policy early this month. According to Daily Express newspaper, public support in favor of the Gurkhas is growing. The paper’s office has been overwhelmed by thousands of phone calls from readers who, according to the paper, have voiced their support. The Daily Express has strongly supported the Gurkhas’ campaign for citizenship. In early September the Daily Express ran a poll as a part of the campaign.

It asked readers whether Gurkhas should be offered citizenship. Among the more than 16,000 votes polled, 99% of the respondents agreed. “The Gurkhas, who have fought so loyally and bravely for Britain, shouldn’t have to take to the streets fighting for British citizenship,” the paper said.

The Daily Express sums up the argument of the Gurkhas: If they are good enough to die for Britain, they should be good enough to be given a British passport. The Express has also launched

a petition in its newspaper calling on the British government to reconsider its position and to give fair rights to soldiers prepared to serve Britain with honor. Apparently under intense pressure from the public, the media and the opposition, Prime Minister Tony Blair was forced to take up the issue. This has raised the level of optimism among the retirees.

They are especially pleased that on September 15 Prime Minister Blair responded to questions from the leader of the opposition, Charles Kennedy, at the House of Commons with an acknowledgement that the Gurkhas had made a strong case for British citizenship. He said then that his government would make the decision soon. “This is an issue we are looking into now, we are examining it very carefully,” said Blair, “and I hope that within the next few weeks we’ll be able to make an announcement on it.” Retired Gurkhas in Britain and Nepal have welcomed the remarks.

“It is positive news,” says vice president of the Gorkha Army Ex-Service-men Organization, Krishna Rai. “We have been fighting for the right to British citi-



SPOTLIGHT: Issues concerning British Gurkhas have always made news back home

UNPREPARED

The Kathmandu Valley has a history of major earthquakes; another one is inevitable. Action now could save tens of thousands of lives and billions in property damage when the next *maha bhukampa* strikes.

BY INDRA ADHIKARI

LAST YEAR, ALMOST 70 YEARS after Nepal's last great earthquake, the government announced a new building code to lower the risk of earthquake damage. Since then, only one municipality in the country, Lalitpur, has made it mandatory that new buildings include earthquake-resistant features according to the code. Kathmandu, where the earthquake took a heavy toll in 1934 is yet to adopt the law.

President of the National Society for Earthquake Technology, the NSET, Shiva B. Pradhananga says that the Kathmandu Valley is especially vulnerable. Traditional construction methods using unskilled laborers, poor maintenance of houses, rapidly increasing population and unplanned urbanization has increased the risk. According to Pradhananga, more than 60 percent of the houses in the Valley are poorly built. Most of them will not survive the next big quake.

The soft sediments of the Kathmandu Valley are part of the problem, say B. Jaisi, Wei-Xin Ren, Zhou-Hong Zong and Prem Nath Maskey in their book "Dynamic and Seismic Performance of Old Multi-Tiered Temples in Nepal." The amount of damage in an earthquake is strongly influenced by the nature of the soil. The Valley floor is a prehistoric lakebed, and most of the ground is sand, gravel and mud washed into that lake over the last millennia. During a major earthquake these soft, unstable sediments change to a semi-liquid state, and the ground literally becomes soft. The effect increases earthquake damage, especially to traditional brick buildings, according to researches.

The old city of Kathmandu, where most of the houses were built by traditional methods, is likely to suffer the heaviest damage in case of a big quake. In the 1934 earthquake, estimated at 8.4 on the Richter scale, about 5,000 people lost their lives, over 25,000 were injured and about 60,000 houses were damaged. In each of the three great earthquakes (measuring more than 8 on the Richter scale) of the 19th and 20th centuries, a few thousand people lost their lives, and a few thousand houses were destroyed in Kathmandu.

A study done by the Japanese International Cooperative Agency four years ago extrapolated from those figures and the population growth over the last 200 years. The predictions: More than 40,000 people would lose their lives,

60,000-90,000 people would be severely injured and another 60,000 would be left homeless by a quake of the same magnitude today. The study estimates that almost all water supplies and 40 percent of the electricity would be cut off. Sixty percent of the telephone lines would stop working, and 60 percent of the bridges in the Valley would be unusable. More than 90 percent of the houses would be damaged beyond repaired, the JICA report warns.

Surya Prasad Acharya, an engineer with the NSET, says the tightly packed construction in the city will cause more casualties because falling buildings will cause other buildings to fall in turn. Hospitals and clinics will be damaged too, because only a few of them were designed to resist earthquakes. With many private healthcare facilities unavailable, the NSET warns, the 7,500 government hospital beds, almost full even in ordinary times, would be completely overwhelmed in case of a big quake.

HISTORY SPEAKS: The Pachpana Jyale durbar and other buildings of the Bhaktapur durbar square in ruins after the 1934 earthquake



The Richter Scale

Average Number
Per Year

Description	Richter Magnitude	Earthquake Effects	Average Number Per Year
Micro	Less than 2.0	Microearthquakes cannot be felt.	About 8,000 per day
Very Minor	2.0-2.9	People generally cannot feel these, but instruments record them.	About 1,000 per day
Minor	3.0-3.9	People feel magnitude 3 quakes, but they rarely cause damage.	49,000 (estimated)
Light	4.0-4.9	Noticeable rattling and shaking, but significant damage is unlikely.	6,200 (estimated)
Moderate	5.0-5.9	Major damage to poorly constructed buildings over small regions is possible. Well-designed buildings suffer slight damage at most.	800
Strong	6.0-6.9	Minor damage caused to many buildings, and some buildings are destroyed.	120
Major	7.0-7.9	Serious damage to many buildings.	18
Great	8.0 or greater	Major damage occurs over a wide area.	1

(Adapted from U.S. Geological Survey documents.)

A report from NGO Geohazards says, “The seismic record of the [Himalayan] region, which extends back to 1255 A.D., suggests that earthquakes of this [1934’s] size occur approximately every 75 years, indicating that a devastating earthquake is inevitable in the long term.” NSET records show that earthquakes measuring from 4 to 6 on the Richter scale occur every two or three years, and earthquakes measuring up to 7.5 occur every six years. It has been 70 years since Nepal saw a major quake.

Much like the Himalayan region, Japan is also quake-prone because of the tectonic plate underneath, which moves at regular intervals. A recent 7.4 Richter near Tokyo caused only 14 injuries. California in the United States is also a quake-prone region but suffers only modest damages during earthquakes. Geohazards says that a schoolchild in Kathmandu is 400 times more likely to be killed by an earthquake than a schoolchild in Kobe, Japan. The difference is proper planning and preparation.

The construction of earthquake-resistant schools in Thechho and Jhonchhe and awareness campaigns by the NSET and municipality authorities in Dharan, Tanahu, Banepa and Kathmandu are good, but very small, beginnings. A major public awareness campaign and implementation of the new building code throughout the Valley are urgent and long-overdue steps, suggest experts.

According to Acharya, building a house that can resist earthquakes adds only about 10 percent to the normal cost. There are no complicated formulas; no specially qualified or experienced laborers are required: A little training is enough. Simple techniques—more overlap of the iron rods in beams and poles, stronger corners and laying bricks a bit differently—are enough. Every year of delay in implementing the building code means more unsafe buildings now and greater casualties later. **N**



PRECAUTION: Building a house that can resist earthquakes adds only about 10 percent to the normal cost

B Rai



QUAKE DAMAGE: A study estimates that 60 percent of the bridges in the Valley would be unusable in the case of a magnitude 8 quake



ERSATZ NOSTALGIA

nm/ss

I have begun to wonder how, despite all their reading and at times beautiful mastery of the English language, our young journalists produce such pedestrian writing about Nepal

BY PRATYOUSH ONTA

I MUST SAY THAT I WAS FIRST amused by the effort Ajit Baral makes to not mention the Martin Chautari discussion forum in his article “Guff Addas” in the last issue of this magazine. Upon first reading, I thought maybe the omission could be justified because the writer was only interested in *guff addas* located in *chiya pasals*. However, reading the piece a second time made me realize that was not the case. After all, he talks about *addas* in *chiya pasals*, around bookshops, one that meets in Trichandra College and another in Kirtipur. Certainly that kind of portfolio could have easily included Martin Chautari, recently described by Abhi Subedi as a forum in which participants are expected to sit on *chakatis* and participate vigorously. After my second reading, I began to worry about the new generation of Nepali writers and journalists who are full of enthusiasm, but I am afraid, full of ersatz nostalgia, a dangerous combination.

I do not want to speculate on why the writer omitted Chautari in his article. He is certainly aware of its existence. After all he has participated in many discussions at Chautari over the past three or four years and has been the main presenter on at least one occasion.

Many of the people mentioned in the article—Lok Raj Baral, CK Lal, Suresh Dhakal, Chaintanya Mishra, Govinda Bartaman, Khagendra Sangroula, Krishna Khanal, Krishna Hachhethu, Hari Sharma and Abhi Subedi—have been the main presenters at Martin Chautari on



CHAUTARI: 'A forum in which participants are expected to sit on *chakatis* and participate vigorously'

one or more occasions. Many of these same individuals and others he mentions including his fellow Pokharelis, Sarubhakta and Usha Sherchan, have also participated in Chautari discussions. When non-Nepali nationals, including the Darjeeling-based writer Indra Bahadur Rai and the Calcutta-based social scientist Ranabir Samaddar (a “fiery communist” of the 1970s), made presentations and participated at Chautari, they have lamented the absence of such *addas* in their own hometowns. This has also been the experience of some Nepalis from other parts of Nepal, and some of them have been inspired to initiate such *addas* after having seen Chautari at work.

I worry about journalism that is based on denial. Surely, the public work of a journalist or a writer is judged by the social landscape he makes visible to

the readers. When readers of this newsmagazine know about the existence of Chautari (after all Nation Weekly carries notices about Chautari discussions every week), they will certainly wonder when one omits any discussion about this particular *adda*.

Had this been a simple case of a writer being bent on insulting the intelligence of Nation Weekly’s readers, this omission wouldn’t have deserved a mention here. But it is suggestive of a larger lacuna in English-language journalism in Nepal, and that is why I am worried. A write-up that cannot mention a case of homegrown success while pretending to describe the “changing urbanscape” of a particular theme is not journalism. It also raises questions about the process of editorial value addition to an inadequate copy submitted by in-house or outside writers.



nm/ss

Chautari's record speaks for itself. Started in October 1991 as an informal discussion forum regarding development issues (among its founders are Bikash Pandey and the late Martin Hoftun), it has become the longest-existing forum of its kind in Nepal at the moment. Initially its *addas* were scheduled two times a month, now 16 scheduled discussions take place each month. As demand has grown, it is not unusual for Chautari to hold one or more additional unscheduled discussions each month. Despite banda-induced cancellations, it managed to hold 195 such discussions during the last fiscal year.

The list of those discussions also demonstrates the variety of themes that Chautari has brought into the discussion arena. Moreover many discussions held at Chautari have given birth to research agendas, friendships between participants and much more. Since the article laments about the "closed" nature of other *addas* in town, one should also take note of Chautari's ability to attract a continuous group of new and young Nepalis to participate in multi-dimensional conversations, a point emphasized by journalist Raghu Mainali on September 14 when Chautari held an open session in which it invited critical comments and suggestions from one and all about its work. If Chautari *adda* has entered its 14th year at a time when such *addas* have disappeared from some of the more intellectually sexy metros of the world, then it is doing something right.

There is a passage in the article that refers to milestones in world history to

account for the decay in the culture of *addas* elsewhere. Therein the article quotes columnist CK Lal pliantly regarding how "the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the march of globalization" is responsible for the death of high lefty idealism and the dying culture of *addas* elsewhere. Lal should have been challenged to explain how precisely in that same era the Chautari *adda* was born and grew tremendously and how Chautari brought the likes of Lal and Khagendra Sangroula together in the same room in the mid- and late-1990s. What idealism informed such

a n encounter? Anyone who knows a bit about the history of "democratic" and "progressive" intellectual camps in Nepal would have noted that such an encounter was no small achievement then.

As a former convener and (at present) a member of the executive committee of Martin Chautari, I do not seek praise for the work we have done. I seek critical appraisal. Critical appraisal means, among other things, asking simple but probing questions: How did Chautari thrive in an era in which many of the other *addas* in Kathmandu died? Why has it been able to attract an average of 30 people in each of its sessions? Why are new young people who are think-

ing about a variety of career options coming to Chautari week after week? Anyone writing about Chautari need not have talked to any of Chautari's organizers but could have interviewed some of the young participants and asked them what prompts them to come to Thapathali, week after week.

Answers to these simple questions would reveal the reasons for the success and longevity of a single *adda* in Nepal and contribute to a real debate about *adda* culture in our society. Such analysis is basic journalism, nothing more.

I have picked up on the *guff adda* article because it is representative of a new tendency among young journalists writing in English in Nepal today. Simply put, in an attempt to be "chic," their writings are replete with ersatz nostalgia about far-off places and fascination with globally visible people. They also contain non-illuminating quotes from heavyweights, as if these lines can make up for the lack of thorough research. I have begun to wonder how, despite all their reading and at times beautiful mastery of the English language, these journalists produce such pedestrian quality writing about Nepal.

Can our young journalists and writers who talk about Paris and America to lament about conditions at home conceive of their worlds alternatively?

Can our young journalists and writers who talk about Paris and America to lament about conditions at home conceive of their worlds alternatively?

Can they evaluate home-grown contexts and institutions with historical depth, the only kind of journalism that matters in the long run? Can they demonstrate to us that they are interested in Nepal described in words that are the prod-

ucts of good research, diligence and fair analysis? Can they show to us that beyond name-dropping, their wide reading contributes to our understanding of a complex Nepal?

Finally, can they drop their ersatz nostalgia for a revolutionary Calcutta "thick with smoke and the smell of rum" and Parisian pubs and coffeehouses and ask if Thapathali has lessons for Calcutta and Paris? ■



AS OIL PRICES BOIL...

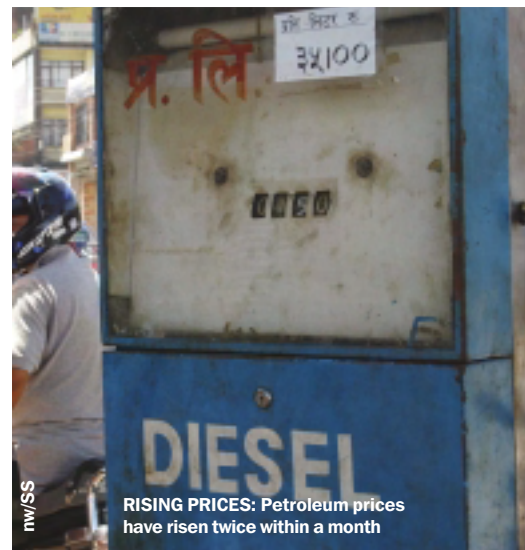
The cost of keeping oil prices at the current level could be as high as Rs. 1.5 billion a month or Rs. 18 billion a year—almost half of the government’s total development spending. Subsidizing oil is neither the most efficient nor the most equitable way of spending scarce government resources.

BY BIPUL NARAYAN

THE GOVERNMENT’S DECISION to hike prices of petroleum products has again invited a din of protests from the usual quarters—political parties, student organizations, and transport and consumer associations. On the face of it, it is quite inexplicable that petroleum prices should hold such a prominent place in public imagination.

Yes, petroleum prices have risen sharply in recent years but so have prices

of other essential products such as medicines, food, clothes and housing. If anything, petroleum prices have been less pressured than other prices because of the massive support provided by the government. Last year, the government spent Rs. 2 billion to subsidize the petroleum products while hardly any government subsidy was provided to other commodities. Petroleum prices, thus, rose by 0.3% while prices of medicines, education, vegetable and fruits, construction materials and clothes were up 3.5%, 4.8%, 7.2%, 19.5% and 6.7%, respectively.



RISING PRICES: Petroleum prices have risen twice within a month

Even after the latest hike, the government is still incurring a cost of almost Rs. 500 million every month to keep oil prices low.

Why, then, is the public up in arms against the recent hike in prices of pe-



SS/NU



B Rai

INFLAMMABLE: Petroleum prices are an issue exploited regularly for political gains

petroleum products? There are two main reasons for this.

First, a government owned monopoly—the Nepal Oil Corporation, the NOC—distributes petroleum products. Price hikes are, thus, looked upon as political decisions, not economic ones. Common people perceive government insensitivity to their plight in a decision to raise prices while opposition parties see a potential political opportunity to be exploited for political gains. This also explains why governments are loath to increase prices until forced into it and why political parties adopt contradictory stances depending upon whether they are in the opposition or in the government.

Second, there is a lack of transparency in the way petroleum prices are fixed in Nepal. When the government hikes oil prices, people are unsure whether it is to fill up the pockets of high-ranking officials or because of the pressure of international prices. Their distrust of the government and the NOC is further compounded by the fact that petroleum prices, which are hiked up when international prices go up, seldom come down with international prices.

The way out of the current mess—where the government is not only losing money but also inviting the ire of all concerned—is for the govern-

ment to completely disassociate itself from the price fixing process. This could be done in the short term by replacing the current administered pricing system with a mechanism that would automatically reflect changes in international prices. Such a mechanism could use a publicly declared formula to fix prices, increasing the confidence of the common people in the process. This would be consistent with the government's liberalization policy, which has consciously sought to link domestic prices to world prices through trade liberalization. In the medium term, the government should open up the petroleum sector for the private businesses so that prices are set competitively.

Setting up a transparent mechanism for setting oil prices will be crucial because the current level of government subsidy for petroleum products is unsustainable. Crude oil prices, which have risen to \$48 a barrel from about \$28 last year, are expected to go up to as much as \$65 a barrel until they bring on a global recession that finally slows demand. The cost of keeping oil prices at the current level could be as high as Rs. 1.5 billion a month or Rs. 18 billion a year—almost half of the government's total development spending.

Spending such huge amounts of money on subsidizing oil is neither the most efficient nor the most equitable way of spending scarce government resources. The country would be benefited more through government investment in education, infrastructure and agriculture rather than in petroleum products, which mainly benefit the urban minority at the cost of the rural majority. **N**



B Rai



Utter Neglect

The only museum dedicated to the history of modern Nepali art is a dismal failure. It needs a new location, an adequate budget and conscientious management.

BY AJIT BARAL

The National Association of Fine Arts was established in 1965 to promote Nepali art. One of the first things it did after its establishment was to open the Birendra Art Museum. The idea was good; almost every country has at least one art museum dedicated to its national art history. India has the Indian Modern Art Museum. In the museum there are paintings by Raja Ravi Verma; artists from the Bengal School of Art, Jamini Roy, Amrita Shergil, Rabindranath Tagore and the Progressive Artists' Group neatly displayed in a chronological order. The paintings tell the story of Indian modern art.

Nepal's equivalent, the Birendra Art Museum, fails to tell the same story. It seems the paintings in the museum were procured without a plan. Senior artist Madan Chitrakar says, "NAFA is being run by people with no sense of history."

The selection of the paintings in the museum is inadequate. More importantly, the works of some of the artists like Tej Bahadur Chitrakar and Chandraman Singh Maskey are missing entirely.

Bajuman Chitrkar's visit to Britain in 1850 helped bring British academic naturalism to Nepal. The Rana rulers, who were enamored by the British style of painting, encouraged Nepali artists to paint in the same style. The Ranas were the only patrons of art in the country then, and the style found widespread currency. The influence of British academic naturalism remained strong until 1950, when artists like Maskey, Chitrakar and Manohar Man Singh Pun tried to paint a little differently. These artists were the bridge between British academic naturalism and Nepali modernism. The museum could have thus started by procuring the works of these artists, and it could have added the works of artists who helped define the contour of



All photos B Rai



Nepali modern art later. But it seems NAFA members didn't know what to do with the museum.

NAFA appointed a committee to select paintings for the museum. "But it never fixed any criteria [for selection]," says art critic Mukesh Malla. That explains the glaring omissions of artists and bad selection of paintings. At present there is no committee at all; the head of NAFA has been procuring paintings at his own discretion for several years. There is criticism about his choices. "Many below-par paintings have found their way into the museum," Malla says. "What will foreigners think of our art after seeing the paintings in the museum?"

Even overlooking the poor selection and glaring omissions, the museum's state of neglect is enough to discourage visitors. Water seeps into the hall, and the air is damp. There are daubs of yellow paint all over the white walls. The paintings are displayed on stretcher boards. The lighting is awful and distracts the viewer. The carpet is filthy. The windows are broken, and pigeons enter and perch on the frames, which are rough and poorly made. Canvases have yellowed; worse, many paintings have started to peel. If this neglect continues, the few important paintings in the collection, like those of Bal Krishna Sama, will be damaged beyond repair in a few years.

Sunita Bhandari, who is in charge of the gallery, says she can do very little. "The museum hardly gets anything for its upkeep," she says. NAFA has a budget of Rs. 300,000. With this amount NAFA has to organize art activities like the National Art Exhibition as well as pay its operational expenses. But if this building, never intended to be a museum, can't be maintained, then the museum has to be moved.

Bhandari suggests that the museum could be taken to the Royal Nepal Academy and that the offices of the academy could be shifted to the NAFA building. That's a good suggestion, though unlikely to bring cheers at the academy. The academy has a huge building, which would make a museum worthy of Nepal's fine art. It could also be developed into a center for promotion of the arts, just what NAFA was intended to do. **N**



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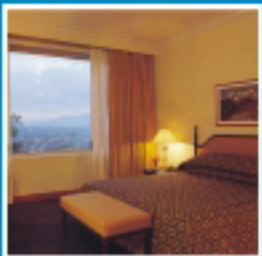
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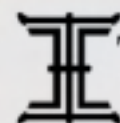
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Don't Drink The Water

The Maoists are not Nepal's biggest problem, not even close

BY IAN BAIRN

It's human nature to misestimate risks. Almost everyone worries about flying in an airplane, statistically a very, very safe thing to do; most of us don't think twice about riding in a car or on a motorcycle, even though it's 100 times more dangerous than flying. Our perception of the Maoist problem suffers from the same mis-estimation.

When asked why the Maoist problem is so terrible, most people point to the deaths, a ghastly 10,000-plus in eight and a half years. But what else kills Nepalis? According to CWIN, 99,000 children die each year in Nepal from diarrhea, pneumonia, smallpox, malaria and malnutrition. Why aren't we spending billions to prevent these easily averted deaths? Where is the concern and support from Big Brother to the south and Uncle Sam (who seems to be everywhere) for this huge problem?

Besides dead children, we have tuberculosis. The Britain-Nepal Medical Trust says that 16,500 Nepalis die each year from the disease. That's three times the casualty rate of the worst year of the insurrection, and TB goes on and on. A study a few years ago by the Ministry of Health estimated that 12 women died each day from preventable complications of pregnancy. Do the math: It comes to 4,380 women dead each year just because they lacked medical care of even the most basic sort. The situation certainly hasn't gotten any better since the study. It's an enormous problem, but an easy one to underestimate, since there's no shock and outrage, no media coverage.

The cost of the insurrection seems staggering too. The government estimated the total cost of the deaths, destruction and damaged economy at Rs. 18 billion, through the end of 2003. As huge a sum as that is, it's roughly what the property losses due to floods, landslides and other

natural disasters came to during the same period. Estimates of deaths and displaced families from the disasters were also similar to those caused by the insurrection. We can put an end to our self-induced disaster; Mother Nature will be with us forever.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization says that continuing deforestation costs Nepal Rs. 11 billion per year, five times the average cost of a year of the insurrection. The gross depletion of our natural resources is a much bigger drain on the nation's wealth than the Maoists.

Then how about the Maoists' damage to the economy? It's hard to estimate, but the cost surely amounts to billions. So does the damage caused by smuggling, a lucrative "business" with alleged ties to top political figures. The Nepal Textiles Industries Association says that textile smuggling from India and China costs their industry Rs. 6 billion per year, and has almost driven them out of existence. Eighty percent of imported fabrics, the association says, evade customs, costing the nation a fortune, destroying an industry and putting people out of work. That's one example of a vast problem, far, far worse than the Maoists.

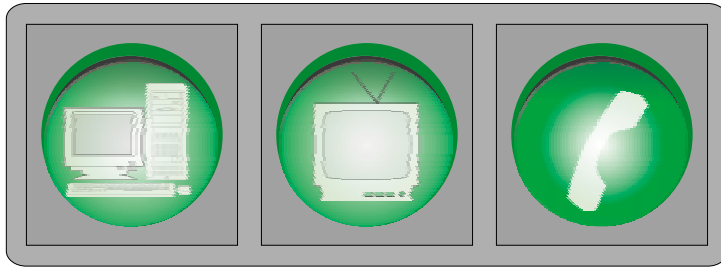
Perhaps you are willing to grant all that, but still feel the Maoists are our number-one problem. Don't they prevent anything productive being done about all those other problems? Yes and no. It's certainly harder to get services into Maoist-controlled regions now, but there wasn't much of an effort before the insurrection, when it would have been much easier. The real reason nothing got done was mismanagement and greed. Officials responsible for helping the nation instead helped themselves to, estimates say, 50 to 75 percent of the money. Much of the rest was wasted. That's a terrible problem, one that is far harder to resolve than the insurrection.

So let's clean up corruption. That's what the police and courts are for, right? Sorry. The lack of ethics, responsibility and honesty in the whole legal system makes it almost impossible. The culture of impunity and absence of rule of law on the part of the "good guys" is a much, much bigger problem than the Maoist bad guys.

The Maoist problem is easier to solve, less costly and less deadly than any of these other problems. We are preoccupied with the *Maobadi samasaya* for the wrong reason: It's spectacular, like an airplane crash. But the real danger is everyday, on the highways and in the inexorable toll taken by poor education, no health care, slow development and terrible governance. Drinking the water is more dangerous than the insurgency in most villages in Nepal. And that, of course, is why we have a Maoist problem in the first place. **N**



MISPLACED PRIORITIES: The Maoist insurgency has overshadowed the sorry state of our education and health sectors



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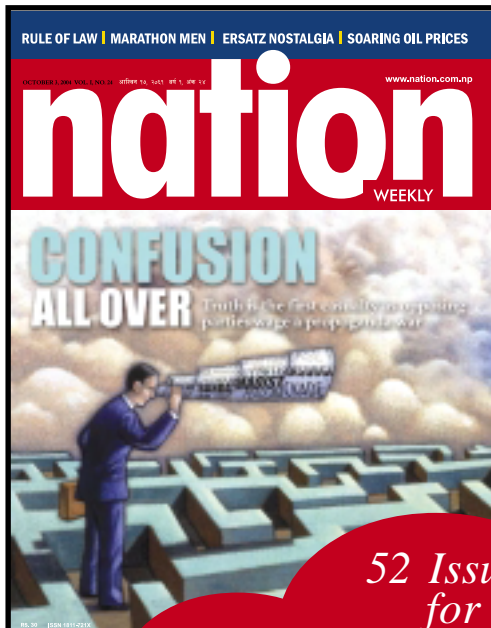


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High On Cloud Number 9

A flying leap could leave you sky-high

BY KUNAL LAMA

Whether Nepal is a failed, failing or flailing (my preferred, more accurate coinage) state, one thing it is for sure: stunningly beautiful. On a recent trip to Pokhara, as the Beechcraft flew over, through and under dramatic cloud formations, the country below was emerald. Mountains, hillsides, valleys, plains, all in that eye-soothing, vibrant, amazingly alive green. The monsoon had done its magic, transforming the grey-brown-scape into a land that we can be thankful to be living in. (Sometimes, though, flying over can be fun-and easier!)

The monsoon this year has been quite different. Spells of intense rainfall interspersed between periods of scorching sun and sticky humidity. The Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM—here we go again) has termed monsoon 2004 “weak.” It has, however, had its usual effects: East Nepal got thoroughly soaked, resulting in landslides, floods and losses of lives, whereas in the West, paradoxically, droughts have caused severe damages to crops and the livelihood of its people. To have learned that I needn’t have paid 4,040 rupees (Mother of God! For a flight which lasts 20 minutes one-way, a glass of water to rehydrate my drained budget and a lovely Ms. Rai or Gurung—sensational in disco

time keeping her balance that she had to claw her way back to her bucket seat, leaving a line of mauled and good-naturedly bemused passengers in her wake!). Goodness me, no: I could have just sat on a bench and looked around to see that, in spite of just 252 mm of rain in August (24 mm less than last year; on an average, the Kathmandu Valley receives over 1,500 mm of rain annually), thanks to the monsoon, even my garden had changed and was growing very well indeed.

Spreading particularly prolifically was the water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*). Discarded dismissively by a friend a few months ago, the hyacinth was now marching out of the confines of an evidently inadequate terracotta bowl. Royal intervention was immediately required, but how could I let the multi-lakh Harley Davidson roar its way through my small garden? It would surely destroy my delicate bed of ajuga (*Ajuga reptans*) forming an effective groundcover around small shrubs of azalea (*Azalea hybrida*), hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla*), the uniquely-named Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow (*Brunfelsia calycina*) and an ungainly-and-struggling sapling of flowering cherry (*Prunus cerasoides*). Ajuga is as prolific as the hyacinth, but on dry land, and it shoots up short stems studded with cheerful purple blossoms in the spring. Must say the hydrangea bushes look a bit the worse for wear, but they should come back to form soon.

On a north-facing brick wall a-jangle with ugly overhanging corrugated iron sheets, a spectacular display of intertwined morning glory (*Ipomoea hederacea*) and nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*) climbing over 10 feet have been wowing my envious friends. A closer friend, given to experimenting with psychoactive and hallucinogenic substances, has asked me to harvest the morning glory seeds. If you want to have visions of Mr. G. P. Koirala getting out of his SUV and walking the hundred or so meters to the dilapidated domestic terminal, all you have to do is grind up the seeds, mix them up with milk in a form of shake and gulp it down. The active substances—belonging to the Lysergic acid amide group—in the seed dissolve deliciously in the fat content of the milk. This could get addictive! Better stick with nasturtium flowers in your salads and pickle its plump green seed heads in brine as a substitute for the enormously pricey capers from Spain.

Gardening note: I’ve just bedded out cockscomb (*Celosia argentea*), marigold (*Tagetes patula*), chrysanthemum (*Chrysanthemum morifolium*) and salvia (*Salvia leucantha*) in a variety of colors except red. The first two are annuals, prefer well-drained soil, full sunlight and should flower through December. The latter two are perennials. Just make sure that you divide the chrysanthemums every few years, discarding the woody center. Chopping back the salvias after flowering ensures they bloom again and again.

The beauty of the monsoon is soon to leave us. Dare we hope that it will be replaced by the bounty of the autumn? Or are we to stock up on LSD and suchlike? **N**



heels and tight long skirt—in attendance, but is she going to be of any use when we have to jump out of the aircraft hanging on to our bottom “emergency floatation” seat if we are lucky enough to be over Begnas or Phewa??? I have seen similarly attired airhostesses wobbling up or down suspended stepladders and through the narrow aisles inside, gingerly balancing a tray full of cotton wool and sweets. Once, on a flight to Meghauli, when the aircraft was being buffeted by strong winds, a dutiful attendant, checking to see if the seat belts were on, had such a

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Interior Design By Suban Rajbhandari

The Good Doctor

After the exasperating traffic at Chabahil and the overwhelming rush of patients inside the Medicare National Hospital and Research Centre, it's a relief to be in Dr. Chakra Raj Pandey's quiet office. Dr. Pandey, however, is anything but quiet. He has a natural gift for gab: He's deliberate, articulate and engaging. The managing



director of the Department of Orthopedics and Traumatology at Medicare has already achieved what others of his age can only imagine. In his seven-year career he has pioneered modern orthopedic surgery in Nepal. Knee, hip and even spine replacement surgeries are rare in the country, but Pandey, in his late 30s, has done them all.

The doctor talks of a 65-year-old man who is suffering from a rare case of cancer. Eleven major operations had already been performed on the cancer patient: One half of his lungs had been removed and half of his leg amputated at a hospital in Mumbai. The last time he flew to India, the 65-year-old received the worst news of his lifetime: Nothing more could be done, and he had no more than a few months to live. Eight months later he is still alive. Dr. Pandey did a hip replacement surgery on him.

“This was one of the toughest surgeries I have undertaken,” says Dr. Pandey. “It was risky throughout, and one small mistake would have ended everything.” The difficulty and challenge motivated the doctor, as they have all his life.

The son of a farmer from a remote village in Sindhupalanchowk, Pandey left home as a child

to complete his S.L.C. in Kathmandu. He says living in his uncle’s home in the city was always a struggle. “There was a total mismatch,” he says. He wanted to do his best academically, but didn’t get “the proper environment, the proper nutrition; not enough of everything.” The difficulty motivated rather than discouraged him. He couldn’t afford higher education; the challenge to earn a good scholarship along with his “instinctive urge” for knowledge spurred him on. He finished sixth among all students in his S.L.C. examinations and later became the first Nepali to be chosen for an MBBS scholarship in Turkey.

In Turkey, he drove himself hard, excelled again and received another scholarship for a five-year-long orthopedic residency. “I actually wanted to be a cardiologist,” he says. “But because I hurt my knee once during my MBBS program, curiosity led me into becoming an orthopedic surgeon.” Pandey’s intellectual curiosity and willingness to take on difficult tasks won him his medical degree and orthopedic specialty.

The same things drive him still. His office in the orthopedics department at Medicare is filled with shelves of well-ordered books. A personal computer in one corner gives Pandey access to medical websites. The doctor tries to keep abreast with the latest developments in his field through meets abroad. “In every workshop you learn something different. You are up-

dated with what’s going on internationally,” says Pandey. “There is always a sea of knowledge to take in.” In 2003 he was one of four international doctors who were awarded a scholarship by the AAOS, the American Academy for Orthopedic Surgeons.

Dr. Pandey is dedicated to his specialty; he says it is because he is a perfectionist. He remarks, “I don’t think I’m flexible enough to manage too many things at a time. It’s basically about specializing in one thing and being the best at it.” Unlike many doctors, Pandey dedicates all his time to a single hospital and keeps no outside office. He has been at Medicare for two years; earlier, he was with B&B Hospital for five and a half years.

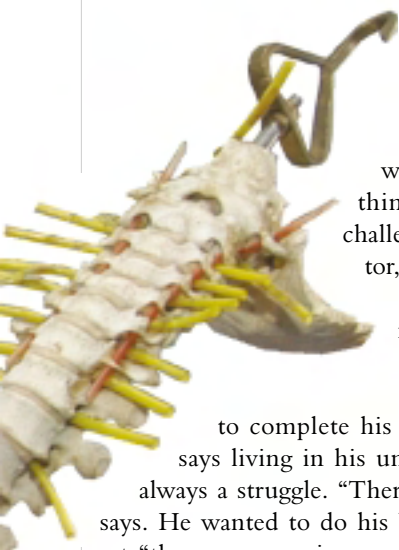
“I have this philosophy,” he says. “Doctors should wait for patients, not patients for doctors. I don’t take my patients for granted. What I am today is partly because of them, and by working at too many places I would do no justice to them.” That attitude and his determination to excel have made him one of the leading surgeons in the country.

Even so, Dr.

Pandey is unfulfilled. Why?

The career he really wants—a sports medicine practice—doesn’t yet exist in Nepal. “During my residency program in Turkey I felt a certain pull towards sports medicine, and I took up special courses on this subject,” says Pandey. In 2002, he received a traveling fellowship to study sports medicine and arthroscopic surgery in the United States. He also had a chance to practice sports medicine.

During his medical residency program in Turkey, Pandey accompanied the Turkish national youth basketball team to Germany as their sports doctor. Nothing similar has come his way in Nepal, but he is optimistic: “I know sports medicine isn’t still big in Nepal, but if organizations like the National Sports Council come up with the initiative we can form a team of sports doctors and give our players the same treatment they get only after paying millions of rupees abroad.” With his track record, don’t bet against his achieving his sports medicine dream. “After all,” he says, “it’s only about having the vision.” **N**



CITY ThisWeek

EVENTS



CHANGA CHAIT

Dashain is just around the corner. Keeping up with the Dashain festival, Club Himalaya is organizing the "Chang Chait 2061" for the second consecutive year. A kite flying competition among Nepal's top corporate houses, financial institutions, travel/tourism industry, export/trading companies and multinational companies, Changa Chait will be conducted through three stages. After two preliminary rounds, the final match will be held between the winners from the previous rounds. In the final match the three winners with the highest points will be awarded.

Csportsmanship among corporate bodies and also revive our

age-old culture of kite flying. Also enjoy the food festivals, fun games, music, dance party, and much more. Venue: At the Club Himalaya, Windy Hills, Nagarkot. Dates: September 25, October 2 and October 16 (finals). For information: 4410432.

Masquerade Night

Raizz International is organizing a Masquerade Night. The event will feature models from Cybernepal, Nepali pop artists, DJs Alex and Rupesh, and juggling and flamming bartenders. At Club Platinum, Hotel Yak & Yeti. Date: Saturday, October 2. Time: 8 p.m. Entry: Rs. 350 per person.

Batsayana In Town

ART EXHIBITIONS

This September marked the 19th anniversary of Siddhartha Art Gallery's establishments. To celebrate its commitment to arts, the gallery is exhibiting the paintings by one of Nepal's foremost artists, Durga Baral. Over the years, Durga Baral has reached much fame as a cartoonist and is known by his nom de plume "Batsayana." Over the years, Baral's paintings have been valued for their sublime exploration of the socio economic and political situation in Nepal. This time his exhibition titled "The Faces of Time and the Colors of Sensibility" focuses on the civil war that has gripped Nepal for the last nine years. He seeks to sensitize the viewers to the human



tragedy that is taking place in Nepal. Even though there is no political posturing in this exhibition, it is indeed critical of our pathetic inability to end the violence and the suffering. Starting October 1.

Cine Club

Movie: Taxi 3 (2002). Director: Gerard Krawczyk. Starring: Samy Naceri. At the Alliance Francaise, Tripureshwore. Date: October 3. Time: 2 p.m. For information: 4241163.

Tourism Products

Exhibition of new tourism products in Nepal on the

occasion of the 25th World Tourism Day. Also featuring documentary movies, art and culture shows, interaction programs and photo-exhibitions. Venue: Tourist Service Centre, B h r i k u t i m a n d a p , Kathmandu. Date: September 24-27. For information: 4269768.

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SEPTEMBER 28

MANGALBARE
DISCUSSION

Topic: Village Tourism in Nepal.
Pundit: Shreekanta Khatiwada.
Time: 5 p.m.

SEPTEMBER 30

MEDIA DISCUSSION

Topic: Gender Discrimination in
Nepali TV Programs. Pundit:
Deepa Gautam, Chief Program
Producer, NTV. Time: 3 p.m.
For information: 4256239.

**Films @ Lazimpat
Café Gallery**

OCTOBER 5

Love Actually

The directorial debut by Richard Curtis, screenwriter of "Four Weddings and a Funeral," "Notting Hill," and "Bridget Jones's Diary" is a romantic comedy that boasts a jaw dropping line up of a A- list British and Hollywood talent, including Hugh Grant and Colin Firth. "Love Actually" is a delightful mess, which inter weaves 15 stories of love and heartbreak and is unpretentious about what is—cute, fluffy and utterly charming. Time: 7 p.m. For information: 4428549.



ONGOING

**San Miguel
Oktober Fest**

The season to eat, drink and dance is here. This San Miguel Oktober Fest brings you bratwurst, frankfurter, chicken and steak barbeque, smoke ham carving and much more. This along with unlimited beer and extraordinary live music at the poolside to make your body spin. At the Hotel Yak & Yeti. Date: September 24 - October 3. For information: 4248999.



Longest Happy Hour

Hotel Yak and Yeti introduces the longest happy hours . Buy any drink and get a second one free. Add an array of sumptuous exotic snacks to the mix, and you will see why the happy hours have become happier. Venue: The Piano Lounge Bar. Time: 12-7:30 p.m.

Rock @ Belle Momo

Steel Wheels, a rock 'n roll band, at the Belle Momo, Durbar Marg. Also enjoy the delicious Belle Combo meal. Every Friday. 6:30 p.m. onwards. For information: 4230890.

Sekuwa Saanjh

Enjoy the Sekuwa Saanjh at The Dwarika's Hotel. Price: Rs. 555 plus tax per person; includes BBQ

dinner, a can of beer or soft drink and a good time. Live music by Abhaya & The Steam Injuns playing blues, jazz & more. Also drop your visiting cards or BBQ coupons for the lucky draw. Every Friday. 7p.m. onwards. For information: 4479488.

Fusion Night at Rox

The rhythmic and harmonic tunes of both eastern and western instruments will be a treat for your senses. Enjoy the sensational tune of Sarangi played by Bharat Nepali, blended with the western instru-



ments played by The Cloud Walkers. Every Wednesday. At the Rox Bar. Time: 6 p.m. onwards. For information: 4491234.

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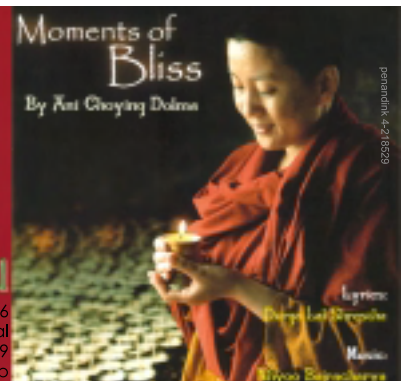
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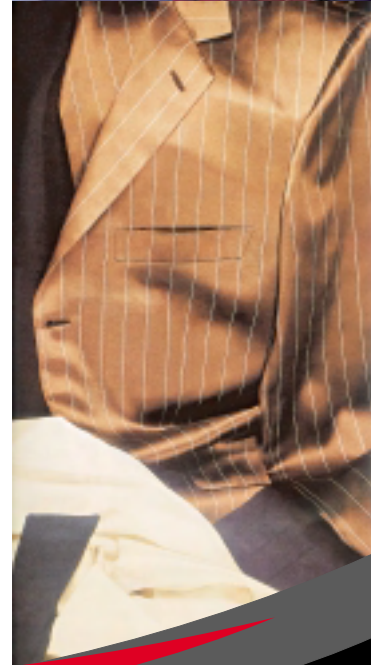
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	Lukla	YA103	Daily	0710	0745	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Lukla	YA 105	Daily	0715	0750	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Lukla	YA107	Daily	0840	0915	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Lukla	YA113	Daily	0845	0920	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Lukla	YA109	Daily	0850	0925	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Lukla	YA 115	Daily	0855	0930	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Lukla	YA117	Daily	1020	1055	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Lukla	YA119	1,2,4,5,6,7	1025	1100	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Taplejung	YA 901	3	1025	1135	2695	164	DHC-6/300	
	Phaplu	YA181	1,3,5	1030	1105	1480	85	DHC-6/300	
	Rumjatar	YA 221	2,4,7	1030	1105	1245	61	DHC-6/300	
	Manang	YA 601	6	1030	1130	2995	122	DHC-6/300	
	Meghauly	YA171	Daily	1130	1200	1340	79	DHC-6/300	
	Bharatpur	YA 173	Daily	1200	1225	1160	61	DHC-6/300	
	Bharatpur	YA 175	Daily	1400	1425	1160	61	DHC-6/300	
	Simara	YA 141	Daily	1330	1355	970	55	DHC-6/300	
	Simara	YA 143	Daily	1500	1525	970	55	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	Kathmandu	YA 301	Daily	0700	0800	4800	109	SAAB 340B
Kathmandu		YA 302	Daily	0705	0805	4800	109	SAAB 340B	
Kathmandu		YA 303	Daily	0820	0920	4800	109	SAAB 340B	
Biratnagar		YA 151	Daily	0945	1025	2585	85	SAAB 340B	
Biratnagar		YA 153	Daily	1430	1510	2585	85	SAAB 340B	
Biratnagar		YA 155	Daily	1640	1720	2585	85	SAAB 340B	
Pokhara		YA 131	Daily	0815	0840	1710	67	SAAB 340B	
Pokhara		YA 137	Daily	0955	1020	1710	67	SAAB 340B	
Pokhara		YA 135	Daily	1415	1440	1710	67	SAAB 340B	
Bhairahawa		YA 163	Daily	1555	1630	2220	79	SAAB 340B	
Bhadrapur		YA 121	Daily	1135	1225	2950	109	SAAB 340B	
Nepalgunj		YA 177	Daily	1155	1250	3500	109	SAAB 340B	
Biratnagar		Kathmandu	YA 152	Daily	1050	1130	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar		Kathmandu	YA 154	Daily	1535	1615	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 156	Daily	1745	1825	2585	85	SAAB 340B	
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 132	Daily	0905	0930	1710	67	SAAB 340B	
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 138	Daily	1045	1110	1710	67	SAAB 340B	
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 136	Daily	1505	1530	1710	67	SAAB 340B	
Bhairahawa	Kathmandu	YA 164	Daily	1655	1730	2220	79	SAAB 340B	
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	Kathmandu	YA 106	Daily	0805	0840	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 108	Daily	0930	1005	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 114	Daily	0935	1010	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
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	Kathmandu	YA 116	Daily	0945	1025	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 118	Daily	1110	1145	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
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Bharatpur	Kathmandu	YA 174	Daily	1240	1305	1160	61	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 176	Daily	1440	1505	1160	61	DHC-6/300	
Simara	Kathmandu	YA142	Daily	1410	1435	970	55	DHC-6/300	
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B Rai

1. NO COMMENTS: Former police chief Achyut Krishna Kharel being taken into judicial custody after he appeared before the Special Court
 2. HONOR: Journalist Pannalal Gupta receives Gopal Das Patrakarita Pruskar from Prime Minister Deuba for his contribution to field of journalism
 3. CELEBRITY NUN: Anni Choying at a concert at the Dream Garden, Keshar Mahal, to raise funds for the Arya Tara school
 4. HERE WE GO AGAIN: The four agitating parties begin another round of Ratna Park-centered protest programs
 5,6. CANDLE-LIGHT VIGIL: Hundreds gather at the Mandala at Maitighar to light candles to mourn those who have died in the eight-and-a-half-year long conflict
 7. FESTIVE SEASON BEGINS: Devotees observing Rishi Panchhami near Pachali Bhairav
 8. DAY OF PEACE: A gathering at Basantapur organized by Himsha Birodh Abhiyan, the Campaign Against Violence



5

nw/SS



nw/SS

6



8

SS/nw



7

B Rai

Marathon Men

Nepal's best chance for international distinction is distance running. The discipline needs little specialized training and no expensive facilities, just as legendary marathon man Baikuntha Manadhar says.

BY SUDESH SHRESTHA

How should we feel for the Nepali athletes who were in Athens last month? Happy for their once-in-a-lifetime moment or sorry that they were so far behind while confronting the very best in the world? The results were the same during Nepal's previous eight appearances at the Olympic Games, starting at Tokyo in 1964. It was the same drama of listless despair—except that this time we had a protagonist in the taekwondo star Sangina Baidya. The fact that she had fought her way to a place among the top 16 to qualify for the event raised the hopes of a nation.

Member-secretary Kishore Bahadur Singh, who attended the Olympic Games in Athens as chef de mission of the Nepali contingent, understands how to add official gloss to the Olympic lament. "It's been more of a learning experience," says Singh. Even the most fervently patriotic Nepalis have no illusions that Nepal's Olympic dreams will be fulfilled any time soon. There's a reason. An Olympic medal is such a sought-after commodity that developed nations hardly leave anything to chance. They will test every conceivable method—cutting-edge technology and, in some cases, even drugs—in order to win.

The competition is demanding. Olympic disciplines like swimming and most athletic events are now well beyond the reach of poor countries. That doesn't mean there is no room for individual talents, and those talents have their best shot at middle- and long-distance running. Despite their lack of resources, Kenya, Ethiopia and Morocco continue to produce top-notch runners, for example.

At 5,000 meters, Kenyan runners hold 48 of the 100 best times ever, followed by Morocco with 23 and Ethiopia with 18. "They have a quality that stems from severe hardship that they are exposed to since their childhood," explains Prakash Pradhan, who holds a Ph.D. in sports science. "Much like Nepal, these resource-poor African nations have no roads. There's no alternative to walking and running. And with some help, they become world-beaters," he adds.

While Olympic medals may be beyond our reach in the immediate future, Pradhan believes Nepali distance runners have realistic chances to excel at the Asian level. Baikuntha Manadhar, Nepal's marathon man, shares his views. "I never went through advanced training when I was running, recalls the three-

time SAF Games gold-medallist. "I used to run for two to three hours regularly and increase it before major competitions." His record of 2:15:03 set at the third SAF Games in Calcutta remains unchallenged.

Athletics experts say that with advanced training, he could have had a podium finish at the Asian Games. The performance of Nepal's own self-effacing distance runner Rajendra Bhandari in Athens suggests he could be a top runner too. His timing of 14:04.89 in the 5,000 meters heats may be off the final qualifying mark in Athens, but this soldier from Tanahun has potential to climb up the ladder. In Athens Bhandari clipped over 30 seconds off his silver-medal winning time of 14:42.63 at the ninth SAF Games. Noushad Khan of Pakistan won the gold there with 14:39.47.

"That's [Bhandari's time in Athens] better than any of the winning times in the SAF Games yet," confirms athletics coach Pushpa Raj Ojha. "If we pay proper attention, he can be a medal prospect at the Asian Games," Ojha adds. At 27, age is definitely on Bhandari's side, and he will work hard for the 2006 Doha Asiad.

The only worries are over officials' frivolous attitude toward players. "Hopes for a good showing were sunk less by strong opponents than by infighting among officials," Bhandari says, recalling the incident at the Kathmandu airport before flying for Athens. He and three other athletes were left stranded there with no sport officials in sight for hours. The infighting comes because the nation's sports authorities are divided into two factions—a morale-sapping situation that no one appears to have the political will to end.

"The officials should now work to create the right environment for players to cast off the unpleasant experience," Bhandari says, "and to work on the right prescriptions for better performances." Sports enthusiasts agree and hope the guardians of country's sports will pay more attention to the athletes' needs and less to power games. **N**



KING OF MARATHON: 'I never went through advanced training'



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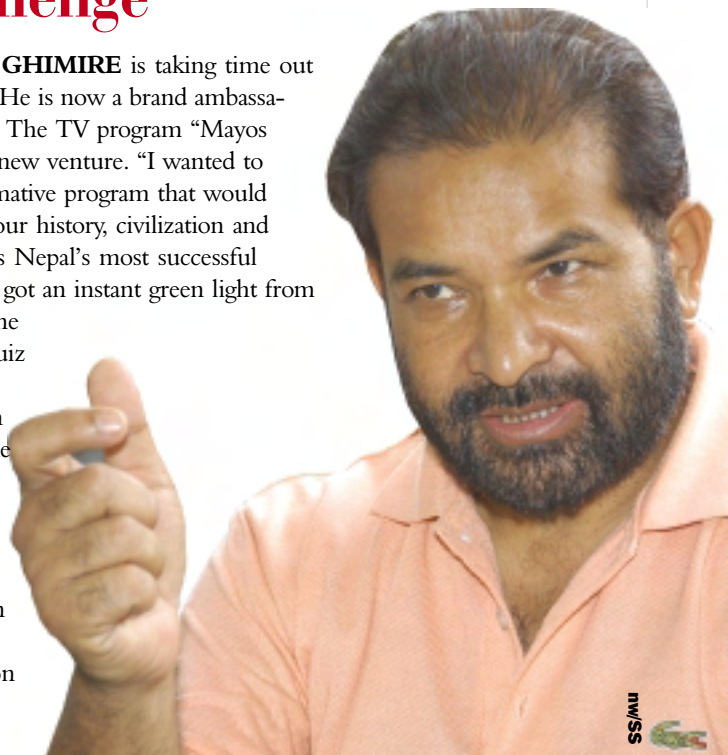
Top Floor, Media House, Tripureshwor, Kathmandu

Snapshots

BY DHRITI BHATTA

New Challenge

Movie director **TULSI GHIMIRE** is taking time out from his busy schedule. He is now a brand ambassador for Mayos Noodles. The TV program “Mayos Super Challenge” is his new venture. “I wanted to come out with an informative program that would tell the audience about our history, civilization and above all ourselves,” says Nepal’s most successful movie director. His idea got an instant green light from the makers of Mayos. The only hitch: The NTV quiz show only caters to the recipients of the Golden Coupon found inside the Mayos packs. Fourteen episodes of the program, the first of which went on air on September 18, have already been confirmed. Catch his program on Saturdays on NTV at 8:40 p.m.



nm/SS



B Rai

DIFFERENCE MAKER

MEERA BHATTARAI is a rare breed: a woman entrepreneur in Nepal who has achieved international recognition. She recently won the SCHWAB Outstanding Social Entrepreneur Award-2005, given out by the Swiss SCHWAB Foundation that honors outstanding social entrepreneurs around the world whose work has significantly improved people’s lives. Established in 1984, her organization—the Association of Craft Producers, the ACP—works with 1,000 producers from 17 districts; 90 percent of them are women. Their products include ceramics, baskets, toys, wool products and furniture. Her goal: To make Nepali women independent by providing them with job opportunities. Already 70 percent of ACP’s sales are to the international market. Her model is one definitely worth emulating.

Nepali Touch

ANI CHOYING DOLMA is an internationally reputed singer with a Nepali touch. Her five albums with Tibetan chants and mantras and Nepali songs have been highly acclaimed. The Tibetan-Nepali has made several international tours to Europe and the United States. Last week, she was home—at the Garden of Dreams in Keshar Mahal for a concert titled after her latest album, “Moments of Bliss.” It was a total sellout. From local Nepalis to expats, you could see everyone swaying to Choying’s euphonic voice. Next up is a tour to Germany scheduled for later this year. She’ll mesmerize them there, too.



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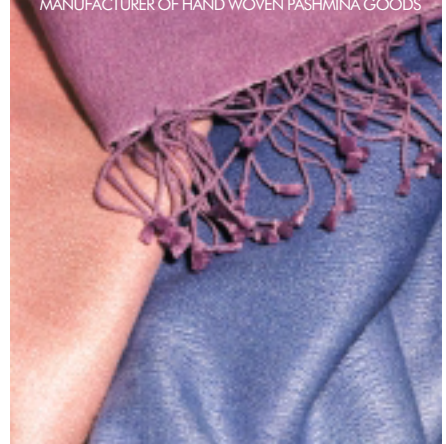


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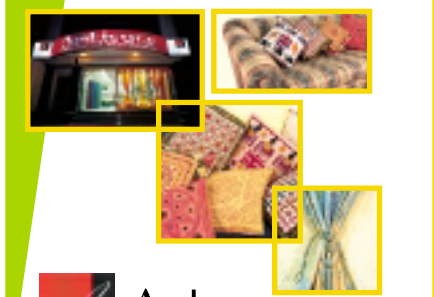
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Bridging The Divide

Something happened last week, something not generally seen in our country, caught up in conflict. Common people, people from the middle class, gathered to make their voices heard against the growing culture of violence. First on Monday, September 20, hundreds gathered at Maitighar to light candles to mourn the more than 10,000 who have lost their lives

in the eight and a half years of conflict. A day later at Basantapur they protested the use of violence for political ends. The gatherings organized by the Himsha Birodh Abhiyan, the Campaign Against Violence, a loose coalition of civil society groups, were the first of their kind. Using e-mail, SMS, phone calls, radio and television, organizers were able to spread the word within a day or two. They were able to tap into a segment of the population that generally stays away from politics—professionals and the apolitical crowd among the city’s school and college-goers. Yashas Vaidya talked to writer and filmmaker **Kedar Sharma**, one of the many people behind the campaign.

How did the program come about?

We wanted to do something on the International Day of Peace on September 21. We didn’t want take out a rally to disrupt traffic and normal lives. We wanted to do something that was thoughtful. Soon more people came aboard, people doing event management, those in the media and so on. Everybody contributed. All this came about within a week.

What is your message?

We wanted to protest against the culture of violence that is slowly taking root in our society. We believe that violence shouldn’t become routine. We wanted to make sure that violence doesn’t take root in a society that is normally as tolerant and peaceful as ours.

How did the culture of violence come about?

I personally think that the UML while in the opposition started this—uproot-

ing railings, burning tires. Then when others moved into the opposition they did the same. Soon if anybody wanted something addressed, the thing to do was to resort to violence. What happened on September 1 [the riots that followed the killing of 12 Nepalis in Iraq] is indicative of this. Violence is just not limited to just the security forces and the Army.

Your movement doesn’t have a public face. Was that intentional?

Yes. We wanted to avoid the traditional focus on protests: Who is doing it, rather than what is it.

If middle-class Nepalis don’t speak out for other Nepalis today, then there will be no one left to speak for them

So this obviously is a movement of a different kind...

It’s an experiment. When just a rumor of a banda by an unknown, underground group is enough to have a disturbing impact, we wanted to see if similar calls for peace from an unknown group would work. They did. The gathering at Basantapur was huge and had many professionals—editors, writers, intellectuals and artists. And, more importantly, the common Nepalis from different walks of life came.

You were able to mobilize a segment of the population not too involved in the political process.



B Rai

Yes. I believe some of it had to do with the medium we used—emails, SMS, telephone calls and some radio and television stations as well. We felt we needed to get our message to the urban middle class. Most people in Kathmandu haven’t felt the brunt of the violence that has wracked the rest of the country. The closest they’ve come to witnessing the conflict is, probably, the closure of educational institutions. There is a message for us from the Holocaust. It’s about a German pastor. When the Nazis came for the Jews, the communists, the trade unionists, and Catholics, he didn’t speak up because he didn’t belong to any of these groups. In the end when they came for him there was nobody to speak up for him. If middle-class Nepalis don’t speak out for the sorrows faced by other Nepalis today, then there will be no one left to speak for them.

You have chosen the theme of “anti-violence” and maintain that your message will be strictly apolitical. That’s fine, but doesn’t it all boil down to politics, as two failed peace processes prove?

Our movement is apolitical, but the roots of problem and probably the solution are political.

Do you think there is a realistic chance that a movement such as yours will bring peace to the country?

Maybe. There’s an apt line from a Lata Mangeskar song that comes to my mind: “*Mere batan ke logo, jara bharalo aakhomai pani,*” countrymen, fill your eyes with tears. One Nepali must feel the hurt of another. **N**

Nehru's Legacy

Shashi Tharoor's very readable book about Jawarhalal Nehru is about democracy and secularism, Nehru's abiding legacies, and also about socialism and nonalignment, now nearly forgotten

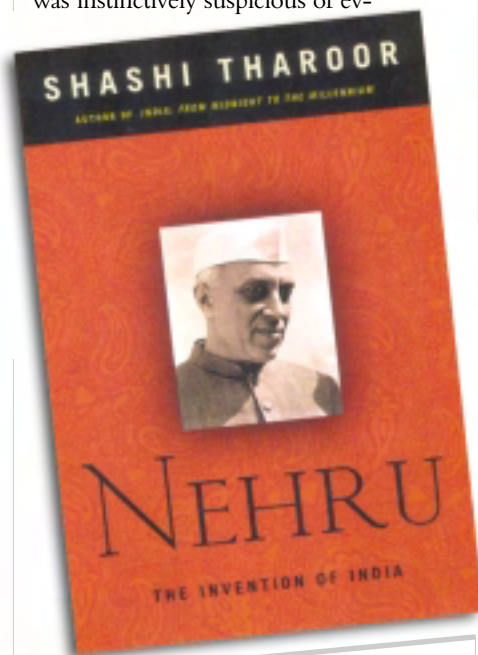
BY SOHAM DHAKAL

Many in India think that Nehru was "too" soft on Nepal. As recently as 2000, BJP leader K. R. Malkani said Nehru lost a major opportunity when King Tribhuvan offered Nepal to Nehru. Nehru may or may not have been soft while dealing with Nepal, but it's inconceivable to think that he would have acted in any way to diminish his stature in the international arena. According to Shashi Tharoor, "Nehru's foreign policy positions were self-justifying emanations of his intellect; to link them to direct benefits to the Indian people was beneath him." However, his life did revolve around serving the Indian masses, and, without much opposition, he held influence in practically every matter of the newly independent India. It is therefore fitting to include "The Invention of India" in the title of the book.

Nehru grew up a privileged child, born into a family that had close ties with the colonials. He graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge, and entered politics within a few years of returning to India. Tharoor touches on all the major events in the life of Nehru including the defining Amritsar massacre, which Nehru was sent to investigate. Upon finding out that the expatriates had raised a quarter of a million pounds for Dyer, who had carried out the massacre, he understood "how brutal and immoral imperialism was and how it had eaten into the souls of the British upper classes." As Nehru's involvement in the National Congress increased, so did his closeness to Mahatma Gandhi and consequently his rise within the party. Tharoor also gives a superb analysis of the relationship between Nehru and his family, especially through the tumultuous times spent in prison. Even with all the hardship that Nehru endured, his

biggest contributions would come after independence.

Tharoor summarizes Nehru's contribution to India as "four major pillars": Democracy, secularism, socialist economics and nonalignment. It's the legacy of a democratic secular India that he gives most importance to. Even though Nehru was successful in promoting a democratic India, his shortcomings lay in his economic assumptions. According to Tharoor, this partly stemmed from the fact that Nehru was instinctively suspicious of ev-



Nehru: The Invention of India

by Shashi Tharoor
Penguin Books (Hardcover)
PAGES: 282
PRICE: Rs. 462

ery foreign business: The British East India Company had come to India to trade but later became the rulers. This, coupled with Gandhi's ideas about economic self-sufficiency, led to protectionism. Tharoor is honest about criticizing Nehru's follies.

Tharoor also amply highlights the personal characteristics of Nehru, who believed in democracy and was able to connect, despite his aristocratic roots, to the masses so easily that a "threat of resignation was all that was needed if anyone opposed him." At the same time, the thing that he feared most was autocracy. Thus he wrote "anonymous articles warning Indians of the dangers of giving dictatorial temptations to Jawaharlal Nehru." He never craved a dynasty and was not too keen about grooming his daughter for politics. Tharoor concedes that the greatest irony of his legacy was that "the Jawaharlal who had warned of the temptations of dictatorship should produce a daughter who would, albeit briefly and unsuccessfully, suspend India's democracy." In this Tharoor provides one of the most valuable lessons that any young democracy can realize; even though some may associate democracy with "inefficiency, corruption and mediocrity" and tyranny and dictatorship might enjoy some support, especially from those who are "themselves untouched by it," democracy provides everyone, including the victims, the "means of redemption through the ballot box."

Shashi Tharoor's "Nehru: The Invention of India" is, as he declares in the preface, not a scholarly work, as "it is based on no new research into previously undiscovered archives." It is rather a "reinterpretation—both of an extraordinary life and career and of the inheritance it left behind for every Indian." Tharoor is therefore free to remove any dry narrative and present Nehru's story both delectably and analytically. It is difficult to capture all aspects of a man like Jawaharlal Nehru (and there have been many books on him), but what Tharoor is able to accomplish is to make him accessible to everyone, including audiences outside of India. However, the pains he has taken in reiterating some of the things that should be understood by Indians show how far removed Nehru is becoming from modern India. Tharoor's conclusion illustrates this fact: "...the consensus [Nehru] constructed has frayed; democracy endures, secularism is besieged, nonalignment is all but forgotten and socialism barely clings on." **N**



Ordinary Virtues

Where, to the eyes of the ordinary people, the situation seems to offer no alternative, where it seems that one must bow to circumstances, the hero fights the odds and, through some extraordinary deed, manages to bend destiny to his own ends...

“Facing the Extreme,”
Tzvetan Todorov

Todorov’s classic work is about the human capacity for moral life amid extreme pressure—life inside Nazi concentration camps and Soviet gulags. Through his painstaking research, Todorov questions the conventional wisdom that moral life dies in extreme circumstances. He instead constructs gestures of dignity, compassion and solidarity that triumphed over the prevailing hopelessness inside the camps. In a world that was devoid of grand heroes, little acts of ordinary virtues were quietly heroic; they held enormous political symbolism and moral significance for posterity.

We saw something similar happen on the streets of Kathmandu last week. The ‘ordinary virtues’ were abundantly evident. And we can’t help documenting them. Like in Todorov’s heroes inside the camps, we saw ordinary virtues in scores of school kids who had gathered to mourn the deaths of 10,000 faceless Nepalis killed in the so-called people’s war. It was a spontaneous gesture that relied on word-of-mouth—friends called friends, one colleague told another. Many of those who held the candle-lit vigil at the Mandala in Maitighar on Monday were not the typical government-hating crowd you have come to associate with protests at Ratna Park that have continued for the past year. Most were urban middleclass kids, who wanted to show solidarity to the pains of Nepalis outside Kathmandu, who have seen it all for years (see Khula Munch, page 56).

Next day, a much larger crowd gathered in Basantapur. If the first gathering had a large number of high school students, this one was pretty mixed—writers, intellectuals, journalists, civil society representatives and common Nepalis. The modest gathering at Maitighar the day be-

fore seemed to have galvanized a large urban population. The message: After eight and a half years of needless violence, Nepalis desire peace and the desire is overwhelming. The constituency demanding that both the Maoists and the state immediately put down their guns is growing. They want concrete actions; not smokescreen statements that have jammed our airwaves and flooded our newspapers since the ceasefire collapsed last August.

It’s hard to decide whether the ceasefire is any closer now than it was in June when Deuba took office amid great



expectations that peace would finally be restored. Four months on, all one sees is that everyone’s busy talking up peace, blaming the other party for the impasse. The net result: Nothing happens on the ground. In the long run, it doesn’t matter what you say; people will begin to see you for who you are. Do the warring parties really care about the people?

To Todorov, caring is one of the prime “ordinary virtues” of a hero. And we take heart from the fact that scores of Kathmandu residents showed last week that they care. They are our heroes.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor

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