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# nation

WEEKLY

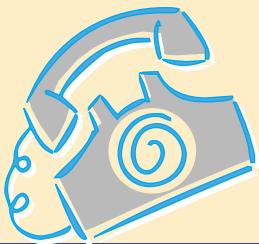


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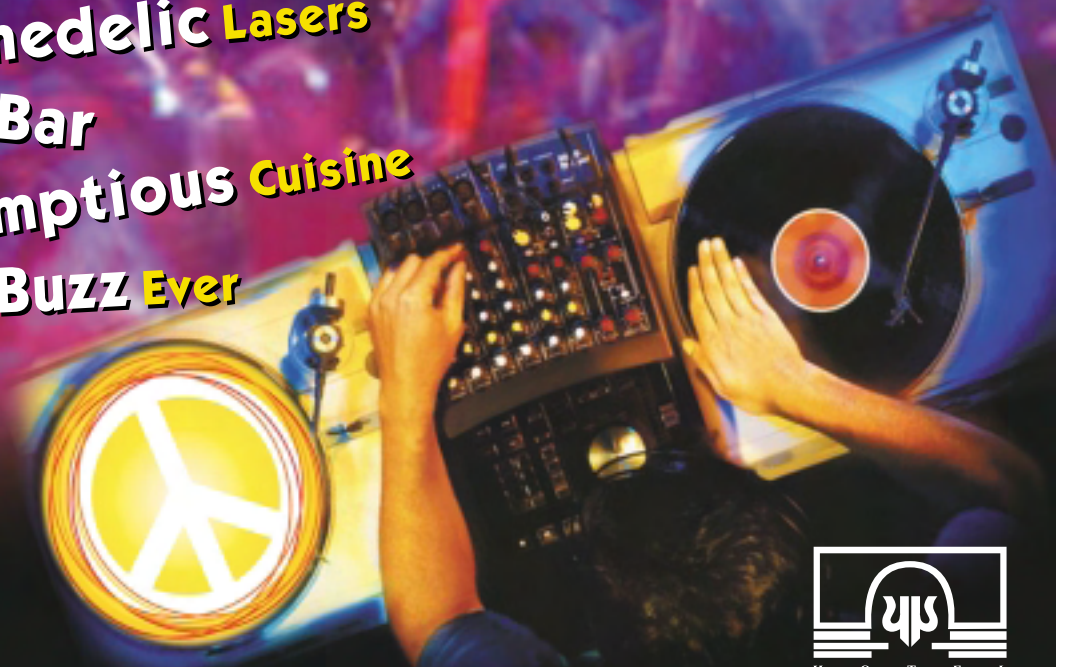
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## COVER STORY

# 22 Elusive Ceasefire

By John Narayan Parajuli and Satish Jung Shahi

With the first major explosion in the capital last week, it was clear that holiday truce had ended. Although both the government and the Maoists still say they are committed to peace, it's unclear what is holding them back.

## COLUMNS

### 11 Stop This Nonsense

By Suman Pradhan

### 38 Peace By Consensus

By Arnico K. Panday

### 40 On Bended Knee

By Kunal Lama

## LIFESTYLE

### 47 Food for Thought

By Sushma Joshi

The international food festival at the Hyatt was a plateful of disappointment

## DEPARTMENTS

6 LETTERS

9 WEEK IN PICTURES

10 PICTURE OF THE WEEK

14 CAPSULES

16 MILESTONE

16 BIZ BUZZ

28 TIHAR THAT WAS

44 CITY PAGE

52 SNAPSHOTS

56 KHULA MANCH: THE SWEET MAKER

57 BOOKS: "RIDDUM"

58 LAST PAGE

## 18 Constitutional Chasm

By John Narayan Parajuli

With the constitution derailed for almost two years now, there are mixed interpretations about it. But almost everyone agrees that, it needs amendmen

## 26 Helter Skelter

By John Narayan Parajuli

Every time the RPP has been close to power, it has split: The party itself may have lost count of how often. This time Thapa has departed with a bigger purpose. What is it?

## 31 Rap Is Da' Trend

By Satish Jung Shahi

Nepali hip-hop music is starting to do well commercially, especially among youngsters, who are turning into major fans

## ARTS & SOCIETY

### 34 The Muse In The Garden

By Veneeta Singha

The ornate surroundings of Kaiser Library speak volumes of the man who created it

## PROFILE

### 42 The Education Divide

By Sunil Pokhrel

It's been 22 years since Christine Stone came here to teach, and she's still going strong

## SPORTS

### 50 Dark Shadows

By Sudesh Shrestha

It's time officials looked seriously into sports injuries

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# Letters



## “ The leadership in the Nepali Congress is dead as a dodo ”

DR. AMRIT K.C.

### NC muddle

I PERSONALLY THINK JOHN Narayan Parajuli’s “Leadership Muddle” (November 14) was a sheer waste of space in your popular magazine. There are so many other pleasant things to talk and write about. To put it succinctly, the leadership in the Nepali Congress is dead as a dodo, and who is to blame? None other than the persons mentioned in your magazine. I thought it was quite unnecessary to bring in the feud inside the Koirala family while discussing Nepali Congress politics. Finally, I would like to add that Dr. Shashank Koirala has made the biggest mistake in his life by trying to revive the already dead dodo. Dr. Koirala, you are a highly competent eye specialist. Your patients need you much more than the Nepali Congress party.

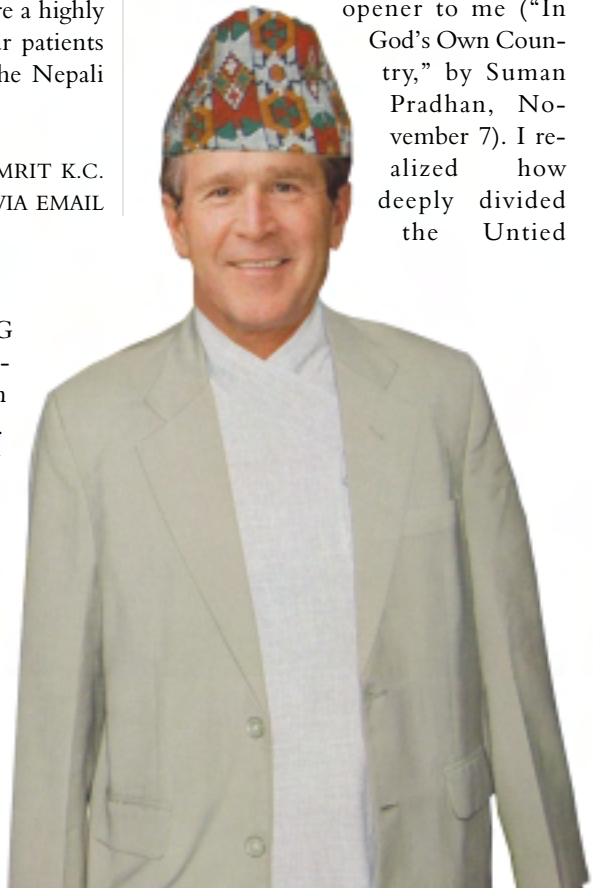
DR. AMRIT K.C.  
VIA EMAIL

life-support system—just as it was to the most famous of them all, Tenzing Norgay, more than 50 years ago. Perhaps even more so now, thanks to Tenzing. Mountaineering has now made a name for itself as a revenue-generating industry, and Sherpas are its renowned foot soldiers. Every single high-altitude expedition has Sherpa *sardars*, who are perhaps more important to the climbing team than the team leader himself.

PHURBA SHERPA  
VIA EMAIL

### US and religion

ELECTION 2004 WAS AN EYE-opener to me (“In God’s Own Country,” by Suman Pradhan, November 7). I realized how deeply divided the Untied



### Everest call

THANKS FOR FEATURING Ang Karma Sherpa in your interview page, Khula Manch (“Ever Higher,” November 7). He correctly spells out why young Sherpas are so strongly drawn to Everest: “You can be nobody today, and tomorrow you can rise to stardom.” But that’s not all—anyone who has visited Khumbu will tell you the attendant stardom only partly explains the Everest call. To Sherpas, mountaineering is simply a



States is and how big a role religion plays in its election. All this in arguably the world's most vibrant democracy! President George Bush virtually campaigned on the back of religion. Whatever happened to the secular values the rest of the world relates to the west? So are they just for speeches and have mere ornamental values? I am disturbed.

PRABHAT GHIMIRE  
VIA EMAIL

## Skirting the issue

I AM WRITING TO RESPECTFULLY question the intent of the letter to the editor titled "Rightist slant" (November 7). As an occasional contributor to your publication, I welcome criticism of the content of my writing. I believe that constructive criticism provides a unique opportunity to broaden one's horizons and re-examine issues from differing perspectives.

However, in the case of the letter you recently published, I am offended because the criticism outlined has, at best, a marginal relation to the content of my writing. The letter is more of a weak attack on my personality, based on a groundless assumption regarding my supposed political preferences. First of all, nowhere in my writing do I state that Bhekh Bahadur Thapa made a better case for his government's anti-Maoist campaign than Prakash Sharan Mahat. My only point was that Mahat explicitly called the Maoists terrorists whereas Thapa had avoided using the term. Second, neither the issue of human rights nor of the Royal Nepal Army was raised by the audience in discussions with Mahat this year (at Columbia University). Third, nowhere in my piece do I claim that Nepal's human rights record is infallible or that the RNA is immune to criticism. Fourth, how is it that a piece about deficiencies in Nepali diplomacy somehow indicates that Nepal's diplomatic efforts are secondary to the RNA? Fifth, no individual was my "whipping boy," definitely not Mahat. My intent was to write the facts and leave judgment on systemic abuses and inefficiencies to the readers. Sixth, there was no cover-up to be done. Anyone who was present at

both Thapa's and Mahat's presentations can attest to this.

This necessitates for clarification that the individual "Niraj Joshi," who wrote that letter, was not present at either Thapa's or Mahat's function. It is entirely possible that "Niraj Joshi's" alter ego was, but "Niraj Joshi" was not. He is the one who has missed the point—it is entirely possible to have a rightist approach and still champion human rights. Alternatively, it is also very possible to have a leftist tinge and be in support of the RNA. Mutual exclusivity in this area is a feeble excuse for undermining the democratic norms of diversity and tolerance. Human rights abuses aren't perpetrated based on political preferences; if such were the case, "Niraj Joshi's" logic indicates that he/she is a Maoist.

Should "Niraj Joshi" have issues with the RNA's human rights record, I would suggest that he/she take it up with them, instead of trying to use me as a "whipping boy." Should "Niraj Joshi" feel a strong compulsion to lambast the RNA, he should have the guts to do so publicly, using his own name and citing his own reasons. What I wrote was based on pure, hard facts. There was not a word of exaggeration. "Niraj Joshi's" attack on my writing uses facts that are completely out of context and conjecture that should have raised editorial alarms.

Last but not the least, I understand that verifying sources external to Nepal may be a challenge, but it is not impossible. Publications similar to yours successfully meet this challenge by requesting that contributors state their professional or educational associations (even pictures in some cases).

DIPTA SHAH  
NEW YORK

## CORRECTION

- Hemant Arjyal's name has been incorrectly spelled as Hemanta Aryal in "Flying High" (Cover story, by John Narayan Parajuli, November 14).
- In "Week in Pictures" (November 14), a picture caption for the program "Hasyabahar Kabi Gosti" at the Indian Embassy named the comic Govind Babu Tiwari wrongly as Govind Bahadur Tiwari.

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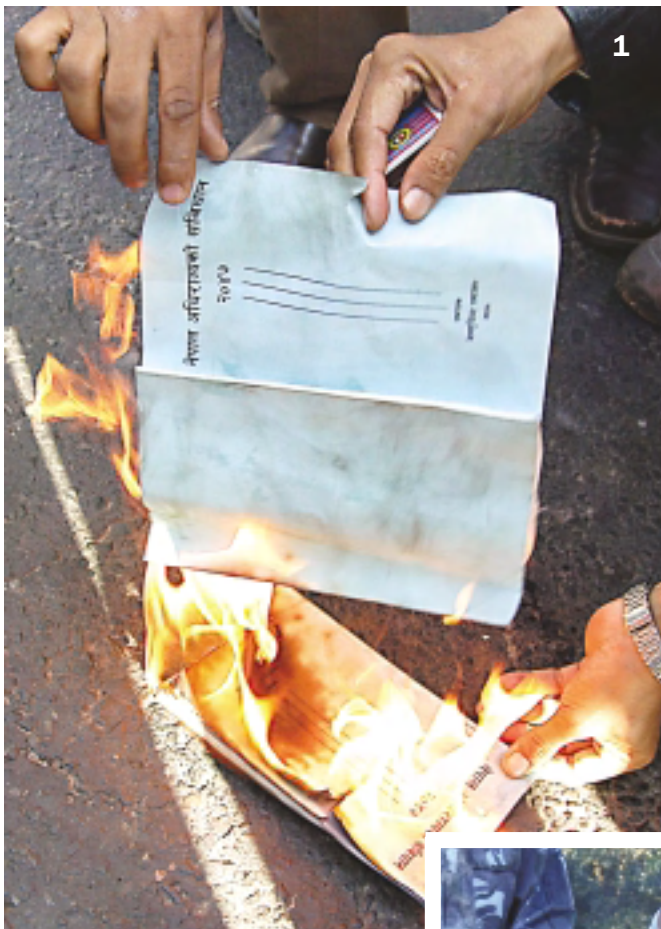


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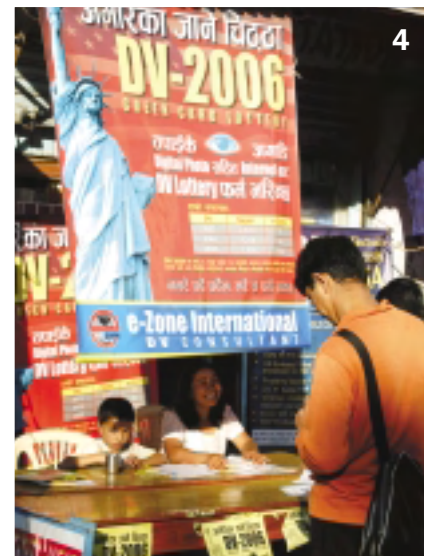
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7



5

1. TO ASHES: Minority groups demanding quotas in educational institutions burn the Constitution on November 8, the 15th Constitution Day  
 2. SLAGONEERING: Children at a Gefont rally  
 3. & 6. IT'S A DOG'S LIFE: Police dogs on Kukur Puja at the Central Dog Training School in Ranibari  
 4. AMERICAN DREAM: The DV-2006 starts  
 5. FESTIVE MOOD: Deusi-bhailo program at NTB Hall  
 7. WHERE IS EVERYBODY: A kid collects plastic cups after tea party for Ganeshman Foundation at Bhrikutimandap  
 8. MAKE HAY...: Farmers drying paddy grain  
 photos 1,3,4,5 and 6 nw/SS, 2, 7 and 8 B Rai





**FAMILY REUNION:** Inus Karawee, with his father, on his return home from Iraq where he was held hostage by Islamic militants





# Stop This Nonsense

That Minister Mohsin raised the specter of dictatorship last week is troubling

BY SUMAN PRADHAN

Talking to a group of editors and publishers last Wednesday, Minister for Information and Communication Mohammed Mohsin threw a bombshell: If the present government fails, then an authoritarian regime cannot be ruled out. It doesn't matter that Mohsin labeled his thoughts as "personal opinion" or "hypothesis." The fact is that such an opinion has been expressed by a responsible government leader who is considered close to the King.

The statement can be interpreted in two ways. It could be a last-ditch attempt to push the Maoists to the negotiating table by raising the specter of dictatorship. Or it could be a trial balloon to gauge public reaction before, God forbid, the inevitable. Either way, Mohsin's remarks are deeply troubling.

It is disconcerting because a senior government leader is openly talking of authoritarianism as a last recourse to establishing peace. And instead of slapping him down, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has stayed conspicuously silent. But we should not stay silent. This is the time for political parties, civil society and the people in general to strongly condemn such views, lest it send the wrong signals to the powers that be. History is replete with examples of wrong turns because people and parties slept at the wheel. Let this moment not pass without a vigorous response.

Throughout history, those in power have argued for more authority to control rebellion and dissent. Indira Gandhi did so by imposing emergency in democratic India from 1975 to 1977. It did not solve India's problems. In fact it made them worse and could have contributed to the rise in violence later in several Indian states.

Further out, dictatorial regimes have failed time and again to achieve their military and political objectives. They may have provided stability and peace for brief periods, but they have inevitably failed over time. Suharto-era Indonesia, the former Yugoslavia and the ex-Soviet Union are all examples of authoritarianism gone awry. None of these countries could prevent disintegration despite the recourse to draconian laws and use of military force. And the world is shuddering today by the prospects of what will happen after Burma and North Korea throw off their authoritarian regimes some day. Might it be any different in Nepal?

Those in favor of authoritarianism may want to point to Singapore and Taiwan, two countries, which attained remarkable progress on the

back of benign authoritarian governments. True, but those countries are the exception rather than the rule. Without the massive infusion of U.S. aid, Chiang Kai Shek and his followers may never have succeeded in Taiwan. It has been in U.S. strategic interests to keep Taiwan a viable developed nation. And Lee Kwan Yeou in Singapore may have failed if the tiny state did not possess some of the world's best natural deep-water ports to keep the population busy in economics rather than politics.

We don't see any of these conditions in Nepal. This country is too insignificant for geo-strategic interests, and it doesn't have oil and ports. All it has is water, and no one cares about that other than India and us. And we don't want India meddling with our water resources, right?

It is a challenge for any regime, authoritarian or otherwise, to keep the population busy in economics. Indeed, this has already been tried before and failed. What was the Panchayat system if not

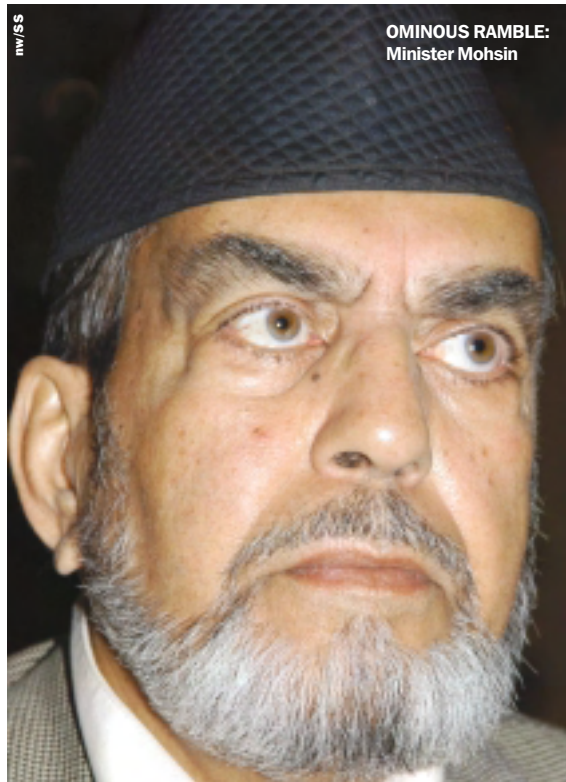
an authoritarian form of governance which tried to keep the population away from politics and busy in economics? Did it work? Those who long for the "peace and stability" of the Panchayat ignore the artificial nature of that peace. Once you take the lid of authoritarianism off, the peace quickly turns into violent expression, as has happened elsewhere and is happening here in Nepal.

The answer to our problems is not a dictatorship, though I know the idea sounds appealing to some. The answer lies in politics, specifically the politics of accommodation. This calls for negotiations and compromise. Mohsin is right in one key aspect though: He said the Maoists had not shown any meaningful response to dialogue. But that should not foreclose the possibility of dialogue in the other direction—among the political parties.

Has the government done enough to begin a dialogue with the opposition? If it views the opposition leaders

as intransigent, then it should go above their heads and appeal directly to the party workers and the people. All politicians and parties care about public opinion. Why not use the peace constituencies among all parties and the people as leverage to force intransigent politicians to bridge the divide between themselves? The Maoists will have more incentives to come to the table if all political parties are united.

Minister Mohsin, Sir, stop this nonsense about dictatorships and urge your government to begin dialogue with the opposition. **N**



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**HONOR:** Mohammed Mohsin presents the Natikaji Puraskar to musician Shiva Shankar; the prize is worth Rs. 50,000

### Ominous clouds

Minister for Information and Communication Mohammed Mohsin raised a furor when he stated that if a “liberal regime” could not bring a solution to the current political deadlock, then an authoritarian government could not be ruled out. He labeled his thoughts as “purely hypothetical.” The political parties reacted immediately, protesting the government spokesman’s comments. Some members of the CPN-UML, a member of the ruling coalition, demanded that Prime Minister Deuba take action against Minister Mohsin. Kantipur quoted an unnamed source as saying the Cabinet meeting, which took place a day after the minister’s comments, termed the comments as being positive as it urged all forces to make the present government successful.

### Bomb explosions

Three suspected Maoists detonated a bomb at the state-owned Sanchayakosh building at Sundhara. Thirty-eight people were injured in the incident. More than Rs. 30 million worth of property, including a newly installed escalator, was destroyed in the explosion that ransacked the first floor of the building still under construc-

tion. Another explosion at the Inland Revenue Office at Surya Binayak, Bhaktapur, on the same day, damaged the building. The explosions took place within a week of the arrest of a senior Maoist leader Prasant, Kathmandu Valley’s media coordinator. Diplomatic missions condemned the bombings in Kathmandu. British Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Douglas Alexander, who was on a visit to the country, said that “the maiming of innocent people is not only wholly wrong, it is completely counterproductive.”

### Civilian deaths

Three civilians were killed when a Maoist opened fire on a group of four locals in Birendranagar. One other person was seriously injured by the bullets and was taken to Nepalganj for treatment. In a separate incident in Khalanga in Jumla, an eight-year-old child died when a bomb exploded in a school.

### More violence

In a major escalation of the conflict after the Dashain truce, security forces gunned down 13 Maoists, including three women, in different parts of the country. Six Maoists were killed along the Sahajpur Bhasu section of

the Bhimdutta Highway in Dadeldhura, where Maoists were attempting to block the highway. For their part, the Maoists shot dead a deputy superintendent of police of the National Investigation Department in Butwal, Hemraj Regmi. Regmi died on the spot after sustaining bullet wounds in his head, stomach and neck.

### Royal message

In his message to the nation on the 15<sup>th</sup> Constitution Day on Monday, November 8, King Gyanendra stressed that constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy were articles of faith to the Nepali people. He said that the Constitution is only a means to create a welfare society; it is not an end in itself, and any assessment of the past must be based on this reality. To many, the message indicated that the government would sit for negotiations with the Maoists but that constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy are non-negotiable.

### Border security

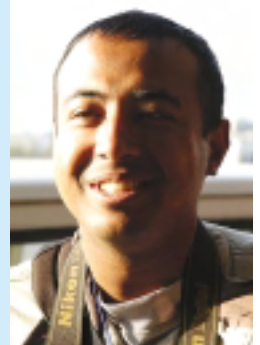
The Indian Special Security Bureau forces across the Indo-Nepal border in Jhapa have launched a new campaign to control cross-border terrorist activities and arms smuggling. The new measures were being taken following reports about the nexus between the Nepali Maoists and Indian armed outfits like Peoples’ War Group and Kamatapuri Liberation Organization. News reports said that Indian forces have initiated a probe on the alleged nexus and deployed their personnel at all major checkpoints, including Galgaliya and Panitanki.

### Collateral damage

Deepak Bohara, a fifth-grader at Laxmi Lower Secondary School in Shyalapakha, Rukum, died when a bomb left in the school premises by the Maoists went off. The bomb exploded when the student tried to take down a Maoist flag to which bomb was attached. The Maoists have been placing

## Bashing Picture

Army personnel in plain clothes beat up Kantipur’s photojournalist Prakash Mathema in Taulihawa, Kapilvastu, for publishing a picture of an Army man carrying an injured fellow soldier. A group of soldiers were wading a river in Badhganga, Ramghat in the picture that came out on Kantipur’s front page. Mathema was in Taulihawa to mourn the death of his friend’s father. Mathema said the Army first took his friend’s brother into custody asking Mathema to report to their barrack after the picture appeared on Kantipur on Tuesday, November 9, a day later. The security personnel manhandled Mathema despite the assurance from the Army authorities in Kathmandu, who had guaranteed him of his safety, Mathema told Nation Weekly. He escaped the second time unhurt when the locals stopped the Army personnel, saying that Mathema had come from Kathmandu to mourn the death of his friend’s father. The Army personnel ignored pleas by the chief district officer to leave Mathema alone. An Army lieutenant later apologized to Mathema after the Army’s Department of Public Relations was informed about the misbehavior.





bombs in schools in hill districts in western Nepal even as the security forces try to use schools as bases for their security operations, news reports said.

### Marsyangdi suspension

Fischtner Joint Venture, the consultants for the Mid-Marsyangdi hydropower project in Lamjung, has suspended work on the project until it receives a security guarantee from the government. Earlier, work had resumed on October 29 after a two-month-long suspension due to Maoist threats. The suspension of the work has caused cost overruns of more than 60 million euros, approximately Rs. 5.7 billion, so far. The overruns almost equal the total contract bid of 74 million euros, approximately Rs. 7 billion. About 40 percent of the work on the project has been completed.

### Poverty reduction

The poverty level in the country decreased by 12 percent over the last six years, according to the preliminary result of a yearlong nationwide survey carried out by the Central Bureau of Statistics. Those with income of below Rs. 6,400 per year and with less than 2,124 calories of food per day are considered as living below the poverty level. Rising per-capita income due to a large increase in remittance inflow has been cited as the main reason for the improvement. The survey indicated that the poverty level declined to 30 percent in 2002 from 42 percent in 1996.

### Village ablaze

More than 18 houses were reduced to ashes when a fire broke out in Bishariya VDC in Saptari. Initial inspection by the police revealed that the fire destroyed property worth more than Rs. 1.5 million. Police say the accident occurred when a fire that was lit to keep away mosquitoes went out of control.

### Sobhraj secrets

A three-member investigation committee has deemed that international criminal and French national Charles Sobhraj had secret links with security personnel that enabled him to procure mobile telephones inside the jail. Security personnel at the central jail were allegedly involved in providing the phones to Sobhraj. Police, acting upon the tip-off that Sobhraj had plans to escape from the jail, raided his cell and recovered a mobile phone, a UTL phone and a laptop computer.

### Dead-man sentenced

The Supreme Court reversed its earlier decision to acquit an international drug smuggler, Kevin John Miles, who had been using the alias William Gordon Robinson. In doing so, it upheld the verdict passed by the Special Court sentencing the drug peddler to 17 years of imprisonment and slapping a fine of Rs. 10 million on him. The court decision came barely days after reports said that Miles, a New Zealander, was found dead on the Indonesian island of Bali. A three-member bench of Supreme Court Justices Dilip Kumar Poudel, Kedar Prasad Giri and Chandra Prasad Parajuli upturned the earlier decision by Justices Krishna Kumar Verma and Baliram Kumar, calling the acquittal flawed.

### Political prisoner

The Calcutta High Court has ruled in favor of Mohan Vaidya, senior Maoist politburo member, deciding to provide Vaidya the status of a political prisoner, the Himalayan Times quoted Vaidya's lawyer as saying. Vaidya will be entitled to certain privileges after the ruling comes into effect, most likely next month. The 52-year-old Maoist leader has been in custody in India since he was arrested in the city of Siliguri in March.

### In the books

Nepal's first post-graduate scholar, Purna Bahadur Rana M.A., died in Bir Hospital after a long illness. He was 79. As a freedom fighter in the democratic movement of the

1950s and as an intellectual, he has made significant contributions to Nepal's foreign relations, education and development sectors. He also served as one of the first members of the National Planning Commission and was a former member of the Raj Sabha standing committee.

### Tarun Dal

At the third convention of Nepal Tarun Dal in Janakpur, the youth wing of the Nepali Congress elected Binod Kayastha as its new president. He won the election with 169 votes, edging out Chandra Bhandari who received 113 votes. The convention also elected 23 central committee members, four each from the East, West and Midwest, five from the central region and three from the Farwest. Binda Rana, Usha Gurung and Saraswoti Tiwari were elected to the seats reserved for female candidates. Kayastha appointed Hurmat Singh Neupane as the new general secretary of the organization.

### Highway studies

A team of experts led by J. Takahashi from Ehime University in Japan and from the Nepal Engineering College has agreed to conduct a study of the landslide-prone sections of highways linking the capital with the rest of the country. The first site the team has chosen is the Naubise-Mugling section of the Prithvi Highway, after which they will examine the Mugling-Narayanghat highway. Lecturer in geo-technical engineering at Ehime University, Netra Prasad Bhandari, will guide the team to the sites.



REIMBURSEMENT: Journalists, imprisoned during the Emergency period, at the Appellate Court, Lalitpur, demanding compensation

# Appointed



**K**eshav Sthapit, former Kathmandu mayor, took over the reins of Nepal's oldest party, the Nepal Praja Parishad, as its acting president. NPP President Ram Hari Sharma handed over the party leadership to Sthapit on Monday, November 8. Sthapit, after accepting the nomination, said he was joining the NPP after turning down a request from former Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa to join his "new political force." Ram Hari Sharma, Tanka Prasad Acharya and other political activists established the NPP in 1993 B.S. to fight for democracy against the Rana regime. "My dream of handing over the leadership to a young and dynamic leader with a commitment to democracy has been fulfilled today," Sharma said. The NPP has been almost defunct except for its name and a few office bearers since the restoration of democracy in 1990.

Sthapit was first elected as mayor of Kathmandu as a UML candidate in the local election of 1997. He supported the CPN-ML after the UML split in 1998 and then chose to remain an independent after the reunification of the parties in early 2002.

Known as "demolition man" for his vigorous action against illegal and unorganized construction in Kathmandu during his tenure as the mayor of the city, he was often criticized for having grandiose ideas, some consummated—most of the overhead bridges in Kathmandu were built during his terms—and some not.

## ATM CARDS FOR REMITTANCE

Smart Choice Technology has signed up Krishi Premura, a Hong Kong-based money-transfer company, as an associate member of its network. Under a tripartite agreement, Krishi Premura will provide its clients with ATM cards issued by the Laxmi Bank, an affiliate of the Smart Choice network. The cards are accepted at all ATM machines in the Smart Choice system, which provides the technology, business processes and services infrastructure to support financial transactions through ATMs. SCT currently has eight member banks.

This new service is targeted at people who receive remittances from abroad. Under the arrangement, Krishi Premura will be able to provide customers with pre-paid ATM cards in lieu of the remittances they receive from abroad. These customers will have access to SCT's network of over 26 ATMs located in all major urban centers of the country. The customers of Krishi Premura will have their cards automatically recharged when fresh remittances are received. Apart from ease of operation, the providers also claim the system provides greater security to the cardholders.

This new agreement is Laxmi Bank's latest effort to bring out innovative services. The bank already provides its services through a host of delivery channels including cell phones, Internet, ATM and point-of-sales devices after only two years of operation.

## FESTIVAL IN POKHARA

The Lekhnath Festival 2004 is being planned from November 26 to December 2 in Lekhnath municipality, about 15 kilometers from Pokhara city center. The main aim of this festival is to promote tourism in the Pokhara Valley and Lekhnath municipality. The Lekhnath Chamber of Commerce and Industry is organizing the festival. The organizers believe that the promotion of potential tourism destinations in the Pokhara Valley will help bring in more tourists and lengthen their stay. They hope that disseminating information about tourism destinations through programs like

these will help increase the flow of tourists. The festival will have stalls with local and imported industrial goods, fish, fresh vegetables and more. There will also be various programs including folk dances, a food festival and a music concert.

## RESUMPTION OF AIR CHINA FLIGHTS

Air China, which suspended its flight between Lhasa and Kathmandu from October 30 this year, will resume its operations from March 29 next year.

## MEET IN PARIS

The Nepal Tourism Board organized a press conference and a tour operators' meet in Paris. The meet was organized to ease security concerns about Nepal and promote Nepal as a safe destination for tourists. Various Nepali companies involved in tourism, such as Soaltee Crowne Plaza Hotel, Kathmandu Travels and Tours, Destination Manang and others attended the function.

## GEL TOOTHPASTE FROM DABUR

Dabur Nepal has introduced Dabur red gel toothpaste in two packages, 40 grams and 80 grams. The packages are priced at Rs. 20 and Rs. 40 respectively. The company claims that the gel toothpaste ensures freshness and strong, healthy gums. Dabur's other oral hygiene product in the market is Dabur Lal Danta Manjan.

## DEBIT CARD LAUNCH BY NCC

Nepal Credit and Commerce (NCC) Bank has introduced a debit card. Customers with any type of account with the bank can utilize the debit card, which is based on Smart Choice Technology, at ATMs. Customers of the bank can withdraw up to Rs. 25,000 per day with the debit card at present.

## COSMIC AIR FLIES TO DHAKA

Cosmic Air has begun flights to Dhaka. This makes Cosmic Air the first airline in the country to operate international flights on routes other than to India. The airline will operate two flights each week with its new Fokker-100 aircraft.





## KRISHI PREMURA'S BRAND AMBASSADOR

Krishi Premura has appointed singer Nalina Chitrakar as its brand ambassador for the next year. Krishi Premura was established in 1989 and specializes in the field of money changing and remittance. It is the agent for Nepal Remittance, which has been approved and granted a license by the Nepal Rastra Bank.

## CORPORATE SUPPORT FOR SANGINA



Sangina Baidya was awarded Rs. 500,000 as pledged by a group of corporate houses—Dabur Nepal, ICTC, Jyoti Group, Nabil Bank, Nepal Lever and the Vaidya Organization of Industries and Trading House “as a token of support for being the first Nepali to partake in the Olympic Games through competitive qualification.” Baidya, the taewondo star, participated in the Athens Olympics in August in the under-49-kg weight category; she reached the quarterfinals. The sponsors had appointed Baidya as brand ambassador and had provided financial support to Baidya's quest for Olympic glory.



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WEEKLY

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B Rai

# CONSTITUTIONAL CHASM

With the constitution derailed for almost two years now, there are mixed interpretations about it. But almost everyone agrees that it needs amendments.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

**E**XPERTS MOURNED; YOUNGsters burned copies in Ratna Park. For the last two years Constitution Day has been a time of contemplation and reflection on what went wrong with the fundamental law of the land, the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990. After just 14 years, what was once hailed as the finest constitution on the planet looks irrelevant.

Constitution Day is still a government holiday though, and the plethora of programs organized throughout the country to commemorate the day is telling evidence that the ideas the Constitution embodies are still cherished. But alongside the celebrations, a consensus





about the need to change it is growing, even among the framers of the 1990 document. The problem is there's no consensus at all about what the Constitution should become.

There is a general feeling that the Constitution has failed. Some say it is because of shortsightedness of the framers. Some of them readily accept the criticism. "I concede that we were very soft toward King Birendra because of his personality," former speaker of the Pratinidhi Sabha, Daman Nath Dhungana, a member of Constitution Drafting Committee, told an audience last week. "We didn't push the King too much because we had faith that he would

deliver on his commitment [to democracy]," he said.

Has this Constitution, a compromise document between the political parties and the late King Birendra, outgrown its relevance? More tellingly, has the role of this King breached the spirit of the sacred contract between the King and the people? These questions have become more relevant against the backdrop of an escalating Maoist insurgency with its long-standing demand for the end of the monarchy through a new statute drafted by a constituent assembly.

"No constitution becomes irrelevant in its entirety," says Dhungana. "The principles propounded by this Constitution have become more relevant, although the results have fallen short of the people's aspirations." The balance of power between the monarchy and the people has been broken, but that doesn't render the entire constitution irrelevant, he adds. It is the sense that the King is backtracking on the tacit commitments his predecessor made that makes change seem inevitable.

Constitutional experts say that the King has breached the deal his brother made with the people in 1990 by assum-

ing extra-constitutional powers following the royal takeover of October 4, 2002. There is a general feeling that the King usurped the power at the first opportunity he got and that he's used that power in an attempt to bridge the gap with the political parties and between the state and the Maoists, but to no avail.

The King's Constitution Day address this year only added more controversies. "The Constitution is only a means for creating the welfare of society; it is not an end in itself," he said. Many see this as his clearest political statement on what he thinks of the Constitution. It may be also a clear reflection of his unwillingness to go back to the limits imposed by



**SOVEREIGNTY: Not of the people, writes professor Subedi**

the 1990 compromise on the powers of monarchy. But the statement conceals as much as it reveals. There is no indication if he is willing to discuss a new constitution or constituent assembly as demanded by the Maoists; amendments or a new constitution would likely curtail his power substantially.

The reaction is obvious. Even within mainstream political parties that have been pro-monarchy, the call for a constituent assembly has now become common—should that help resolve the Maoist impasse. Framers of the present constitution say that any future constitution is likely to have built-in checks against encroachment of the rights of the people and their representatives—as happened on October 4, 2002.

Although the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990 says in its Preamble that the people are the "source of sovereign authority of the independent and sovereign Nepal," observers say in practice it has been a mere "legal fiction," an "honorary title" without any built-in mechanism for the people to exercise the sovereignty in a real sense.

"The way the Constitution functioned during the last 14 years gave the impression that this was a prime ministerial sovereignty," writes professor Surya Prasad Subedi, a scholar of international relations and the recent recipient of the Order of British Empire (OBE), in his paper titled "International Dimension of the Constitutional Crisis



**DISCONTENT:** Minority groups express their dissatisfaction with the reservations provided to them by the Constitution

AN/S

in Nepal.” Subedi is referring to the reckless use of Article 53(4), which provides discretionary power to the prime minister to dissolve the Pratinidhi Sabha. This provision has been the most controversial of all the articles in the Constitution.

The present constitutional crisis started with the dissolution of Pratinidhi Sabha by Prime Minister Deuba in 2002, following his tussle with his long-time political guru-turned-arch-rival, Girija Prasad Koirala, and his subsequent failure to conduct elections. Experts lament that the Constitution provides no checks against such abuse of authority for settling personal scores. Even the Supreme Court failed to negate unfettered use of prime ministerial prerogative. The court gave a different interpretation of the dissolution each time it was asked to intervene post-1990. Legal experts say the last such decision proved disastrous. The court upheld Deuba’s decision to dis-

solve the Parliament when it said, “elections can be held even during an emergency.” In doing so, analysts say, the court failed to play its role as a neutral arbiter on constitutional issues.

Many don’t see the King as a neutral and honest powerbroker either. Although the Constitution is modeled on the Westminster-style of democracy, it provided too much discretionary power to the monarch instead of regulating his powers.

“When you elevate the King with words such as ‘custodian and protector of the Constitution,’ what are you implying?” asked Subedi, speaking to an audience filled with legal experts, including the framers of the Constitution. “While trying to emulate the British, we have doing it the Bihari way,” he says. With so much contemplation about the cause of the crisis, there is also growing debate on the ways to bridge the constitutional chasm.

“We don’t have many choices left,” says Sitanandan Ray, former law minister and a CPN-UML leader. “Constituent assembly or restructuring of the state is the only way out.” This is a failed Constitution, he says. Others argue that amendments to this existing Constitution will do. “The only way forward is to put this Constitution back on track, either by reinstatement of the Parliament or through elections,” says Nilambar Acharya, former minister and a member of the Cabinet sub-committee that drafted the Constitution. The mixed opinions on how to proceed are crucial: The way the crisis is resolved will have a profound impact on the country’s future.

Despite differences of opinion over what would be the best way out from the crisis, there is agreement that if the Constitution is to be retained, it warrants a serious overhaul in order to address the problems that have emerged in recent years. **N**



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# ELUSIVE PEACE



With the first major explosion in the capital last week, it was clear that holiday truce had ended. Although both the government and the Maoists still say they are committed to peace, it's unclear what is holding them back.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI AND SATISH JUNG SHAHI



**T**UESDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2:40 p.m., the Maoists publicly displayed in the capital that they are getting back to the battle field. An explosion at the Karmachari Sanchayakosh

Building in Sundhara shook the Valley. Tremors were felt as far away as Thapathali where people were shopping for upcoming Tihar. Birds fluttered in the sky and Kathmandu witnessed the routine traffic jam—this time for hours.

“As most others, I immediately feared that the Maoists were back. I heard the explosion far out in Thamel,” says Khem Bahadur Karki, a tourist guide. “I knew the country was back to fighting again.”

Barely 12 days after their nine-day long Dashain ceasefire, which ended on October 28, the Maoists have sent a strong signal: Since the government was in no mood to reciprocate their gesture, they were getting back to business. Moments later, another explosion took place at the Inland Revenue Office in Bhaktapur.

The ceasefire in the capital may have just come to an end, but elsewhere in the country, it had ended long ago. The warring parties were back to upping the ante. A day after the explosions, the government spokesman, Minister for Information and Communication Mohammed Mohsin raised a frightening specter, saying the country could plunge into a “deeper crisis” with an authoritarian rule—if neither peace nor polls materialized.

As much as Mohsin’s comments reflect the government’s position, it also troubles a large number of Nepalis that the government should adopt a “go-easy” approach vis-à-vis the peace talks despite its public claims that it is anxious to get the peace process started. “The Maoists have hinted that they are not against peace talks,” says Arjun Karki, president of NGO Federation Nepal.

What is then holding the peace process back? Behind the veneer of all this sweet talking, is there something that doesn’t meet the eye?

Civil society leaders blame the “militaristic forces” on both sides for the stalemate. Both the Maoists and government leaders are increasingly getting swayed by the hardliners in their decision-mak-

ing ranks. Analysts say that the government is increasingly relying on militaristic analyses in its bid to resolve the Maoist problem. The thesis holds that there are deeply entrenched people in high places who are reaping huge profits from the war-economy. To them, the longer the war, the better.

There is a widespread feeling that the Deuba government has gradually squandered the early goodwill as the conflict has dragged on. Many see Prime Minister Deuba as the acceptable public face of a state that is increasingly tilting rightward and fast losing its own democratic space.

Evidently the lack of clarity in the thinking on how to resolve the conflict is providing space to the crisis to get aggravated while people like Minister Mohsin wonder why the Maoists can’t talk to his government. This is a letdown; the Maoists did hold talks with the Chand and Thapa governments—perhaps more “royal” than the Deuba government.

There are many reasons, say analysts. Despite being royalists by inclination, Thapa and Chand gave the impression that they were actually in charge. Unfortunately, despite having a wider political representation and enjoying relatively more legitimacy than the two preceding governments, Deuba increasingly gives the impression that he has lost the initiative to the Palace and the Army.

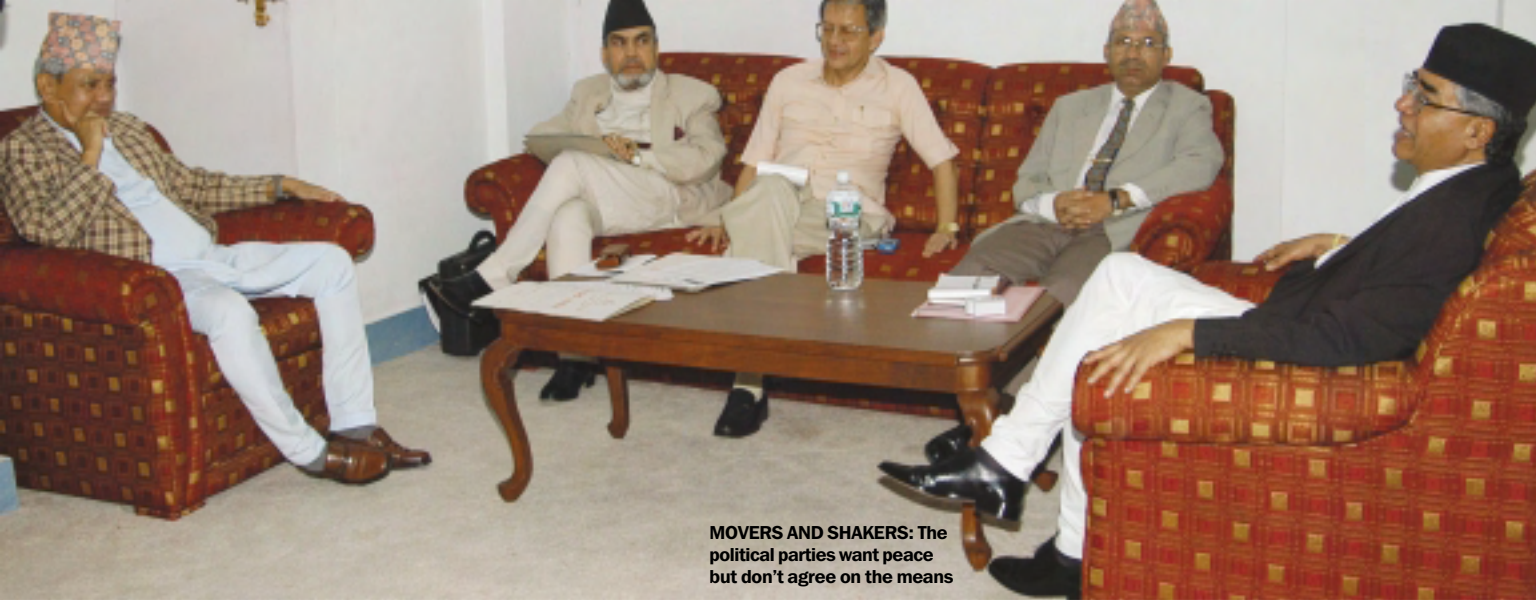
But above all, says an analyst, the biggest failure of this government is that it has not been able to persuade political parties and civil society that it is in fact committed to peaceful resolution of the conflict. As a member of the newly constituted Civil Peace Commission puts, “When even the people in the political mainstream are finding it hard time to believe what the government says, how can one expect the Maoists to buy the government’s claims? The Deuba government is fast losing its space to maneuver.”

Civil society leaders say if the government can rally the political parties



All photos: n/w/S





**MOVERS AND SHAKERS:** The political parties want peace but don't agree on the means

**ON THE OFFENSIVE:** DSP Hemraj Regmi shot dead by Maoists



behind it, the Maoists will find it difficult to keep away from the talks. Even the Maoists know that their military capability has come under serious attack in recent months, a trend that started since the emergency, November 26, 2001. The Maoists are also get-

tionship is likely to get even stronger and there is going to be no letup in their relentless war against the Maoists.

Many believe New Delhi's newfound drive to nab senior Maoists leaders in India has reinforced Prime Minister Deuba's anti-Maoist campaign. Immediately after his visit to India in September, he publicly "threatened" the Maoists of impending military action if they failed to come to the negotiate table. But the threat seems to have little effect on the Maoists who have kept everybody guessing.

ting increasingly isolated from the international community.

The thinking is that Washington and New Delhi have in recent times have developed a common view as far their approach toward the Maoists is concerned. "They [the Maoists] have got to be isolated," U.S. Ambassador James Moriarty, told Nation Weekly late July in an exclusive interview. "And again, the goal here is to make them realize that they aren't going to win and [that] they have to come up with a compromise." And in the aftermath of President Bush's re-election, the Delhi-Washington rela-

Leaders of the civil society lament that both the warring sides have displayed more rigidity than ever. They say the onus lied on the government to utilize the opening offered by a Dashain truce, never mind it was only a temporary one.

Emerging from the holiday truce, the government still faces an uphill task. It still says it is committed to the peace. So have the Maoists. But curiously neither has delivered on its commitment so far. It is still far from clear, what is holding them back. **N**



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# HELTER SKELTER

Every time the RPP has been close to power, it has split: The party itself may have lost count of how often. This time Thapa has departed with a bigger purpose. What is it?

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

WHEN FIVE-TIME PRIME Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa decided to quit the RPP, the party he founded after the Panchayat collapsed in 1990, it sent shockwaves everywhere. The surprise wasn't that the party had split: That's happened often enough. But the way Thapa left the party, unceremoniously and after what appeared to be only token attempts to patch things up had party-watchers scratching their heads. Before packing his bags, Thapa met with RPP President Pashupati Shumshere Rana, his long time intra-party rival. Reporters gathered outside the meeting were confused by the smiles on both leaders' faces. "From now on, I don't have any political affiliation with RPP," Thapa said. Shocked reporters asked Thapa to repeat himself; he obliged.

Thapa and the party president, Rana, have been at odds for most of the RPP's history: Their rivalry was heightened during Thapa's fifth innings as the prime minister, when Rana withdrew party support for him. Last week, both men looked happy as they came out of their meeting to part their ways under full media glare.

The RPP under Rana's leadership took part in the street protests in May this year with four other agitating parties who called for Thapa's resignation. Rana also sacked Thapa stalwart Kamal Thapa from the post of party general secretary. The internecine dispute between the two veteran politicians became bitterly personal—Thapa famously questioned Rana's lineage, challenging him to prove that he was actually the grandson of Mohan Shumshere, the last Rana prime minister. Following pressure

from all quarters, Thapa stepped down as the prime minister in late May. He blamed Rana for forcing him out, and the two have barely spoken since then. Having been unseated by Rana, Thapa seemed determined to return the favor and turn Rana out of the party presidency.

Thapa had been threatening to split the party for some time; lately he had intensified his verbal salvos, asking Rana to convene a special convention of the party. Rana declined to oblige. Having failed to unseat Rana, Thapa apparently decided to break away. Former home minister and Thapa stalwart, Kamal Thapa, explained some of the new thinking last week: "We won't be forming any party that bears the name RPP," he said. That's a change. In the past all the RPP splinter groups have bore the party moniker with a suffix indicating the leader.

The RPP has an unpleasant history of divisiveness. Born as twins, the two RPPs (Thapa and Chand) merged in 1992 following a humiliating debacle in the first general election campaign. The 1997 elections brought a hung parliament; the RPP split again and the two factions alternatively headed coalition governments. The RPP inherits a 30-year-old party-less culture in which its leaders were always near the center of power, in the Panchayat years and after 1990. Many describe the RPP as a "club" of former *Panchas*. Power has been both the glue that holds them together and the wedge that drives them apart.

Following the debacle in the 1999 election, in which the com-

bined parliamentary representation for the two factions fell dramatically from the previous Parliament, the party again merged. After October 4, 2002, both former Panchayat prime ministers, Thapa and Chand, alternatively headed the government. Clearly the palace had faith in them, especially during the time of crisis. But there are hints that this last split is more than just intra-party politics. Thapa has carefully not explained what his motivation is.

There can be only two explanations, say analysts and party watchers. One







ing with senior editors and publishers last Wednesday might have something to do with it. “The alternative to this government will be one you people can’t bear with,” Mohsin said. He clearly said that if the present government fails to fulfill its mandate by April 2005, its replacement with an authoritarian government is inevitable. Mohsin, the royal nominee in the present government, is well positioned to know the Palace’s thinking. There are rumors that again-Prime Minister Thapa would be told to hold a referendum much like that of 1980. Party-watchers say Thapa’s agility, so late in life cannot be simply brushed aside as just another incident. They say it has huge symbolism for things to come in the days ahead. “It won’t be surprising at all if Thapa is again asked to head the next royal



THE RIVALS: Thapa and Party President Rana

government,” writes Borna Bahadur Karki, an advocate who keeps an eye on the RPP’s affairs, in his article. Karki believes that Thapa’s walking away from the party is related with the Palace. No doubt, Thapa, since 1960, after the introduction of Panchayat system, has played a key-role in sustaining the monarchy’s hold over power. In 1980, after growing political unrest accompanied by massive demonstrations, King Birendra had, as a palliative tactic, called for a nationwide referendum asking people to choose their form of government. Thapa, who then headed the Panchayat government, allegedly rigged the election so that it reaffirmed what was then called a reformed Panchayat system. Political analysts say talk of another referendum is speculative at this stage, but they also say that with Thapa in the power, nothing can be ruled out. They say he is the best there is at the game of politics, both for his shrewd diplomacy and his daredevilry. Thapa is a master politician with ruthless determination and lust for power. What is he actually up to? No one knows for sure. **N**

explanation is that Thapa may have realized that the RPP has, as a pro-royalist party, lost popular appeal. That would be a dramatic shift in his thinking. Thapa has always been a staunch royalist. But he has also been an advocate for greater democratic freedom even during the Panchayat era. He was jailed in October 1972 for more than a year for democratic beliefs, and he went on a hunger strike for three weeks. A shift in Thapa’s thinking would be a huge setback for the Palace. It also would change the political balance in the country if Thapa sided with the parties in the streets. There are speculations that a new Thapa-led party, if formed, would attract NC and UML leaders. The second explanation for Thapa’s departure is that he and the Palace have something up their sleeves. Since tendering his resignation, Thapa has met with the King twice. Rumors are flying high that if Deuba fails to meet his royal deadline of April 2005 for initiating the process of elections (which analyst say he is certain to fail), Thapa would again be appointed prime minister. Minister for Information and Communication Mohammed Mohsin’s caveat in his meet-

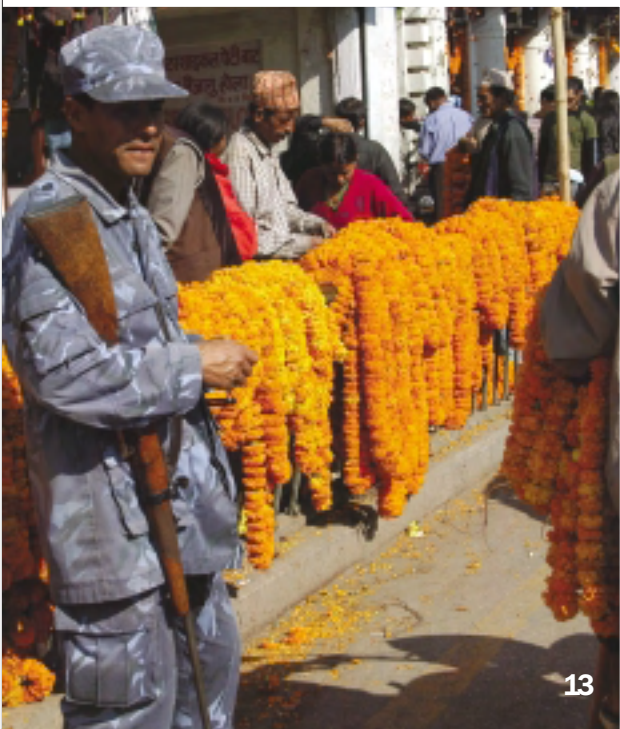
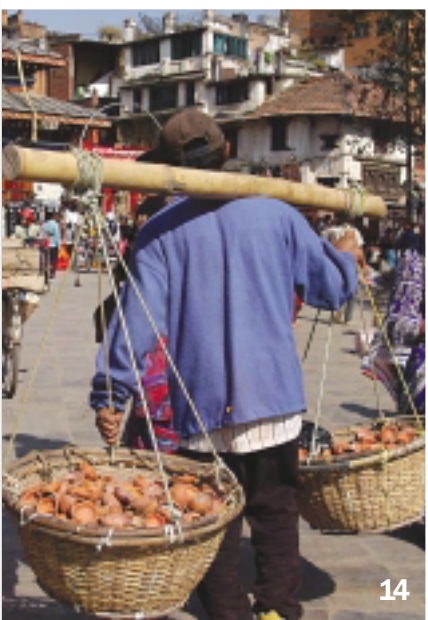
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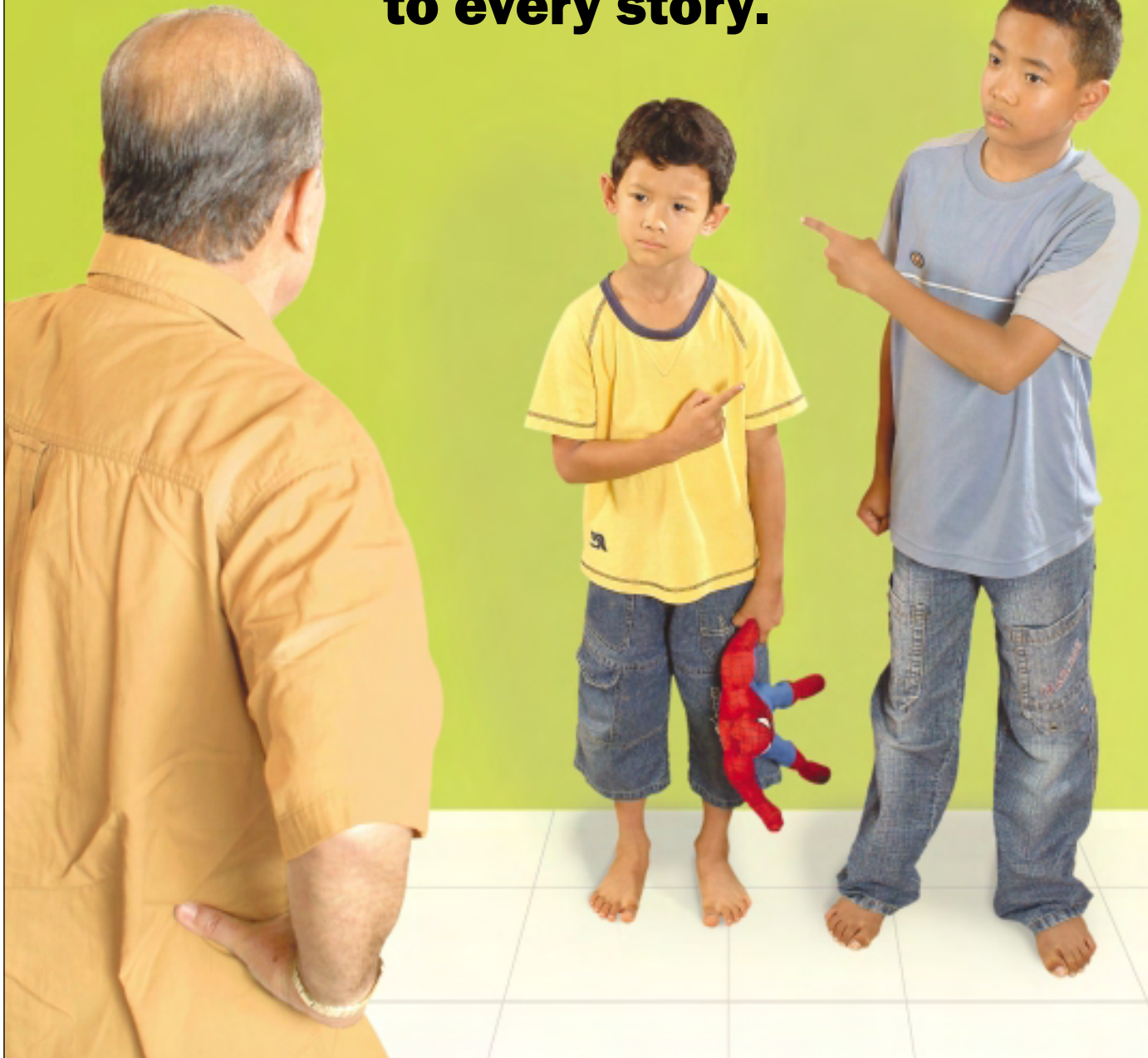


1. Garlands of *sayapatri* and *supari phool* being sold at New Road  
 2. *Diyos* on the day of Laxmi puja  
 3. *Dhoop*, *agarbati* being sold at a vendor  
 4. Coconuts for sale  
 5. A woman buying *masala* for Bhai Tika  
 6. Fruits being sold on the roadside  
 7. Decorations for Tihar at the commercial hub of New Road  
 8. Candles for Tihar, the festival of lights  
 9. A hawker sells portraits of Laxmi for Laxmi Puja  
 10. Sweets, an important part of Tihar  
 11. Traditional Newari instruments being played at Basantapur  
 12. Various colors to be used on Bhai Tika  
 13. A policeman stands beside garlands being sold from street railings  
 14. A hawker selling *diyos* at Kathmandu Durbar Square  
 All photos nw/SS





# There are two sides to every story.

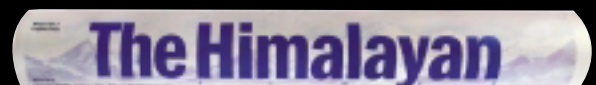


Business Advantage/TH/04/07

There are always two sides to every story. Who's right and who's wrong does not depend on which side you're on. To a third person, there may not even be a right or wrong, just a difference of opinion.

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The Himalayan Times is not about taking sides. It is about positively expressing the view of both sides.



A GREAT NEWSPAPER



# Rap Is Da' Trend

Nepali hip-hop music is starting to do well commercially, especially among youngsters, who are turning into major fans

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

Not so many years ago Kathmandu discos and radio stations stuck to loud remix music when it came to getting people to shake their bodies on the dance floor. Now they play all sorts of international music, ranging from salsa to hip-hop, to get people grooving.

But the country's own rap music artists are coming up with albums that are making it to the top of the charts. For a change, even rap, an acronym for rhythm and poetry, with roots in African oral tradition, is getting airtime on major FM radio stations; that's encouraging young Nepali rappers to bring out their own recordings.

"In the early days I got calls on my radio show complaining that I had played the same music for the last hour," says radio jockey and rapper Nirnaya Shrestha of Rappaz Union. "They didn't understand hip-hop music." Shrestha is popularly known as the Naughty Soul Kid (NSK). "They failed to understand that hip-hop was more about beat and music that meant feeling comfortable about yourself," says Nirryana. Nirnaya's hip-hop radio show "Bring Da' House Down" is aired on Image FM every Friday night at eight. The show's sixth anniversary is coming up in December. Recently he has been promoting young rappers on his show: They have to sing in rap to a certain beat played in the studio. "Hip-hop is already a fashion state-



TRENDSSETTER: Nirnaya Shrestha, a.k.a. the Naughty Soul Kid

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DA'69: Rapper Sudin Pokharel came out with a single when he was 14

ment and has helped commercialize our kind of music," adds Nirnaya.

Thanks to television stations like MTV that constantly feature popular and controversial rappers like Eminem, Kathmandu's youngsters have started including more low-waist baggy pants and loose jerseys in their wardrobes. These boys are the same crowd you see dancing their way to hip-hops wearing "attitudes" like rappers on international televisions at music concerts these days.

"The music scene [in Nepal] is becoming more influenced by the global music trend," says rapper Sudin Pokharel, popularly known as DA'69. Pokharel is known for his famous hit "Ma Yesto Chu" with Girish Khatiwada and Pranil, who are better known as GP. "Even on the international music charts, more than half of the top ten singles are hip-hop. We get rave reviews while performing at pop concerts," Pokharel says.

Both the NSK and DA'69 are cutting new albums a few weeks after Tihar and are expecting their album sales to shoot up. DA'69, who partnered as The Unity along with Aidray and Girish of GP fame,

GROOVIN': Hip-hop is becoming increasingly popular among the urban young





is considered to be the first Nepali rapper. He came out with a single "Meaningless Rap" back in 1994 at the age of 14. GP claims their latest album, "Back Again," sold over 45,000 copies.

"Rap music is more about freedom of expression, which youngsters relate their lifestyle to," writes Girish by e-mail from California, where he went three months ago to study mass communications. "Even when I was back in Kathmandu, I used to sit down with friends like DA'69 and Aidray, and we wrote down our lyrics together to vent out our frustrations."

Nirnaya agrees. At his concerts as far away as Pokhara, Chitwan, Dharan and Biratnagar, he has noticed young faces from mid-teens to those the aged 25 dancing to his beat. "It is always the same age range, but the people keep changing as they grow older," he adds.

According to a rough estimate, there are already at least a dozen Nepali rappers who have come out with singles that have been big hits on the Nepali music charts. The stars include Lottu Hip Hop, Mad Zone, Nepsydaz and

Shree King. Singers say there are around 50 more who can perform extremely good rap but haven't produced their own singles yet. "Another Nepali rapper by the name of Lazy Boy is coming from Canada in January to release another album," says Nirnaya.

Nepali rap's popularity has even attracted few established pop singers to join hands with rappers and turn their songs into instant hits. One of them is Nabin Bhattarai who featured Girish in "Timilai Bhetne" and Bidan Shrestha who gave a big break to Nirnaya with their fusion number "Din Pani Bityo" on Nirnaya's third album. On his new album, Nirnaya's songs feature World Miss University 2003 Ayusha Shrestha, Mausami Gurung, Nalina Chitrakar, Pratna Shakya and Preeti Kaur. Girish and the Unity are not far behind with joint numbers with pop stars Nima Rumba, Sugam Pokharel and the late Cool Pokharel. "We have even introduced *aadyatmik* rap in our upcoming album, with Sanskrit *slokas* in a song titled Hari Ohm," says DA'69. "Most of our lyrics talk about youth issues such as drugs, dreams, police atrocities,

frustrations and even politics." One of their songs, "Malai Vote De," talks about a corrupt politician; it has already received good airplay at FM stations.

"We want to create a different trend for Nepali rap with strong lyrics rather than just copy the fashion and beat of international rappers," says DA'69. "But there is no denying that rap music has already made its mark in the Nepali music scene." **N**



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All photos by/SS

# The Muse in the Garden

The ornate surroundings of the Kaiser Library speak volumes of the man who created it

BY VENEETA SINGHA

**T**he palace stands tall over the surrounding vicinity. The Muse is, perhaps, wandering in the garden. Imagine the glory, browse through the books and walk in the garden—the Muse beckons.

Flanked by mirrors, paintings and other artifacts, the Kaiser Library wel-

comes the visitor with a beautiful stairway. There are books and more books—a feast for the reader—50,000 in all. The ornate surroundings speak of a regal era and a painting of Kaiser Shumshere stands tall in the hallway.

Resplendent on the walls are pictures of the Rana game hunting period and full size portraits of the Rana Maharajas. The plush interiors—with a large gilt-framed

mirror on the wall and silent sitting areas—are beautiful and the books in them equally so. The library is a tribute to scholarship.

Inside one of the many cupboards lies a thousand year-old “Sahotar Tantra”—etched on bamboo fronds and the oldest of its kind in Asia. Red cloth-covered Ramayana and Mahabharata bespeak mythical grandeur. The sun made of *khukuris*, mounted on the wall, gleams and signifies strength and light. The Kaiser Library’s treasures cannot be praised enough and their significance is still untold.

The library, the private collection of the late Kaiser Shumshere, was bequeathed to the government in 1968. It is divided into four sections spanning novels; books on history, astronomy, the arts, religion, philosophy; and much





more. There is also a collection of newspapers and magazines.

Carefully collected books sit in the cupboards, and this private treasure trove is now available to the public. The collection itself is symbolic of Kaiser Shumshere's love of books. Readers and researchers can find a plethora of hidden sources in this rare and valuable compilation.

Now the Muse calls to the Garden of Dreams and the Garden of Six Seasons. The garden is inextricably linked to the library and the collection of books on gardening, architecture and literature. It is one of the unique landscaping monuments of South Asia with its neo-classical pavilions paying homage to Nepal's six seasons.

Softly shaded pavilions and airy garden chairs surround the focal fountain pool. Footpaths around the garden punctuate shrubs and flower bushes, and the garden truly merits its name—"the Garden of Dreams." The design can be likened with formal European gardens—paved perimeter paths; pavilions; trellises; and various planting areas, a sunken flower garden and large pond at the center.

The formal array of the garden's architectural features is juxtaposed with the informal planting—a feature that was prominent in the gardens created in England during the reign of Edward VII.

The restoration of the garden and its expansion as a public and tourist resource was initiated under Visit Nepal Year 1998 and is a joint effort of the Austrian Development Aid, the Ministry of Education and Eco Himal/Nepal.

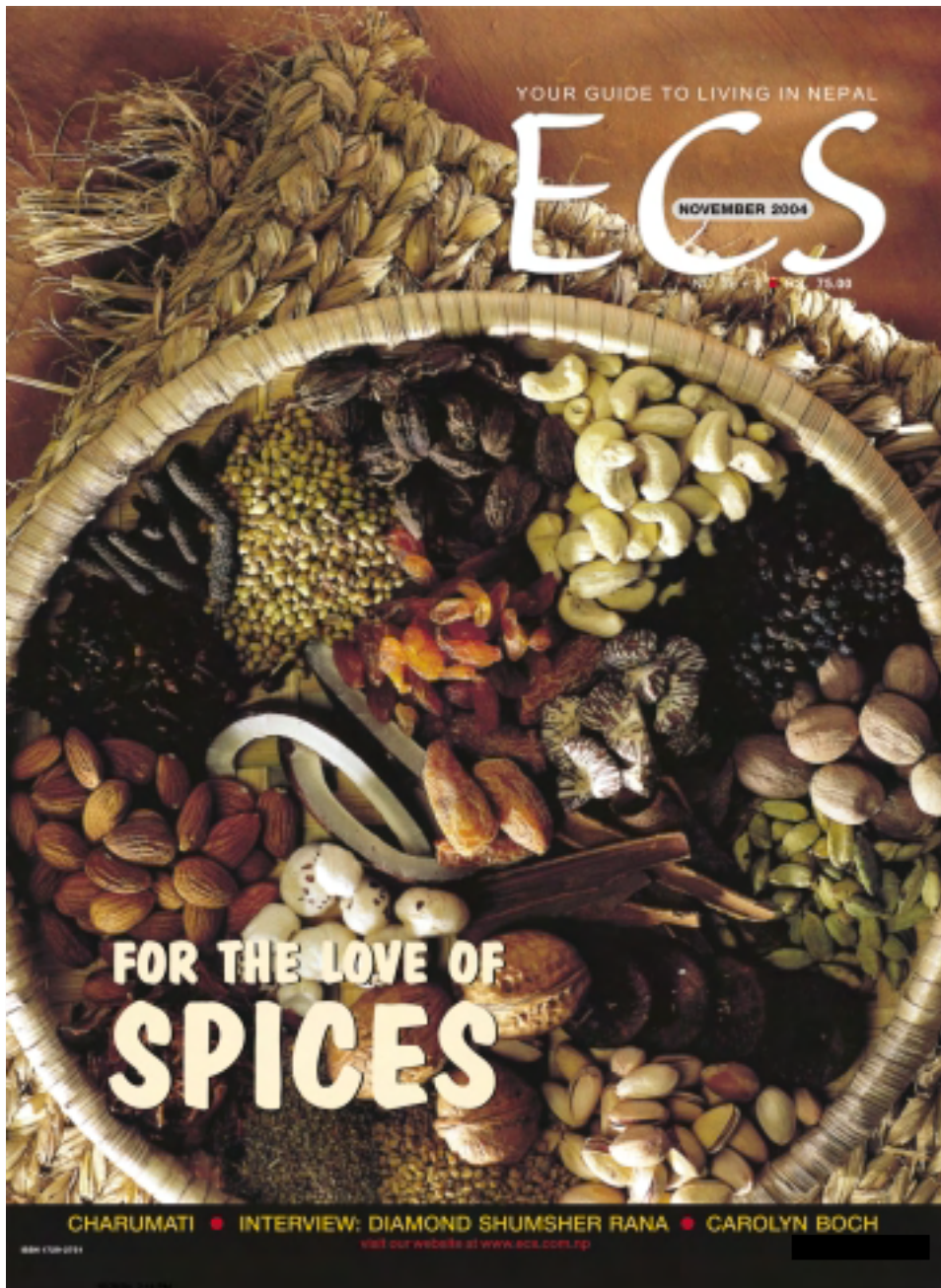
The completed restoration project will bring to life the history, ecology and beauty of the garden. In addition, planned are a Kaiser Café, a Viennese style garden café; a tourism information center; and shopping facilities for souvenirs and handicrafts. The garden will also be available for special events and cultural programs, and the proceeds from the garden will help support improvements to the Kaiser Library.

The garden is picture postcard perfect—the Muse has found its home. Rare books found in the library speak of architectural wonders, and the library leads to an architectural wonder itself. Kaiser Shumshere's vision of an ensemble of pavilions, fountains, garden furniture and verandas will soon be a living testament to learning and beauty.

Perhaps, the confluence of the garden and the library can be seen in pictures of the late Kaiser Shumshere sitting on a garden bench reading a newspaper. An era has gone by but the vision remains and the Muse wanders carelessly, awakening the mind and bringing inspiration. **N**



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# Peace By Consensus

To date, the peace talks have been preceded, and dominated, by presenting lists of demands and, at best, arguing about them. It's time to change that.

BY ARNICO K. PANDAY

Once again the common citizens are yearning for peace, while the warring parties have just ended another, albeit brief, period when they were not shooting at each other. The hope that the Dashain ceasefire would result in peace talks is shattered. Since the failed peace talks of 2003 August, thousands have died; tens of thousands more orphaned, widowed or displaced; billions of rupees of property has been damaged; and even more has been diverted away from essential development activities into militarization. We don't know when the next peace talks will be, still that should not stop us from thinking about how to structure them so that they succeed.

To date, the peace talks have been preceded, and dominated, by presenting lists of demands and, at best, arguing about them. They have been dominated by points of disagreement that have polarized the participants—disagreements about the best form of government and how to choose it. That has taken the attention away from something much larger—something that may hold the seed for a resolution of the conflict: We are all fighting to create and to protect a better future for Nepal and its citizens. We should focus on clarifying and then achieving that shared goal rather than fighting about the means to achieve it.

Compared to many other countries experiencing civil war, Nepal is lucky that it is not torn along religious or ethnic lines. Our war is among groups fighting about how to structure the government that builds a better Nepal, and that in a country of citizens who mostly are nonpartisan and just want peace and a better Nepal. During the next round of peace talks (when that does happen), let us not get bogged down by starting with lists of demands that we immediately and irreconcilably disagree about, but instead step back and start to talk about what we do agree about. Let us start by building a widening consensus about the features of the better Nepal that we have been fighting for. Once we have a fairly comprehensive shared picture, it will be easier to agree about the most suitable form of government.

I suggest that when we sit down for the next round of peace talks, let us all—royalists, Maoists, democrats—face a big blackboard upon which we together brainstorm one statement at a time that we AGREE about and work together to find ways to phrase them such that they are agreeable to all of us. Let us start with the most obvious and undisputable ones. What might these be? Let me suggest a few:

- Nepal should continue to exist as a sovereign nation.
- Nepal should have a government that is transparent, not marred by corruption, as well as chosen by and accountable to the people.
- Every citizen should be able to live safely, without fear for life or property.
- No citizen should face discrimination based on gender, ethnicity or religion.

- The government should work hard to provide every citizen with opportunities to pursue a better life. Thus equitable and environmentally sustainable economic growth, as well as massive improvements in healthcare, education and infrastructure are essential.

As the pool of such consensus statements grows, we can start moving towards slightly more challenging, slightly more controversial issues whose phrasing might require more discussion. For example:

- Past injustices, neglects and inequalities must be righted. Areas that were neglected or under-represented in the past should receive increased development investment.
- Nepal needs to move towards more decentralized governance and decision-making.
- Integration into the world economy is important, but it has to happen in ways that we don't get trampled upon.
- We need to promote healthy criticism: Citizens and the media should be free to speak out about any issue and not shy away from pointing out problems.
- All sides to the current conflict must demilitarize, and defense budgets should be cut and returned to healthcare, education and infrastructure development.
- We need to recognize the trauma that has been endured by many people during the past decade and allow sufficient healing such that pain, suffering and revenge don't undermine the task of rebuilding.

And so forth...

As a common vision for the shape of the country's future emerges, let that guide policies, institutions and governance frameworks. Instead of beginning peace talks by arguing who should be head of state or whether we need a new constitution or not, let us start by creating the shared image of future Nepal and then together search for the best ways to make that happen.

The last decade has seen huge sacrifices, all in the hopes of defending and building a better Nepal. We have to stop the violence generated by disagreements about how to build our country by first focusing our attention on the features and attributes that we all agree such a Nepal should have. Let the suffering of the past decade not have been in vain. Let every family that lost a loved one, let every person who was maimed—physically or psychologically—be able to look back and proudly say that the losses were worth it. Let them have given what they did in order to build a better Nepal.



AGREE TO DISAGREE:  
Both sides have  
failed to find  
common ground





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# On Bended Knee

It may be time to pray, but I'm not about to kneel

BY KUNAL LAMA

Poor, poor Mr. Deuba. No wonder he needed the weekend break at a forest resort in Gokarna. After stooping low and hard to *dam rakhnu* and retrieve the pesky little gold coin from the red royal palace carpet in front of their majesties (looking down from a raised platform, resplendent in royal regalia: ceremonial military uniform, medals, honors, tiara, flowing cape; graciously receiving the humble homage of their prime minister), his body must have ached for some salvation. In the choice of his weekend getaway, the premier displayed excellent taste; a clear plan of action; a welcome, almost rebellious, streak of independent thinking; and an acute grasp of executive powers. Well done, sir. I hope the walks in the glorious forests of Gokarna; the ayurvedic ministrations of the masseurs; the lazy laps in the heated swimming pool; the long soaks in the bubbly waters of the jacuzzi; the muscle-tenderizing heat and moist vapors of the sauna and the steam rooms have helped you to stretch that bended knee. Pity you didn't indulge in the quiet perusal of the constitution but, hey, does it matter anyhow, anymore? Now we need some action

Prime Minister, some tough decisions, so that the delusive peace and quiet we have enjoyed over Dashain and Tihar be a festival-bound treat but continue to prevail over the days to come. Be your own man. If you bend your knee again, it will at least be with self-dignity instead of traditional, formulaic humility. We will cheer you, but not just yet.

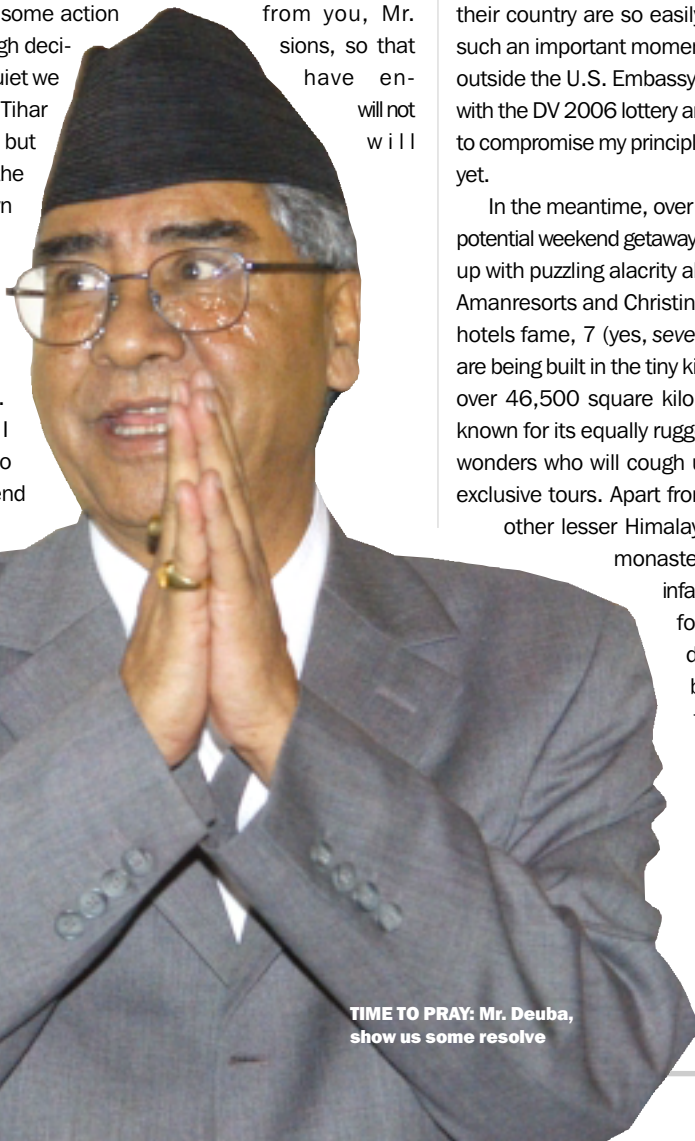
After his historic win, I wonder if Mr. Bush also holed up over the weekend at Camp

from you, Mr. have ended will

David to contemplate whether his second presidency will succeed in establishing him as a great leader with a compassionate concern for the welfare of the citizens of his country AND those from the rest of the world or as a righteous, parochial, divisive warmonger? In the words of a columnist from Washington, "The wings and head of the American eagle are clearly Democratic but its heart is decidedly Republican." The American voters have thrown in their lot with George Bush for another four years. God bless them. Middle America decided that it was one with him on political, cultural, religious and economic themes, however constricting, constraining and coffer-emptying, in spite of at least 54 million other Americans thinking otherwise. They chose him and his vice president, Dick Cheney, who, in the middle of voting and vote-counting chose to describe Mr. John Kerry, the rival presidential candidate who could have well gone on then to become the new president, by saying "Even a pig with lots of lipstick on will always be a pig." Even if it is, as claimed, a popular Wyoming (Or is it Colorado? Makes no difference: they are just the same) aphorism, I shudder to think what 58 million Republican Americans have inflicted upon themselves—and us!—if the leaders of their country are so easily capable of such indelicate expressions at such an important moment of its history. I, for one, will not be lining up outside the U.S. Embassy in Panipokhari for a visa or to take a gamble with the DV 2006 lottery anytime soon. Call me stupid, but I'm not going to compromise my principles and bend my knee to a superior power just yet.

In the meantime, over in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan, lots of potential weekend getaways for its Dashos and Lyonpos are being opened up with puzzling alacrity all over the country. Between Adrian Zecha of Amanresorts and Christina Ong of London and Bangkok Metropolitan hotels fame, 7 (yes, seven) boutique hotels have either been built or are being built in the tiny kingdom of roughly 700,000 citizens sprinkled over 46,500 square kilometers of rugged real estate. In a country known for its equally rugged interpretation of hospitality services, one wonders who will cough up the US\$ 1,000 for a day of lodging and exclusive tours. Apart from outstanding views of Mt. Jhomolhari and other lesser Himalayan massifs as well as the expected run of

monasteries, the exclusive tours might end up being infamous for what they are not inclusive of. Luckily for Bhutan, one Mr. Michael Hawley has just done them a huge favor, literally. Purported to be the world's largest book, standing tall at five feet, weighing a hefty 133 pounds and seven feet wide when opened up, "Bhutan: A Visual Odyssey Across the Last Himalayan Kingdom" has just been published. Should the book be flown over to Bhutan, the guests of the boutique hotels might finally get something which will be worth getting out of their exquisite but sterile environs for. But Mr. Hawley, shame on you, the last Himalayan kingdom? On bended knee, perhaps, but not just yet! **N**



TIME TO PRAY: Mr. Deuba, show us some resolve

nw/S





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**INDEFATIGABLE:** Twenty two years and Christine Stone is still going strong

All photos B Rai

# The Education Divide





BY SUNIL POKHREL

Australian-born British citizen, Christine Stone came to Nepal in 1982 as a volunteer for the United Mission to Nepal, the UMN. It was to be a long haul. During the 22 years of her stay in Nepal, she has taught in a number of government schools, trained thousands

of teachers, and helped prepare text books on mathematics, English, civic education and social studies.

All good things come to an end; Stone, 63, retires next year as a UMN volunteer, but would still like to continue training teachers in the country that's become her home. She still has unfinished business here; she firmly believes that quality in education comes from well-trained and motivated teachers "available at the local level." Well-to-do city residents may have ample opportunities when it comes to choosing good schools, not so with those in the rural areas. The poor have no choice but to go to government schools where teachers are poorly equipped and even the rudimentary facilities are non-existent. "Trained and motivated teachers in the rural areas," she says, "are the only hope for narrowing the divide in the quality of education imparted to urban and rural children."

Stone started out in Nepal as a teacher of mathematics and English for fifth- and sixth-graders in Janashakti High School in Namjung, Gorkha, where she worked for five years. Her young students were soon speaking confidently in English and working with understanding and great enthusiasm. There she was able to share the benefits of her own education. After five more years as a teacher, word spread round, and she was asked to use her knowledge and experience in training struggling teachers. As an expert for the Secondary Education

Development Project she traveled across the country training teachers from both private and government schools. "Teachers around Nepal are faced with an impossible task," she explains. "The government runs numerous training programs, but has been unable to give continuing input and support to bring about changes in skills and attitudes."

She views the job of primary school teachers as the toughest of all teaching jobs. They are responsible for inculcating in children their attitude

toward education, which in turn lays the foundation for future learning. "The Nepali education system is yet to fully create a secure, happy, yet orderly atmosphere and encourage children to be creative, cooperative and able to think for themselves," she says. "Proper training to the teachers helps teachers and students achieve the desired goal."

Her office at the UMN in Thapathali is a testimony to the hard work she puts in training Nepali teachers, who come from all parts of Nepal: The room is full of countless materials needed for the training sessions, their use in explained painstaking detail. Financially supported by the contributions made by her friends in Britain, she is happy to go anywhere around the country to train teachers on her own expenses. Her only family is her dog.

Stone feels that the cycle of people experiencing poor teaching and then becoming teachers themselves has to break. Nepali children, by and large, have not benefited from new and innovative teaching techniques used elsewhere around the world. Classes are conducted exactly in the same way as was common five decades ago. Dogmatic teaching, which emphasizes rote learning, is still a widely prevalent classroom practice.

Still, there are little moments of joy. A student from Janashakti School, Gorkha, recently wrote to her from the United States saying that he was doing his doctorate in nanophysics. To Stone, nothing compares with the satisfaction she gets in seeing her students excel. Learning is another thing that keeps her motivated. "I am always learning new things myself," says Stone, an avid reader.

As all well-wishers of Nepal, Stone is worried that violence will leave a deep scar in the minds of young Nepalis. "The present generation of young people will take many years to overcome such effects, both academically and emotionally," she says. Grim that the present situation may look, Christine is optimistic that Nepal's education will improve in the days ahead.

And she has her task cut out. As soon as she had finished her training sessions in Surkhet last month, she left for Pokhara to meet 30 more teachers. Her next stop: Sunsari, where she is trying to help teachers for the next academic year. **N**





# CITY ThisWeek

## EVENTS



## Kathmandu Dance Festival

It's time to swing to the music! At the Latin Quarter's Salsa Bar swing your body to tango, swing, rumba and cha cha music along with the German dance master Andreas when he takes dance classes for all age groups. This isn't all. Various interesting events and parties will also be held at the bar. You don't need a partner to sign up for the classes this time and you may even make up your own dance schedule. There's more. If you are looking for a private dance class, you can arrange

this as well. A special student of 15% and couple discount of 10% is also available.

The Dance Festival Package is divided into three types. The first one of Rs. 2800 which includes all dance classes, practices and parties. The second one of Rs. 2200 which includes only 10 dance packages and the final one of Rs. 1200 with 5 dance classes. Date: November 16 to 27. Venue: Latin Quarter Salsa Bar, Baber Mahal Revisited. For information: 2030160.

## November Medley

## ART EXHIBITIONS

This exhibition features a rare collection of paintings and sculptures by some of Nepal's most senior artists and eminent contemporary painters. It also includes drawings, tapestries and textile wall hangings by resident foreign artists. Artists: Dil Bahadur Chitrakar, Durga Baral, Govinda Dongol, Jagdish Chitrakar, Karna Narsingh Rana, Kiran Manandhar, Lain Singh Bangdel, Lorraine Lamothe, Meredith Lama, Prakaash Chandwadkar, Ragini Upadhyaya, Seema Shah, Shashikala Tiwari, Sharada Chitrakar, Thakur Prasad Mainali, Uma Shankar Shah, Yuki Shirai. Date: November 10 to December 1. Venue: Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited. For information: 4218048.

### Ramailo Saanjh

Dwarika's Hotel presents "Ramailo Saanjh," where Ishwor Gurung with his popular group "Himalayan Feelings" will be performing a musical fusion of traditional and modern Nepali melo-

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items. A 10 percent discount is available to Heritage Plus members. Date: November 17. Time: 7-10 p.m. For information: 4479488.

### Photo Session

Photo Concern announces it offer for the festive season. Take along the Photo Concern Free Photo Shoot advertisement cutting available in daily newspapers and get a free photo shoot during Dashain and Tihar. Valid up to November 30. For information: 4223275.

### Novem Bowl

Hotel Shahanshah presents "Novem Bowl." Bowl and win prizes worth Rs. 5000 and more. The package includes one game free for every two games paid, two games free for every one hour game played, one bottle of wine for six continuous strikes, Rs. 5000 worth of carpet for scores above 280 and finally the top scorer of the month gets lunch for two at the Revolving Restaurant and three months subscription to Nation weekly magazine. Till November 30.

## SHOWING AT JAINEPAL CINEMA

FOR INFORMATION: 4442220



# VEER ZAARA

## ONGOING

### All That Jazz

Presenting "Abhaya and the Steam Injuns" and the best of jazz in Nepal at the Fusion Bar, Dwarika's Hotel, 7 p.m. onwards, every Friday. Entry fee: Rs. 555, including BBQ dinner, and a can of beer/soft drinks. For information: 4479488.

### Cadenza Live

The only happening live Jazz in town. Enjoy every Wednesday and Saturday at the Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpat. Time: 7:45 p.m. onwards. For information:



### Charcoalz

This festive season Yak and Yeti brings to you "Charcoalz" at the poolside. The piping hot grills are guaranteed to drive away your autumn chills with an array of Indian, western and Mongolian

barbequed delights to tempt your appetites. Time: 6-10 p.m. For information: 4248999.

### Rock@Belle Momo

Enjoy combo meals at Belle Momo every Fridays 6:30 p.m. onwards as the rock 'n roll band Steel Wheels performs live. For information: 4230890.

### Fusion Night

The Rox Bar welcomes everyone to be a part of the Fusion Night. The rhythmic and harmonic beats of the eastern and the western instruments—a treat for the senses. Enjoy the

tunes played by The Cloud Walkers. Every Wednesday. Time: 6 p.m. onwards. For information: 4491234.

### Nepali Platter & Unlimited Drinks In Splash

At the Radisson Hotel every Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Come and enjoy this special moment in the festive season. The scheme applies to Royal Stag, Ultimate Gin & Ruslan Vodka. Time: 6-8 p.m. For information:

### Tickling Taste buds

Barbeque every Friday Evening. At The Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-la Hotel. Time: 7 p.m. onwards. For information: 4412999.



sarangi played by Bharat Nepali with a well-blended mix of western



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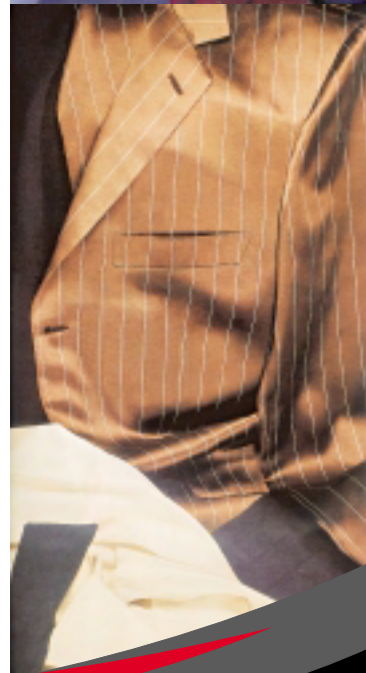
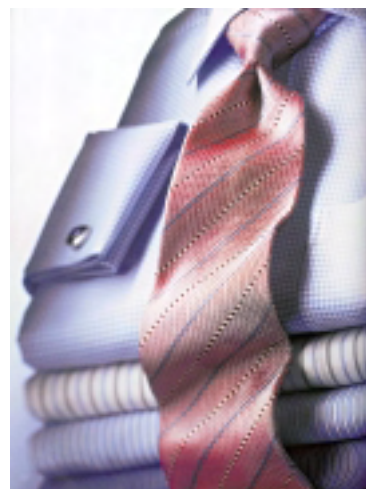
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The international food festival at the Hyatt was a plateful of disappointment

BY SUSHMA JOSHI

International food fests are best done by international types—example, expatriate wives with time on their hands, understanding of their cuisine and pride in perfection. If they have some pretensions or affiliations with diplomacy and some insider trading in authentic spices, the food can (though not always) rise to an elevated level. International food can be tolerable when done by restaurants, although it depends where the owner and/or crew spent the last five years of their hopefully adventurous migrant lives. (Of course, if the restaurateur in question is Kunal Lama, then it's a whole new story.) International food can be downright strange when dished up by mountaineering crews whose understanding of haute cuisine is derived from tin-pan concoctions they cooked over small stoves in the high Himalaya.

The food festival at the Hyatt on November 6 featured only the last two of this triumvirate of international cooks. Sadly, the first category of indomitable diplomatic ladies was missing from this festival. I have fond recollections of my first fair, organized by the Indian Embassy, which featured piping *bhel-poori* dishes up by the aforementioned ladies, fabrics with mirrors embroidered on, an elephant which wobbled along with our oldest cousin on top (I was too scared to ride it) and nostalgic memories of childhood fun. Surely, I thought, looking at the spicy water draining out of my stale *pani-pooris*, the smiling, indifferent servers could have offered something a little fresher and with fewer holes? And doesn't a plate of *pani-poori* usually have more than five in it?

Memories of piping hot *bhel-poori* wistfully rising to the surface, I looked around and caught sight of the Indian stall. "Yes," said my brother, a staunch vegetarian who gave up meat after his Kailash tour but has been unable to kick the smoking habit, "but there is nothing vegetarian in there." So the search for a vegetarian dish began.

The Malaysian stall featured plates of small items, rather like a Newari bhoj.

# Food For THOUGHT





Like a Newari bhoj, it was *not* vegetarian. The stall had its fans. A little further on was the Mexican stall, which featured one burrito and lots of meat being toasted over hot coals. The German stall featured big fat sausages and a salad of boiled potatoes (yum, but no thanks), and the Chinese table bubbled with various brightly colored broths on which rested pots of more broth. The broth was colored orange, and looked suspiciously like cheap oil. The Middle Eastern (or was it Israeli?) food stall had falafel and hummus, but the small bowl was more like a decoration in a living room than serious chow.

The most unappetizing—and I say this with disappointment; as an Italophile, I hate to have its food slaughtered—was the Italy table. It was filled with plates of what looked like Rum-Pum noodles with a sprinkling of

cheese, cold as hardened noodles can be, sitting there, obviously waiting for the hordes to descend and buy them.

Having spent an entire day rolling out fresh pasta and having once helped cook a Thanksgiving dinner of Italian food, I have become uncompromising when it comes to *la dolce vita*. Bad German food is okay; bad Russian food is even more okay. But bad Italian food is *not* okay, definitely not okay.

Let's face it, packaged pasta is just as good as fresh (which can sometimes taste *too* fresh and a bit lumpy) but hey!, there is something to be said about eating a plate of simple pasta that takes a whole, entire day to make in a kitchen. And all it has on it is olive oil and some pesto. Well, all right, you're allowed a bit of basil and some tomatoes if they're really, really fresh.







The hordes may not have agreed with me on the snob-value of fresh pasta, but they didn't vote for the Rum-Pum look-alike either. The Italian table remained untouched. The upwardly mobile masses of Kathmandu who descended on the manicured lawns in an army of motor-bikes, seemed to find other things more palatable—for instance the momos. The Nepal food table was swamped. I scratched my head over that one. Surely you come to an international food festival to eat international food? Of course going outside the range of your comfort food requires a bit of adventurousness. Everything from sushi to Kim chi is an acquired taste. Ditto gundruk. Many foreigners do try it, and those who do even like it.

Or you come to play the games. Basketball was one. Women and children were

allowed to go about two inches away from the hoop. The prize was Milky Falls, a candy being promoted during the event. Shooting small plastic ducks with a toy gun was another. Throwing a ball through a cartoon cutout in a wooden board was the third. And throwing a ring over various prizes on the uneven, bumpy floor was another. You could also throw darts and pop some balloons, just for fun. Never mind that all the prizes (various brands of ready-made noodles, Nepal's favorite food) were worth less than the ticket price. If the noodle-y prizes disappointed you, you could console yourself with the door prize, a grandly optimistic trip to Goa.

I do hope that the trip to Goa was not a set-up, as I suspect most lotteries and prizes are—think about all that gold that the advertisers promise will pop up from instant noodle packages—and that some Nepali dude with gelled hair and a taste for momos really does win that trip to Goa and suddenly finds himself faced with eating coconut fish. That would be a spicy tale all in itself.

Getting back home through the traffic jam was, predictably, a nightmare. It would have been easier to turn the other way, go to the airport and fly to Goa. In the taxi, I mulled about how these fests are getting more common in Kathmandu, giving the impression that there are “more choices” for entertainment. Like other “choices” put together by corporate interests, however, the event left much to be desired. Next time, perhaps they will pull in some home-cooking divas and grandmas with autocratic opinions about food to add a little pizzazz to the notion of international food. **N**



# Dark Shadows

It's time officials looked seriously into sports injuries

BY SUDESH SHRESTHA

With all the charm and excitement that any sport packs for its practitioners, there is one element lurking in the shadows—injury. Especially so in the case of contact sports like football and martial arts.

Although most injuries result in no more than a few days off the field or a limb in plaster for some weeks, serious ones could keep players out for months on end or even end their playing careers.

A recent football match between Liverpool and Blackburn Rovers in the English Premiership witnessed one of many incidents relating to sports injuries.

Liverpool's striker Djibril Cisse was left screaming in agony as he fell to the ground after a tangle with a Blackburn player. What looked like an innocuous challenge at first had a horrible consequence: Cisse, a 23-year-old French footballer, broke his left leg. He had an operation and a statement on the Liverpool website said: "Cisse will be out of action for the rest of the season."

But thanks to immediate medical attention, he is expected to make an end-of-season return. "If everything goes to plan then five months out is not an unre-

alistic target," said a news report, quoting doctors involved in the Frenchman's treatment.

With competitive tournaments gradually gaining in numbers in Nepal, injuries are not uncommon. Nepal's under-19 captain Prashant Giri broke his leg when he was tackled by an opposition team goalkeeper during the Martyr's Memorial ANFA San Miguel Invitational Football Tournament held last December.

Giri had probably experienced tackles like that on countless occasions, but on that occasion his leg could simply not cope with the force of the tackle. Can Giri, who has already undergone months of rehabilitation after an operation, get back on the football pitch?

"Definitely," assures ANFA President Ganesh Thapa, claiming that the association has done everything it possibly could for Giri's speedy recovery. "Sometimes, it all boils down to the player's willpower," Thapa explains, recalling his own experience as an ace striker, who was hounded by the opposition and injuries. And inevitable illnesses.

The year was 1981. Nepal was to play a crucial tie against India in the Asian Youth Football Championship qualifiers at the Dasharath Stadium. With the match only a week away he was diagnosed with jaundice. German coach Rudi Gutendorf, in charge of Nepal's team at the time, and sport officials were let down at the prospect of playing without their in-form striker.

"And against the doctor's advice to take two weeks of total rest," he goes on, "I decided to take a risk and played the match. I scored two goals in Nepal's 4-2 win." Thankfully, he escaped unscathed and the rest, as they say, is history.

Taekwondo player Deepak Bista braved an injury in his leg during qualifying competition

and returned home with a gold medal from the 9<sup>th</sup> SAF Games in Pakistan earlier in the year. Nepal won a total of seven golds—four of them were in taekwondo. However, there is not always a happy ending. For all that golden glory, he ended up with excruciating pain. By the time the competition ended, his knee ligament was so badly damaged that he could not stand on his feet. He returned home on crutches. "I've spent the better part of the past seven months trying to feel better rather than trying to get better," he says.

The ligament was injured either through the twisted knee or due to an impact to the side of the knee, often the outside. Once considered a career-ending injury, the damaged ligament can be successfully repaired or reconstructed now, thanks to advanced treatment.

It does not come cheap, though. "I went to Bangkok to repair the damaged ligament. It has cost me around Rs. 400,000," he says. For worse injuries that require reconstruction of a ligament from a tendon elsewhere in the body, the treatment cost can be even higher.

The government agreed to fund the treatment; Rs. 500,000 was allotted for the treatment and Bista feels privileged to be among the few who have survived a debilitating injury. He, however, fears his career as taekwondo player might be over. He is also bitter about the fact that he had to run from pillar to post to get government approval for funds for his treatment. He fears he lost valuable time for rehabilitation in doing so. All his life, he will also be haunted by the fact that the prognosis could have been better if help had come on time.

Dr. Pradeep Joshi, chief of medical section at the National Sports Council, insists that the council has extended support to top players to nurse their injuries. "Players might have faced some delay as the council has to get approval from the ministries for the release of additional funds," he argues.

But he expresses feelings of inadequacies. The council's medical section has three staff on its payroll, out of them only one is permanent. It has to manage all its expenses through a meager development budget to the tune of Rs. 30 million. "We've got to be more serious about players' health and injuries if we are to put up a good show even at the South Asian level," he says. **N**



SS/MS



From	To	Flight No.	Days of Operation	Dep. Time	Arr. Time	Rupee Tariff One way	Dollar Tariff One way	Remarks
Kathmandu	Lukla	YA 111	Daily	0700	0735	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA 101	Daily	0705	0740	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	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
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Nepalgunj	Kathmandu	YA 178	Daily	1315	1405	3500	109	SAAB 340B
Lukla	Kathmandu	YA 112	Daily	0750	0825	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 102	Daily	0755	0830	1665	91	DHC-6/300
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	Kathmandu	YA 110	Daily	0940	1020	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 116	Daily	0945	1025	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 118	Daily	1110	1145	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 120	1,2,4,5,6,7	1115	1150	1665	91	DHC-6/300
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Meghauly	Kathmandu	YA172	Daily	1120	1155	1340	79	DHC-6/300
Rumjatar	Kathmandu	YA 222	2,4,7	1250	1325	1245	79	DHC-6/300
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	Kathmandu	YA 176	Daily	1440	1505	1160	61	DHC-6/300
Simara	Kathmandu	YA142	Daily	1410	1435	970	55	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA144	Daily	1540	1605	970	55	DHC-6/300

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## Snapshots

BY DHRITI BHATTA

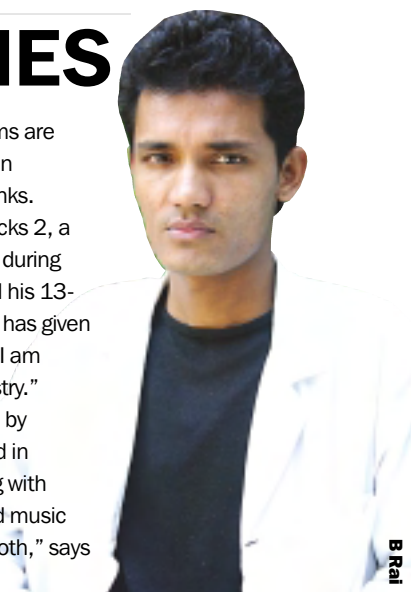
### SINGING SISTER



**POOJA GURUNG** is young, hip and successful. As the host of several shows on Kantipur TV, the director of music videos for The Axix band and Nabin K. Bhattarai and now an up-and-coming singer, Gurung embodies young talent. On October 31, Gurung was at the "Women in Concert," singing and rubbing shoulders with some of the best female singers in town. Gurung, however, is modest about her singing abilities. "I have always been a bathroom singer, a performer during school functions and the family entertainer," says Gurung. "That's all the experience I have." She had been performing at Moksh regularly since last year and now she performs every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at the Rox Bar. If you want to catch her mellow voice you know where to find her.

### HEALING TONES

When passion comes to play, even the wildest dreams are achievable. At least that's what **SABIT SUNUWAR**, an M.B.B.S graduate who is interning at Bir Hospital, thinks. Sunuwar soared over 15 other contestants at Hot Licks 2, a solo-guitar competition organized by Wave magazine during the first week of November. In doing so, he achieved his 13-year dream—to prove himself in the music world. "It has given me the confidence," says Sunuwar, "to believe that I am capable of contributing something to the music industry." Although "A Gift From Bhairawa," an album released by Sunuwar's five-member band, Lahar, went unnoticed in 1997, he plans to come out with a new album along with another band member of Lahar soon. "Medicine and music are totally different fields, but I hope to succeed in both," says Sunuwar. "I believe I have the determination."



### Tip-Topper

**SABINA MANANDHAR** hit the big time when she won the Aishwarya Bidhya Padak-2060 for securing the highest marks among all female candidates in management exams for the bachelor's level. Manandhar, who works in the Food and Beverage Department at the Shangri-La Hotel, has more work experience than most 22-year-olds: She's been a graphic designer at APEC Nepal, a tour officer at Marco polo travels, an assistant tour handler at Yeti Travels and more. So didn't she have a hard time juggling her jobs and her studies? Not at all, she says. "My jobs helped me with my studies," Manandhar says. "The practical knowledge I received was far more useful than the books."





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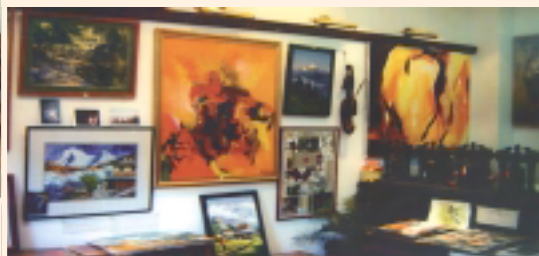
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# Bittersweet Times

**F**estivals are a good time for businesses. Close on the heels of Dashain, Tihar wears a sanitized look; it eschews violence. Animal slaughters are happily over during the festival of colors and lights. Nepalis have a sweet tooth, and the sweet makers are kept quite busy throughout this festival. **Tirtha Rajkarnikar's** sweet shop, Gyan Mithai Bhandar, has been a permanent feature of Tichu Galli, Haugal, near the Patan Durbar Square,



for generations. The Rajkarnikars are traditional sweet makers and Tirtha, now in her 60s, has been in the business for 30 years. She runs the shop with her two sons, Saroj and Niraj. Yashas Vaidya talked to her about Tihar and about sweets in these bittersweet times.

**How is business this Tihar?**

It's good. But we have been troubled by shortages of the materials we use.

**What kinds of shortages?**

We are short of the ingredients we use—the sugar, especially. You cannot have sweets without sugar. We heard in the television and the newspapers that the Salt Trading Corporation would supply sugar for Tihar. But, it's already Tihar and they have not started supplying it yet. And during such times, the suppliers jack up the prices. I bought nearly 50 kilograms of sugar for around Rs. 2,200; that's about Rs. 44 for a kilogram [as compared to Rs. 35 per kilogram during other times; National Trading started supplying sugar from a few outlets at Rs. 33 per kilogram from Wednesday, November 10, the first day of Tihar].

**So you have increased the prices of your sweets as well...**

No, no. We sell our sweets at the same price all around the year, irrespective of whether there's a festival on or not. We've known others who increase prices during such times, but we don't follow that practice.

**Which sweets sell the most? Is the trend any different during festivals like Tihar?**

For us it's the usual the *jeri-swari*, the *burfi*, the *rasbari*. During the festival times, the demand does go up, more in some festivals as opposed to others and more for some sweets than others. For example, during Dashain demand is the highest on the days around the days of the *Tika*. For Tihar, the *lakhamari* is one specific sweet that is more in demand. [The word *lakhamari* is made up of two words “lakha,” meaning something that is costly and is thus only consumed occasionally, and “mari,” which means *roti* or dish.] The *lakhamari* is something for special occasions and is ordered for such occasions as marriages, pujas.

**The business during Tihar is always good. This time around it is more or less the same as in the years before...**

**You seem to be doing brisk business today...**

The business during Tihar is always good. This time around it is more or less the same as in the years before... It hasn't increased significantly; maybe it is because of the state of the country.

**Don't people complain about the artificial colors you use?**

We only use the colors that are approved [by the government]. We only buy those. If we don't use any colors, then all sweets will be of the same color—only white.

The customers demand colorful sweets, and as we are in a business, we need to listen to our customers. The government should be more concerned about the chemicals used in the “packaged” foods, the chocolates and the ice cream that children consume.

**How are you coping with the competition of packaged sweets and those from bigger outlets?**

I don't think those sweets are of good quality. I've had customers come to me and tell me that. There's competition in all areas now. It's no different for us. But we don't engage in price wars—increasing or decreasing prices. We have regular customers that keep coming back to us. They introduce our shop to their friends and family. It's about keeping the customers happy, and so it's about our quality. You need to keep the customers happy; else you can't stay in business.

**Will future generations take up your trade? Do you think your children will continue the family business?**

We have been sweet makers for generations. When I started out more than three decades ago, I used to do everything myself. I used to be the one to make the *jeri-swari*, the *burfi* and sell them too. I can't make the sweets anymore because I've grown a bit old. Now my sons are involved in the business, and I have a few helpers too. My grandchildren are still studying and I can't tell now whether they'll join the fray. These days children don't necessarily take up the trade of their ancestors. **N**



# In Their Own Words

*Riddum* is the Kulunge term the story of the beginning of the cosmos and the ethnogenesis of the indigenous peoples of the world

BY MARK TURIN

**M**artino Nicoletti, formerly professor of Visual Anthropology and the History of Religions at the University of Perugia in Italy, is presently the director of the anthropological section of an Italian research project. He has been working in the Himalaya for over a decade, and English translations of two of his books have recently been published by Vajra Publications. “*Riddum: The Voice of the Ancestors*” is a charming and fascinating little book, which serves as a perfect counterpoint to “*Shamanic Solitudes*,” a more traditional academic monograph on ecstasy, madness and spirit possession among the Kulunge Rai of eastern Nepal.

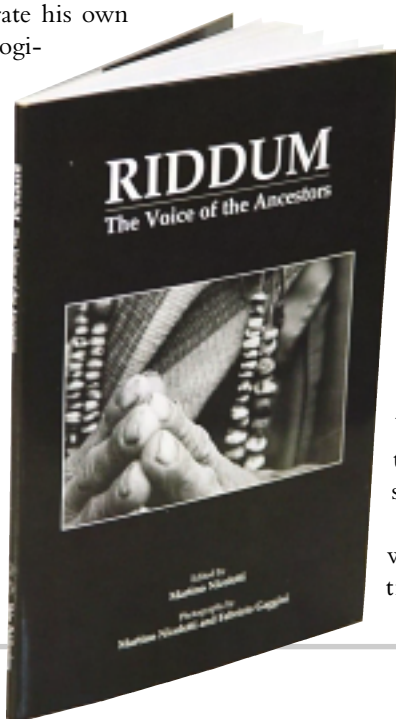
*Riddum* is the Kulunge term for what many of the Rai and Kiranti peoples refer to as *mundum*, the story of the beginning of the cosmos and the ethnogenesis of the indigenous peoples of the world. In this short book, Nicoletti chooses to let an aged shaman, Sancha Prasad Rai, who passed away in 1999 and to whom the book is dedicated, narrate his own story. Nicoletti’s anthropological and analytical involvement is limited to a modest three-page Foreword and what he terms “Card on Kulunge Rai,” which comes at the end and situates the ethnic group in the context of neighboring Himalayan peoples. This

**Riddum: The Voice of the Ancestors**

By Martino Nicoletti, with photographs by Martino Nicoletti and Fabrizio Gaggini  
Vajra Publications (2004)

**PAGES:** 63

**PRICE:** Rs. 300



structure works well, since the narration of the story is as engaging as its contents are intriguing, and we learn that the *riddum* is a “teaching tool: it explains the origin of things and their interconnections, bringing them closer and making them more comprehensible” (page 10).

The presentation of the narration of the origin tale itself deserves special mention. Nicoletti has opted for a stylized and graphically-rich format with large print on the right hand side of the page and thought-provoking black and white photographic reproductions on the left. Since the allusions are subtle and nuanced, only half way through reading



the text did I begin to find linkages between the content of the *riddum* and the associated images. I then turned back to the beginning and re-read the text with a greater focus on the photos and was struck by how carefully they had been chosen.

The text reads well, although the translation is at

times a little over-wrought and archaic. This may be put down to the fact that the text has been translated out of the Kulunge ritual language into Italian and then into English. The usage of terms such as “the gelid waters of the river” (page 33) and “eventide” (page 34) adds a level of lexical complexity that I doubt the shaman had intended.

In common with the cosmologies of other Himalayan peoples, the Kulunge *riddum* is full of sex, incest, death and other archetypal themes. The interactions between the animate world (insects, birds and humans) and the inanimate world (pebbles and the wind) make for an absorbing tale that takes the reader from the origin of the world to the present moment. “Thus it was,” Sancha Prasad tells us, “without interruption, right from the beginning” (page 55). **N** S

(Turin is a Visiting Scientist at ICIMOD and director of the Digital Himalaya Project based at Cambridge and Cornell universities [www.digitalhimalaya.com](http://www.digitalhimalaya.com))



# It's Politics, Stupid

Perhaps Nepal is the only democracy where the debate on the relevance of the Constitution started as soon as the framers had finished drafting it. That was November 9, 1990. The dubious distinction of starting the debate should go to the CPN-UML, which had itself been represented in the Constitution Draft Committee. The communist party said it had only extended “*alochanatmak samarthan*” (critical support) to the Constitution.

Unsurprisingly, the first two weeks of November each year since have been a busy time for the critics of the Constitution. But the constitution debate has gained added significance the last three years, ever since the King dissolved an elected government on October 4, 2002, and put the Constitution into suspended animation.

This November, one clause in the Constitution that has come under intense scrutiny is Article 116, which critics say blocks significant amendments to the Constitution and, hence, the possible entry of the Maoists into the political mainstream. The article in question unequivocally states that no bill that calls for the amendment or repeal of the Preamble of the Constitution may be introduced in the Parliament. The Preamble, of course, says that there will be no compromise on the following—that sovereignty rests in the people (in the 1962 Constitution it rested in the King); and that there will be adult franchise, a parliamentary system of government, multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy.

We believe that amendments to the Constitution will not solve the problem. First, the Maoists have stated in no uncertain terms that they want a new constitution and that such a document needs to be drafted by a broad-based constituent assembly rather than by a Constitution Draft Committee, like 1990, where only political parties were represented. Second, the current impasse is a political one and therefore needs a political solution, not a constitutional one. It's useless to even get into the lawyerly debate and split hairs over the Constitution when we know full well that the Maoists can be brought into the fold only through political dialogue.

So what are the options before us to both overcome the constitutional crisis (post-October 4, 2002) and the political stalemate, taking into account that the Maoists insist that the current Constitution is not accept-

able to them? One obvious choice is to restore the Parliament and let the status quo ante prevail: Since the 1990 Constitution embodies the idea of parliamentary supremacy, the Parliament could then decide what is the best way out of the current impasse. The other choice is a constituent assembly, the option that is obviously more palatable to the Maoists.

We believe the latter is a better option: Political parties and civil society too are increasingly inclined to agree, if that will bring the Maoists into the political fold. But, and a big but, we want the Maoists to spell out what they want the new constitution to be like. While they have been largely consistent in their demand for the constituent assembly, they have remained conspicuously silent on whether they believe in democracy and, if they do, what form of democracy do they want. So long as they fall short of voicing unequivocally their belief in democracy, the Nepali people will continue to regard them with deep foreboding. Numerous reports and analyses prove that a significant number of Maoist followers are dogmatic communists who care little about democracy and are hell-bent on following the classical Maoist theory of insurgency lock, stock and barrel—surround the cities with liberated villages before overrunning them to establish a one-party rule under communist control.

In the final analysis, the argument that the root of Nepal's current problem and also the solution lie in the Constitution is deeply flawed. The Constitution can't possibly have answers to political questions. Those have to be responded to with political moves. Provisions for neither the 1980 referendum nor the restoration of democracy 10 years later were present in the 1962 Constitution, for example. Ter Elingsson observed as far back in 1991 in his essay on Nepal's new Constitution in the “Himalayan Research Bulletin”: “Constitutions and their language may be highly important in symbolic terms, but the meanings of the symbols they invoke must be determined with respect to a wider range of constitutional practices and traditions than the written documents themselves are capable of embodying.” That was true in 1980, true in 1990 and true now.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor



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