

GORKHALAND POLITICS | FALLING REMITTANCES | NEPAL STAR

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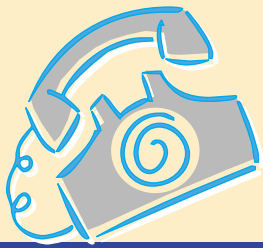


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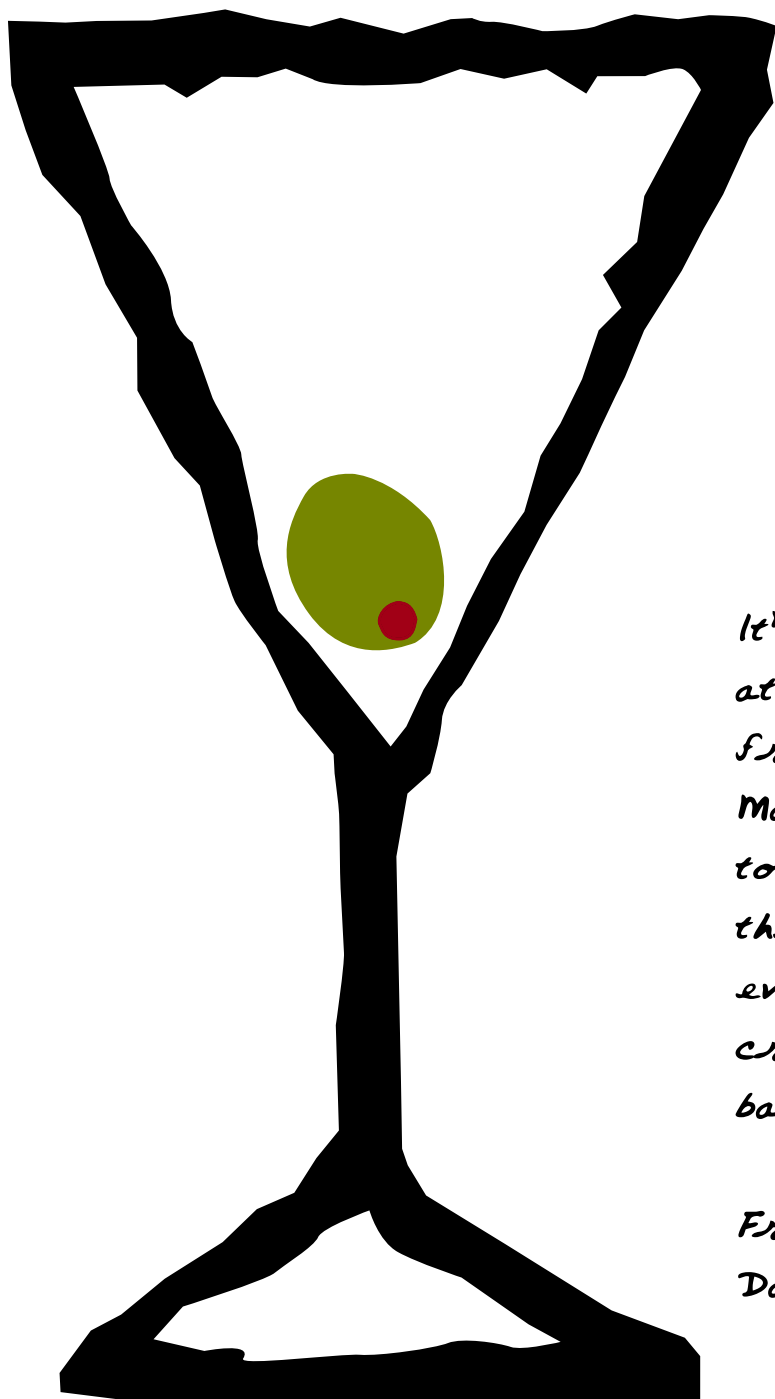
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Engineering Elections 22

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

Any hope for the prime minister's mission to hold elections depends upon getting his party and coalition firmly on board and persuading the parties in the streets not to boycott the polls

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FEBRUARY 6, 2005

VOL. I, NO. 42

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BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

UN human rights chief Arbour declared that 'a grave human rights crisis is afflicting Nepal.' More importantly, she warned both parties to the conflict in Nepal and particularly the Maoists that the world has 'entered an era of accountability.'

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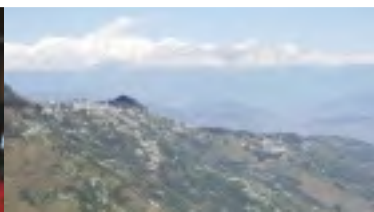
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LETTERS



“ The revision of the Gurkha pension and perks was long overdue ”

IPGURUNG

The Gurkha cause

THANK YOU FOR THE EXCELLENT coverage of the post-1990 awakening among the Gurkhas and their long struggle for parity in the British Army (“Parity for Gurkhas,” by John Narayan Parajuli, Jan. 30). The revision of the Gurkha pension and perks was long overdue.

IP GURUNG
VIA EMAIL

a ‘wide-ranging review’ of the Gurkhas’ longstanding grievances. ... It’s a most positive statement, though cruelly belated.” Moreover, I am especially pleased that you singled out GAESO for praise. There are many in the Gurkha community who are quick to dismiss the organization as a “nuisance.” With all its weaknesses, I still credit it for starting a very legitimate debate: parity for Nepalis in the British Army.

RAMAN SUBBA
DHARAN



Unproductive workplace

IN A SHORT INTERVIEW, YANGDUP Lama said a lot: Tourism, like most other businesses, is about making the customers happy and investing in your employee is not a waste (Khula Manch, “Of Bars, Booze and Bartenders” by Yashas Vaidya, Jan. 30). Lama, for example, explains that he actually hires a tutor if he finds that his bartenders have poor English. How many of our employers, and not just in the tourism trade, bother to

I HAVE SAID THIS IN THESE PAGES before and am saying it again: Nation has given ample space to cover Gurkha issues. But the last issue, where you covered the Gurkha problem as the cover story, was the icing on the cake. While most newspapers were busy with their usual diet of political news, you put the spotlight on the possible revision of the Gurkha pensions and pay. Still, I took note of the mixed emotions the decision provoked in the Last Page: “Happily, the grand anachronism is finally being righted. British Defence Secretary Geoffrey Hoon has pledged



go that far? Unless they realize that most of the employees need to be trained and trained with painstaking effort, the idea of a productive workplace will remain empty rhetoric dished out in the board-rooms.

MAHESH SHARMA
KATHMANDU

Politics of oil

BIPUL NARAYAN INSIGHTFULLY deliberates the issues faced by traditional government monopolies in Nepal ("Politics of Oil," Jan. 30). While I commend him on his understanding of institutional and social issues, it is important to understand that oil should remain a government monopoly, at least until the near future. Nepal is not yet ready for privatization of the NOC and the handing over of a crucial national security-related institution to foreign multinationals. The ideal way to improve efficiency and decrease corruption would be to corporatize the NOC. An independent and autonomous organization, all right, but its stakes still controlled entirely by the government.

POOJA JHA
KATHMANDU

the clashes between the Maoists and security forces stopped? Why the rush for what looks like a bloody election?

RAJIB DAHAL
HYDERABAD, INDIA

Telling irony



"FLAVORS OF INDIA, MADE BY NEPAL" by Purna Basnet and Bela Malik (Jan. 30) talks about the plight of Nepali workers in India without trying to sound overly grim.

The article is a brilliant commentary on the Nepali migrants—that most



Peace before polls

HOLDING ELECTIONS WITHOUT securing peace is a bad idea ("Costs and Benefits," Meanwhile, by Suman Pradhan, Jan. 30). Have we secured peace? Have

food stalls at the Dilli Haat in New Delhi, representing the 25 states in the Indian union, are in fact run by Nepalis. Can there be a more telling irony?

SUSHMA SHRESTHA
NEWROAD

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EDITOR: Akhilesh Upadhyay
editorial@nation.com.np
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR: Suman Pradhan
COPY EDITOR: John Child
SENIOR STAFF WRITERS: Sushma Joshi, Satish Jung Shahi,
Tiku Gauchan
STAFF WRITER: John Narayan Parajuli
PHOTOJOURNALISTS: Sagar Shrestha, Das Bahadur Maharjan
DESIGNER: Raj Shrestha
EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS: Indra Adhikari, Yashas Vaidya

AD & CIRCULATION DIRECTOR: Krishna Shrestha
ASST. MARKETING MANAGER: Rameshwar Ghimire
MARKETING EXECUTIVE: Bijendra Pradhan
ad@nation.com.np
SUBSCRIPTION OFFICER: Akshaya Shrestha
subscription@nation.com.np
ASST. SUBSCRIPTION OFFICER: Jeshna Karmacharya
DISTRIBUTION: Angiras Manandhar
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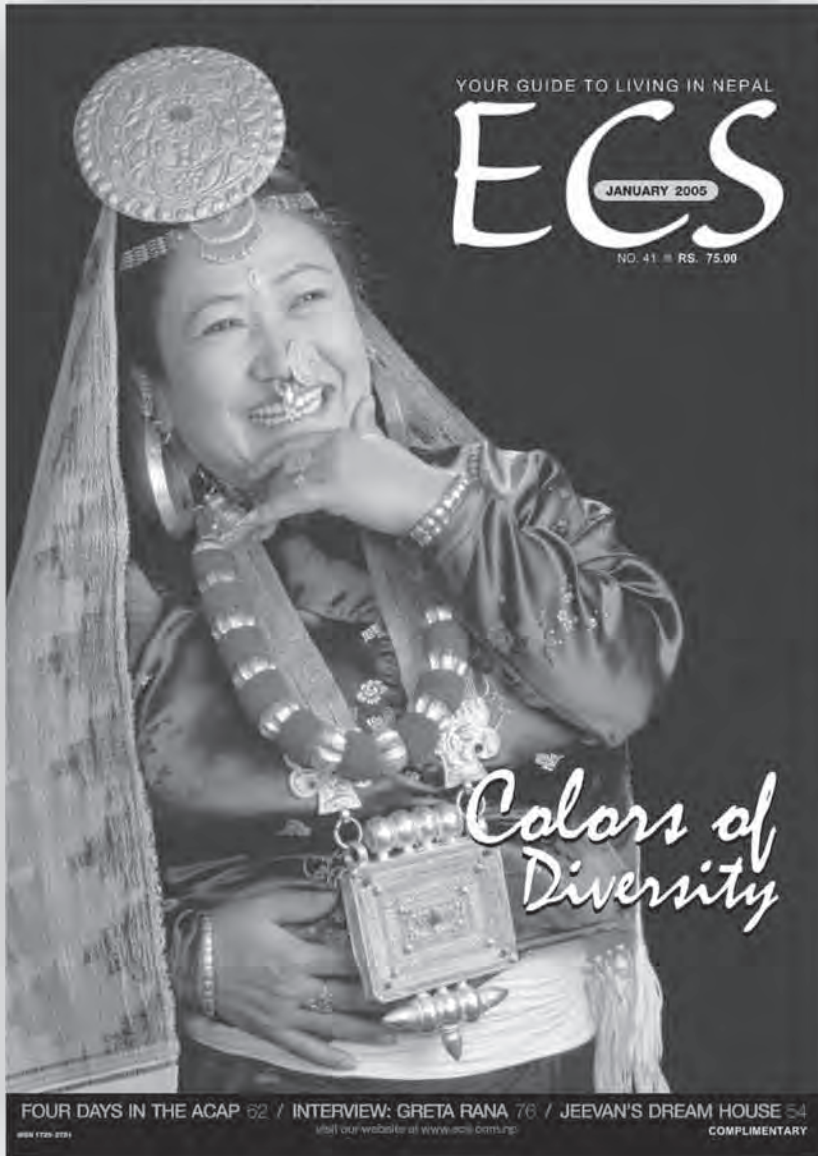
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MAY PEACE RETURN: A student of Don Bosco Academy at a function at the Nepal Tourism Board auditorium



The Sony Ericsson O₂ Xda II, a powerful PDA with phone functionality tacked on—priced at a cool Rs.65,000



Muncha.com resorted to a strange way of marketing its services—models with multi-colored hair



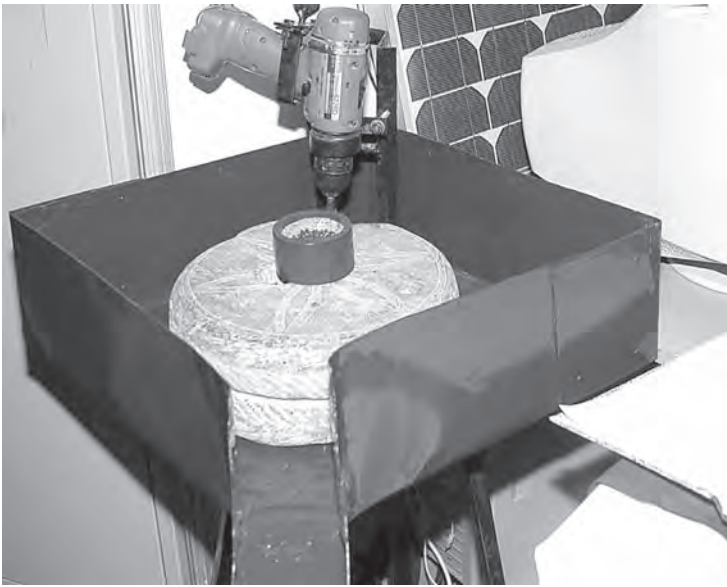
An array of switches and gizmos at the Little Media stall



The stall of IEC, the Nepali franchise of an Indian fashion design institute



Bigger firms like Mercantile took up whole halls



▲ A solarghatta

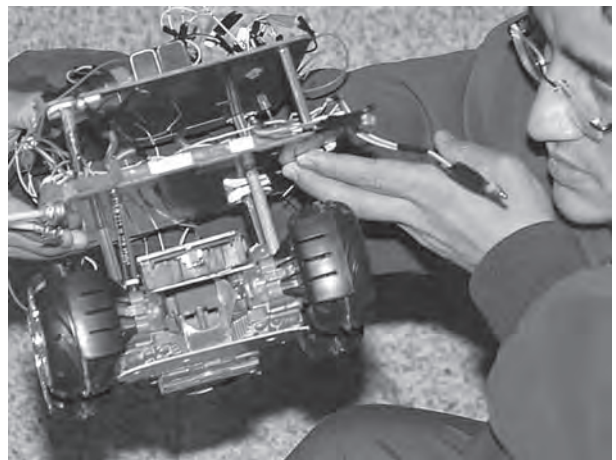


▲ Many students turned up to look at innovative products, like this burglar alarm system, Vajra



▲ Computer and other courses drew in crowds with special offers and discounts

The Kathmandu University Computer Club displayed among other things this remote-controlled four-wheeler



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THE MIRROR MEDIA PVT. LTD.

No polls yet

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba said that he was not yet prepared to announce polls. In an interview with the BBC Nepali service, Deuba said he would carry out extensive consultations with the Election Commission, coalition partners and those parties outside the government before he makes a decision. A day before the interview, on Jan. 22, the government spokesman, Mohammed Mohsin, said that the government should either announce polls within a week or quit as per the King's mandate. CPN-UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal says elections will be meaningless without peace.

NRN funds

The Association of Non-Resident Nepalis will set up a \$100 million-fund to promote Nepali products abroad and increase investments in Nepal. The president of the association, Upendra Mahato, said that the team overseeing the funds would have representatives from the government, the Nepal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the association.

Circus ruckus

Eight Nepali girls were rescued from the Empire Circus in Mumbai. Nepal Child Organization initiated the rescue. The girls, who had been working in the circus for the last two years, said that they were forced into hard labor by the circus owners. In August, the plight of Nepali girls working in Indian circuses made the headlines when Baal Bachao rescued Nepali girls from a circus in Uttar Pradesh.

SC order

The Supreme Court ordered the government to explain the hike in transport fares. Justice Ram Prasad Shrestha who gave the order was responding to a writ

challenging the hike. Fares shot up by up to 20 percent after increases in the petroleum prices. The fares for long-route buses went up by up to 15 percent, while those of short-distance micros by 20 percent.

Everest height

The Chinese Academy of Science announced a month-long survey, starting on March 20, to measure the height of Mount Everest. In 1990, a similar survey carried out by the Geographic Society of America put the height of Everest at 8850 meters. The government has not validated the survey. Nepal still maintains that the height of the peak is 8848 meters, as measured during an expedition in 1954.

GDP growth

The growth in the Gross Domestic Product for the current fiscal year was downgraded to 3.33 percent from 3.5 percent. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the growth rate of the agriculture sector is 3.86 percent, while the non-agricultural sector has witnessed a growth of 3.05 percent. The highest growth was seen in the trade, restaurant and hotel groups, which registered a 6.38 percent climb. Meanwhile, the per capita income increased from Rs.18,851 to Rs.20,020.

UML pullout

The five zonal CPN-UML committees urged the party leadership to pull out of the government. The committees asked the party to withdraw from the government instead of being part of a government that will go ahead with elections. They said that elections were not possible given the poor security situation.

Dalai Lama

The government shut down two offices affiliated to the Tibetan Buddhist leader, Dalai Lama, in



Kathmandu. The office of the representative of Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Refugees Welfare Office, both in Lazimpat, were closed down. The government says that the offices had breached foreign policy norms by operating without its permission. The New York-based rights group Human Rights Watch urged the

government to allow the two offices to reopen, as the organizations were working to safeguard the interests of thousands of Tibetan refugees in Nepal.

Indian arrests

The Indian police arrested five suspected Nepali Maoists with explosives in Pithauragadh in the

Indian state of Uttranchal. The five were arrested with two boxes of gunpowder, which they were trying to smuggle into Nepal, the Indian police said. All the five



have been identified as the residents of Bardiya. The District Administration Office in Bardiya, however, has said that it has no information about such arrests.

DNA tests

The National Forensic Laboratory will conduct DNA tests from May. It will be the first instance of official DNA-testing in Nepal. The laboratory has been carrying out trial runs since October. That since the government decided to introduce DNA analyzers to solve complicated legal and forensic cases, especially those involving rapes, and maternity and paternity identification.

Insurgency no excuse

Bakul H. Dholakia, director of Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad said the Nepali business sector should not blame the insurgency for all the wrongs in the country. He urged Nepali businessmen to be more proactive and not to be disappointed with the current political climate. The service sector needs improvement in undeveloped countries like Nepal to reap immediate economic benefits, said Dholakia during a talk program on "Globalization and Managerial Challenges," organized by the Apex College.

RNA appointments

The Army for the first time appointed women as second lieutenants, Nepal Samacharptra reported. All the 70 women selected will be deployed after the completion of a nine-month training. Another 151 women have been hired by the Army for various non-technical jobs.

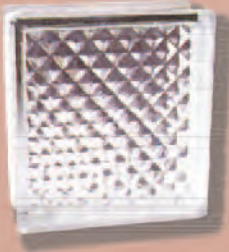


CACHE: The Army displays money retrieved from the Maoists

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VISIT

NEW SHOWROOM

Morang Auto Works, the authorized dealer of Yamaha in Nepal, has unveiled its new showroom in Biratnagar. The outlet will sell all models of Yamaha motorbikes. In another announcement, the dealer said that the prospec-



tive customers will now be able to test ride the new Yamaha Fazer bike. Morang Auto will also provide 80 liters of free petrol to the customers of Yamaha Libero LX. To add to those benefits, the company will offer its Crux and YBX models on easy installments and at zero percent interest. All schemes are valid until Feb. 11.

RBB ANNIVERSARY

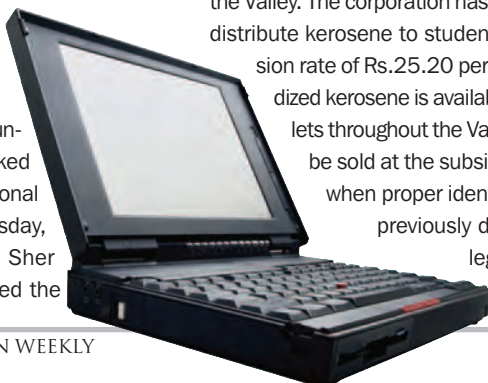
Rastriya Banijya Bank celebrated its 40th anniversary on Sunday, Jan. 23. Bruce F. Henderson, its chief executive officer, said that the bank would emerge as a model bank by January 2006, amid a function in Kathmandu. Toward that end, the bank has already introduced automobile, education and housing loans. RBB, the largest commercial bank in the country, registered a net profit of Rs.1.1 billion during the last fiscal year, said Handerson. The bank has 117 branches in 67 districts across Nepal.

NEPSE GROWTH

Nepal Stock Exchange (Nepse) recorded a nine-fold growth in the fiscal year 2003-04 as compared to 2002-03. Nepse witnessed an rise in bourse from Rs.590 million a year ago to Rs.4.8 billion this year. The rise of 36.62 points in the Nepse index is one of the biggest yearly gains. The commercial banks covered 73.13 percent of the total shares' transactions, while finance companies held 3.66 percent of trading shares in 2004. Nepse, which started its operation 11 years ago, currently has a total share value of Rs.44 billion with average daily transactions of Rs.20.34 million.

CAN INFO-TECH

The biggest IT fare in the country, the CAN Info-Tech, kicked off at the Birendra International Convention Center on Tuesday, Jan. 25. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba inaugurated the



11th edition of the annual show. The 120 stalls aimed at bringing about 200,000 visitors this year. The six-day event also featured a two-day special Information and Communication Technology (ICT) conference. Breaking from the traditional moulds, the exhibitors applied innovative marketing styles—such as using models to demonstrate as well as sell their products. Cell phones, laptops, and wireless Internet were the main attraction of the event.

RMC ROOF SHEETS

Rajesh Metal Crafts has introduced a new brand of galvanized roof sheets in the Nepali market. The company, which has been manufacturing various construction materials for over a decade, has introduced the sheets after the success of RMC pipes, its other popular brand.

ISO FOR MERCANTILE

Mercantile Solutions has been awarded ISO 90001:2000 certification by International Organization of Standardization, the ISO. Mercantile is the manufacturer of Nepal's first branded personal computer. Mercantile's computer assembly, sales, and support services are at par with any international organization, ISO said. ISO 9001:2000 is a globally recognized, process-based quality management system (QMS) developed by the ISO.

FEWA NOODLES

Him-Shree Foods has introduced Fewa Noodles in the market. In addition to the available chicken and vegetable flavors, the company has now added mutton flavor. The price of a packet has been set at Rs 11. Him-Shree also has started a new prize scheme for the customers. Stickers, t-shirts, caps, bags and cash prizes from Rs.5 to Rs.1000 may now be won inside the Fewa noodles packets.

SUBSIDIZED KEROSENE

Nepal Oil Corporation has started the distribution of its subsidized kerosene, which will cost Rs.30 a liter, down from Rs.36 the unsubsidized form costs. The subsidy maybe claimed by the poor, the conflict-hit and the wage earners in the Valley. The corporation has also decided to distribute kerosene to students at a concession rate of Rs.25.20 per liter. The subsidized kerosene is available from 66 outlets throughout the Valley. The fuel will be sold at the subsidized rates only when proper identity cards or the previously distributed privilege coupons are presented.



The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Louis Arbour visited Nepal from Jan. 23-26 to study the human rights situation in the country. Arbour is the highest ranking U.N. human rights official to visit Nepal since the start of the insurgency in 1996.

A Canadian, Arbour has served as the chief prosecutor for the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda from 1996 to 2000. She indicted the former Yugoslav and Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic for war crimes and crimes against humanity when she was the head of the tribunal.

"I am here to express my support for the human rights defenders in the country," Arbour said of her Nepal visit, which gained added significance amid the international outcry over exacerbating rights situation in Nepal. Arbour described the country's human rights situation as "serious" and asked both sides to the conflict to abide by international human rights conventions.

Arbour asked for an immediate end to the disappearances, executions and torture. She called upon the government to sign the Rome Treaty, which will make Nepal a party to the International Court of Justice. **N**

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	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
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	SIMARA	YA 143	DAILY	1500	1525	970	55	DHC-6/300
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	POKHARA	YA 137	DAILY	1000	1025	1710	67	SAAB 340B
	POKHARA	YA 135	DAILY	1410	1435	1710	67	SAAB 340B
	BHAIRAHAWA	YA 163	DAILY	1550	1625	2220	79	SAAB 340B
	BHADRAPUR	YA 121	DAILY	1140	1230	2950	109	SAAB 340B
	NEPALGUNJ	YA 177	DAILY	1415	1515	3500	109	SAAB 340B
BIRATNAGAR	KATHMANDU	YA 152	DAILY	1100	1140	2585	85	SAAB 340B
BIRATNAGAR	KATHMANDU	YA 154	DAILY	1310	1350	2585	85	SAAB 340B
BIRATNAGAR	KATHMANDU	YA 156	DAILY	1800	1840	2585	85	SAAB 340B
POKHARA	KATHMANDU	YA 132	DAILY	0910	0935	1710	67	SAAB 340B
POKHARA	KATHMANDU	YA 138	DAILY	1045	1110	1710	67	SAAB 340B
POKHARA	KATHMANDU	YA 136	DAILY	1455	1520	1710	67	SAAB 340B
BHAIRAHAWA	KATHMANDU	YA 164	DAILY	1645	1720	2220	79	SAAB 340B
BHADRAPUR	KATHMANDU	YA 122	DAILY	1250	1340	2950	109	SAAB 340B
NEPALGUNJ	KATHMANDU	YA 178	DAILY	1535	1635	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
	KATHMANDU	YA 104	DAILY	0800	0835	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	KATHMANDU	YA 106	DAILY	0805	0840	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	KATHMANDU	YA 108	DAILY	0930	1005	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	KATHMANDU	YA 114	DAILY	0935	1010	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	KATHMANDU	YA 110	DAILY	0940	1025	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	KATHMANDU	YA 116	DAILY	0945	1020	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
PHAPLU	KATHMANDU	YA182	1,3,5	1120	1155	1480	85	DHC-6/300
MEGHAULY	KATHMANDU	YA172	DAILY	1215	1245	1340	79	DHC-6/300
RUMJATAR	KATHMANDU	YA 222	2,4,7	1120	1155	1245	79	DHC-6/300
MANANG	KATHMANDU	YA 602	6	1145	1245	2995	122	DHC-6/300
TAPLEJUNG	KATHMANDU	YA 902	3	1150	1300	2695	164	DHC-6/300
BHARATPUR	KATHMANDU	YA 174	DAILY	1240	1305	1160	61	DHC-6/300
	KATHMANDU	YA 176	DAILY	1440	1505	1160	61	DHC-6/300
SIMARA	KATHMANDU	YA 202	DAILY	0905	0925	970	55	SAAB 340B
	KATHMANDU	YA142	DAILY	1410	1435	970	55	DHC-6/300
	KATHMANDU	YA144	DAILY	1540	1605	970	55	DHC-6/300

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IMAGE
97.9 FM

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

LOUISE ARBOUR, THE U.N. high commissioner for human rights, didn't come to Kathmandu to twist arms. On her arrival for a four-day visit last week, she said she was here to appeal to reason in a country where conflict seems to be taking its toll on people's sensitivities. But the attention of the United Nations and the presence of the high commissioner herself must have made the government uncomfortable.

UN human rights chief Arbour declared that 'a grave human rights crisis is afflicting Nepal.' More importantly, she warned both parties to the conflict, particularly the Maoists, that the world has 'entered an era of accountability.'

It had the opposite effect on rights activists, who got a big boost from her visit. Emboldened by her arrival, rights activists and victims' families openly pressed the government and security officials about missing people. The Arbour

visit came at a time when accusations that the security apparatus was targeting human rights activists were flying around.

On the final day of her visit, Arbour issued a stern warning to both sides to the conflict to play by the rulebook

RIGHTS WARNING



IN THE DOCKS: Chief of Army Staff Pyar Jung Thapa listens to Devi Sunwar, whose 15-year-old daughter was reportedly arrested by security forces last year in Kavre

problem is not visibly a large-scale humanitarian crisis, that doesn't diminish its gravity. There is a "hidden face" to it, Arbour noted. Some of those faces were evident during the visit.

At a reception hosted in Arbour's honor at the Yak and Yeti Hotel, Devi Sunwar, the mother of 15-year-old Maina who was reportedly arrested by security forces on Feb. 17 in Kavre, had an opportunity to hear directly about her daughter from the Chief of Army Staff Pyar Jung Thapa.

As Devi spoke with Thapa, tears rolled down her cheeks. "It's been almost a year," she said. "I haven't heard about my daughter." Devi and her husband have done all they could to find their daughter, but to no avail. They visited numerous Army and police offices and lodged an application with the National Human Rights Commission. They met the chief district officer and other regional officials. The officers at the Army post in Kavre, the Shanti Gate barracks, where the girl was reportedly taken for interrogation, deny having Maina in their custody. "I can only imagine what you are going through," Arbour told Devi. "I will do everything in my

capacity to know the whereabouts of your daughter."

Maina's case has already been front-page fare in *The Washington Post* after both Amnesty International and the Human Rights Watch documented it. "I want to know where my daughter is," Devi Sunwar told the Army chief. Thapa responded by empathizing with her sorrow and assured her of a response within a day or two.

Arbour hopes that her visit will increase the awareness the world over about the terrible plight of many Nepalis like the Sunwar family, caught in the midst of an armed conflict that has resulted in rampant abuse of basic human rights. She says very often the rest of the world doesn't wake up until it sees large-scale humanitarian displacement.

High Commissioner Arbour met Nepalis from all walks of life. During her meetings with government and security officials, she says, she was assured that they understand the need to uphold and defend the human rights of all Nepalis. "It is now critical for this understanding to be translated decisively into concrete action," her statement said pointedly. Arbour demanded that disap-

pearances, executions and torture immediately come to an end.

Her warning lived up to her reputation as a tough former prosecutor at the International Court in the Hague: "In every part of the world, political and military leaders who thought themselves immune from prosecution," she said, "are answering before the law for the gross human rights abuses they perpetrated."

In reply the Army chief, Thapa, says the Army is punishing those found guilty and that more than one hundred Army personnel have been disciplined. As for the Maoists? Arbour hopes some leaders within the insurgency will respond to her "very legitimate and reasonable argument."

Arbour knows that words are not enough. She said, "Effective and credible measures to bring to account those responsible for such acts must also be put in place now." She pointedly and publicly invited the government to sign the Rome treaty, which would make Nepal a party to the International Court of Justice.

Not arm-twisting, but pressure all the same. The high commissioner's visit should give heart to more than just the rights activists. **N**

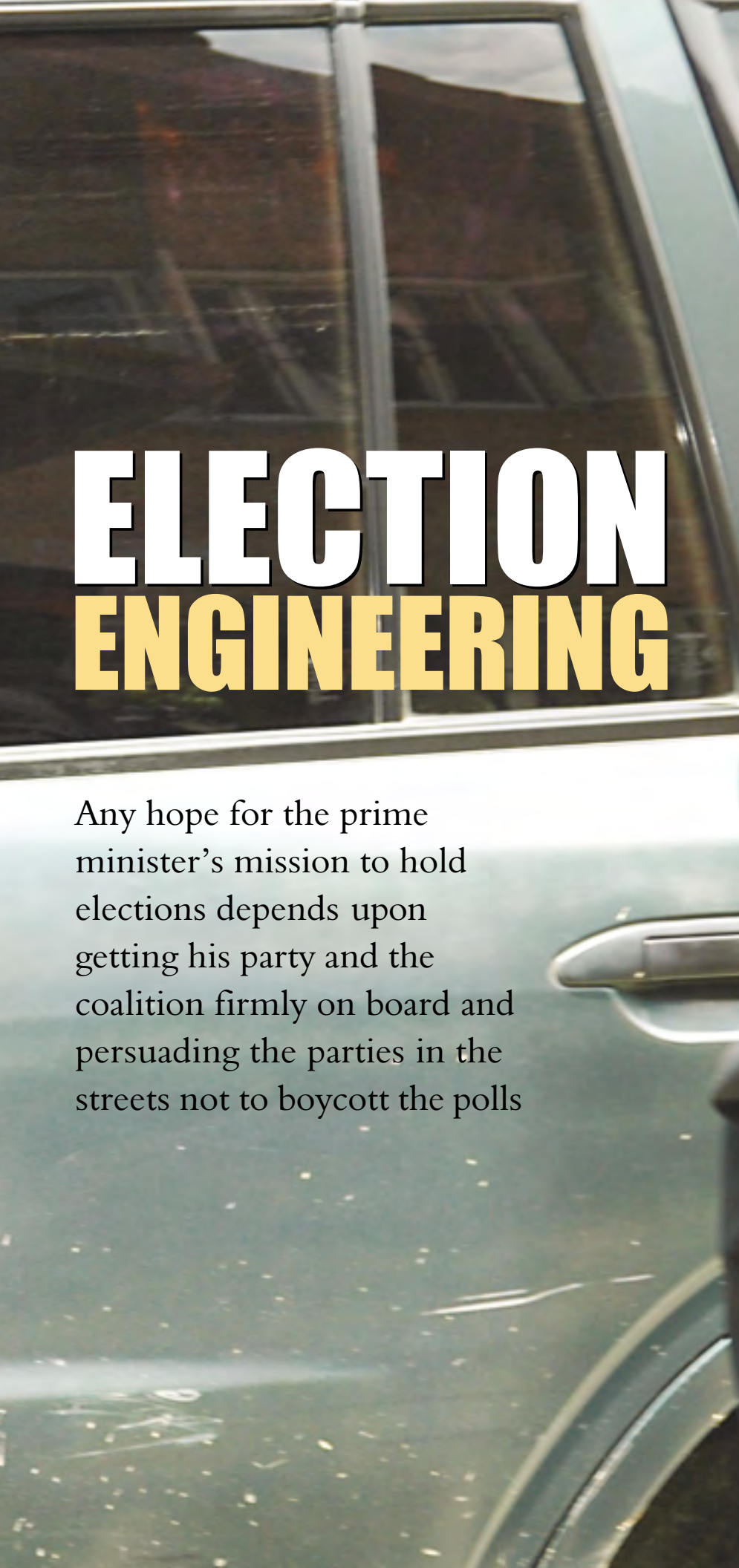


SOLIDARITY: Arbour speaks to local human rights workers. Also seen in the picture is Devi Sunwar

COVER STORY



NW/SAGAR SHRESTHA



ELECTION ENGINEERING

Any hope for the prime minister's mission to hold elections depends upon getting his party and the coalition firmly on board and persuading the parties in the streets not to boycott the polls

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

WHAT IF THEY CALLED AN ELECTION AND NOBODY CAME?

In Gokhunga VDC in Arghakhanchi in May 1981, the voting booth was ready, security was adequate and the polling officers were there on time to supervise voting. But no votes were cast: No one turned up. The whole population had boycotted the election. At the end, fearing that they would lose their jobs, the incumbent election officers cast a total of seven ballots themselves. Lesson: You can't engineer an election, even in times of peace and tight central authority.

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's coalition partners think he's trying to do just that: literally bulldoze those who oppose his one-man crusade to "salvage democracy." Even the election commissioners reportedly got a sharp warning from the prime minister: "I am the King's employee, and so are you. Therefore you should stick to the mandate given to us." The King has given Deuba until mid-April to hold elections.

The gist of Deuba's argument is that elections are the only way to restore democracy. Holding them will be incredibly difficult—former election commissioners have described a meaningful election as next to impossible under the circumstances.

Former Election Commissioner Ram Chandra Poudel says, "Three things are prerequisite for a meaningful election: Consensus among the parties, voters' preparedness and the government's resolve, which includes the election commission's ability to conduct polls."

"Election is our compulsion," says NC-D leader Narayan Khadka. "But the question is," he adds, "is the environment conducive for it?" He thinks not. Though Deuba got his election plans endorsed by his party early last month in the run-up to Jan.13 deadline given to the Maoists, there was considerable dissension. "It was the majority's decision," Khadka says. He adds with a meaningful tone that more than a month has elapsed since then. Khadka's doubts are shared by others, reflecting a deep division within the prime minister's own party.

The rift within the governing coalition is even deeper, endangering its continuity. The dissent has now risen to

COVER STORY

Cabinet level: Deputy Prime Minister Bharat Mohan Adhikari of the CPN-UML now downplays the possibility of holding elections. He described the prime minister's statements as Deuba's own, not those of the government. The deputy prime minister is pressing his own proposal to pursue peace options

vigorously within the Cabinet as a counterweight to the prime minister's election proposal. Adhikari's remarks pose a serious problem for the coalition and they must have dampened the prime minister's optimism that the UML will accept his plan.

Deuba had pinned his hopes on the UML's last official word on elections: that it endorsed them as the last resort, if all options for peace were exhausted. The UML will have a chance to reconsider that position: "Our party will make a decision soon," says UML leader Bhim Rawal, who resigned in early January



SS/MN

Nepal's gag on his party cadres on speaking out about elections backfired and UML leadership is under pressure from party workers to quit the government.



Former Election Commissioner
Ram Chandra Poudel

from the High Level Peace Committee accusing the committee of failing to prioritize the peace process. The party is under pressure from its grassroots members to quit the coalition. A gathering of regional party leaders at UML headquarters in Balkhu has come down heavily on the party leadership, both in and outside the government for failing to live up to the commitments made in the 43-point Common Minimum Program and for acting against the interest of the common people.

“The election is a bombshell,” says NC-D’s Narayan Khadka, “that has the potential to bitterly polarize the mainstream forces against each other.” Experts say that the critical factor to successful elections during conflict is strong commitment to them both by the parties and the voters. So far the prime minister’s ef-

orts have failed to muster that commitment within his party or the coalition. “The public won’t participate in the elections,” said UML leader KP Oli in an interview. He’s not the only one who thinks so. People are going to think first about their security, and there is every reason to believe that the security situation will become more chaotic in the run-up to the election. Army officers don’t rule out the possibility of significant violence. Lack of security dampens

the prospect of high voter turnout, especially outside the valley.

Voters are bound to wonder how safe they would be: Even chief district officers have been abducted. Moreover, voters would want to have security for a prolonged period, not just while the polling places are open. Once the election is over, voters would have to live with fear of Maoist reprisal for having supported the “old regime.” If a Maoist decree can keep people from voting, they can ruin the poll’s legitimacy.

Voters are bound to wonder how safe they would be: Even chief district officers have been abducted. Moreover, voters would want to have security for a prolonged period, not just while the polling places are open.

During the 1997 parliamentary elections, recalls former election commissioner Ram Chandra Poudel, at one polling station in Jajarkot no one voted. Voters had thronged to the polling place, but a notice posted outside the booth by the Maoists turned them away. The notice said: "The first one to vote will be

killed." This time the Maoists may not issue such gentle notices; they could bomb or burn polling stations even before elections are held, once the government's plans are announced.

An observer who recently traveled to Rolpa, Salyan and Jajarkot says that security forces stay mostly within their

barracks in the district headquarters. He questions what sort of election the government can hold in such circumstances. The prime minister has a ready answer.

Deuba and those close to him take solace from the elections held in Afghanistan and Iraq. They argue that if the violence-torn Iraq can hold the elections, Nepal can hold them too. Experts say that if the majority of the population is prepared to vote, it makes sense to hold elections, even if a minority would boycott or be unable to cast ballots.

Without strong support from voters, a boycott of elections by the parties in the streets could also leave the resulting government illegitimate. "It could be like the polls organized by General Ershad in Bangladesh in 1986," says Mathura Prasad Shrestha, who was an observer in that election. The opposition boycotted the elections, and Ershad eventually had to resign.

The prime minister says that elections are the last chance to restore Nepal's eroding democracy and that elections are possible if the mainstream parties come together. But so far all the prime minister's resolve to that end has counted for little. Despite his tough exterior, Deuba must be profoundly uncomfortable about his party's dissension and his coalition partners' lack of support amid their own internal divisions. Even the outspoken Minister of Communications and Information, Mohammed Mohsin, once a key proponent of elections, is reticent now. "I have no comment about elections," he told Nation Weekly. "Let the parties in the government come up with their official decision first."

The prime minister knows that successful elections would brighten his future, and he may believe that even a bad election would save his reputation. Failing to hold elections at all will mark him with the "incompetent" label, perhaps for life. High enough stakes indeed for Deuba; no wonder he is so resolved. But he needs to remember that bridges are as much a part of engineering as bulldozers. No one would think him the lesser democrat if he admitted the enormity of the task ahead and asked for help. **N**

NC-D's Narayan Khadka thinks election will bitterly divide the mainstream political forces





SARA SHNEIDERMAN

THE OTHER NEPALI POLITICS

A new agitation has started for the future of Darjeeling, which has the largest Nepali-speaking population outside Nepal

**BY SARA SHNEIDERMAN
IN DARJEELING**

KATHMANDU IS NOT THE only Nepali-speaking capital awash with talk of strikes and elections these days. The last few weeks have seen the same issues grabbing headlines just across the border in the town of Darjeeling, the capital of West Bengal's Darjeeling district and the seat of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, the DGHC.

The elusive DGHC chairman, Subash Ghisingh, made his first public appearance in three years on Jan. 10 to a crowd of over 30,000 in the town's central Chowk Bazaar. He spoke against the DGHC elections set by West Bengal's state government for February and called for a 72-hour strike to mark the

beginning of a new agitation for Darjeeling's future.

With a population of over 1.7 million that is overwhelmingly of Nepali origin, Darjeeling has the largest and most politically active Nepali-speaking population outside Nepal. The area first claimed international attention in the mid-1980s when Ghisingh, then the party secretary of the GNLF—the Gorkha National Liberation Front—led a violent uprising against the West Bengal and Indian governments to demand a separate state. Gorkhaland, the dream state, would remain a member of the Indian union, but would be run by and for people of Nepali origin, who would implement policies appropriate to the hill areas in which they lived.

The dream never became reality. In 1988 Ghisingh agreed to end the agitation in exchange for the creation of an autonomous council—the DGHC. This was the first of its type in India, soon to be followed by similar setups in Ladakh and other areas. According to the official GNLF position, the creation of the DGHC was never intended to be a permanent solution to the problem, but rather an interim step that would provide day-to-day governance while a long-term plan was hashed out in tripartite meetings between DGHC councillors, West Bengal state officials and representatives of the central government.

But over 15 years later, not much has changed. Frustration with the DGHC's inability to work as a full-fledged governing body has grown from all sides.

GNLF partisans who support the DGHC claim that it has been ineffective because it remains largely tethered to decisions made at the state and central levels and has not been granted a realis-



tic budget to implement the policies it makes. At the same time, opposition political leaders, who have recently banded together to form the PDF, the People's Democratic Forum, say that Ghisingh is a paranoid and corrupt megalomaniac. That he accepted the inadequate terms of the DGHC's creation because they gave him personal power, but that he has done little to develop it into the democratically governed body it should have been. Still more conspiracy theories abound about how the state and central governments colluded to dupe Ghisingh into accepting DGHC as an interim step, while never intending to take the Gorkhaland talks any further.

As one local journalist put it, "The big question is: Did Ghisingh know that he had brought a dud?" In other words, was he guilty of shaking hands behind the backs of the ordinary citizens who had supported him in order to set up a power structure that kept him at the top,

but that he knew could never deliver at the bottom?

Local opinion is divided on this question, but it seems clear that Ghisingh is a mastermind at manipulating public sentiment. When asked who they would vote for if an election were held tomorrow, most locals told this reporter that they would still cast their lot with Ghisingh despite the DGHC's inability to deliver. Why? Because Ghisingh was the first to articulate the suppressed feelings of Indian Nepali—or Gorkhali, as Ghisingh prefers to call it—nationalism that almost every worker in the tea plantations and every porter on the street identifies with, and that initial loyalty remains.

But Ghisingh claims that there are other kinds of masterminds at work who are making it impossible for such

an election as those announced by the West Bengal government, to be held. The primary purpose of the Jan. 10 Chowk Bazaar rally was to disclose an Oct. 6 letter to the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. In it, Ghisingh accuses the central government of not adequately investigating the murders of three DGHC councillors, allegedly orchestrated by a shady network of "masterminds, linkmen and their big Bosses," who are supported by "International Spying Agencies" based in North Bengal.

Until the murders of Rudra Pradhan (1999), C.K. Pradhan (2002) and Prakash Theeng (2003) are fully investigated by the Central Bureau of Intelligence, says Ghisingh, DGHC elections cannot be held because security cannot be guaran-



CONTROVERSIAL: Chairman Subash Ghisingh

SARA SHNEIDERMAN



POPULAR BASE: Many in Darjeeling are still loyal to Ghisingh and his party, the GNLF



SARA SHNEIDERMAN



SARA SHNEIDERMAN

teed for the candidates and their parties.

With elections scheduled every five years and the last round held in 1998, polls are long overdue. Ghisingh has delayed them twice already, each time citing security reasons. This is understandable to an extent, since he also survived an assassination attempt in 2001—which he gave as an excuse for ending his participation in the last round of tripartite talks regarding Gorkhaland, which were ongoing at that time. But the tone of his letter and his Jan. 10 speech were distinctly paranoid. Even the circular inviting internal GNLF participants to the rally stated explicitly at the bottom, “For security reasons all concerned are hereby directed not to enter the meeting Hall with personal arms and ammunitions.”

Many think that the security scare is just a ploy to avoid facing an election that might for the first time call into question Ghisingh’s right to the DGHC chairman’s throne. Although it is unlikely that he would lose, given his con-

tinued popular base, an election campaign would give the newly strengthened PDF opposition coalition, led by Madan Tamang, the opportunity to expose Ghisingh’s shortcomings and propose an alternative platform. The PDF claims that Ghisingh has sold out, abusing common people’s genuine aspirations for Gorkhaland to achieve his own ends. They advocate a return to the Gorkhaland campaign, but through non-violent methods. And when it comes to the murders, many fingers point at Ghisingh and his cronies, since all three of the councillors killed were in fact opposition party members. Even a 10-year-old child said, “Everyone knows who killed them: Ghisingh himself.”

Besides the demands for a CBI investigation, many of Ghisingh’s requests of the central and state governments are reasonable ones. He seeks a redistricting of Lok Sabha constituencies so that Darjeeling would receive proportional representation (the district currently has the same number of MPs as Sikkim despite having over three times the popu-

lation); a revision of financial policies so that DGHC would control its own coffers more effectively; the declaration of Darjeeling as a tribal area under India’s constitution; the full transfer of infrastructural development departments (such as Mines, Water Resources, and Land Reform) from the West Bengal state government to the DGHC; and the development of Bagdogra as an international airport in order to boost the all-important tourism economy in Darjeeling.

So what does all this mean for the average Indian citizen of Nepali origin? Most Darjeeling residents seem tired of the political intrigue and more concerned about how the town’s water and electricity supply systems can be modernized to avoid the crippling shortages and blackouts that dominate daily life. One of the PDF’s main charges of corruption against the GNLF is that the DGHC has received Indian Rs.160 million of funding since 1988 to revamp the municipal waterworks, but there is no evidence of any such work ever having been conducted. In his Oct. 6 letter to the Indian prime minister, Ghisingh himself claims that the limitations set by the central and state governments have prevented the DGHC from becoming anything more than a “micro-development agency.” But one glance at Darjeeling’s plumbing and potholed roads makes one wonder whether the DGHC has even been able to work effectively on this level. In the swirl of Gorkhaland politics, one hopes that the people get a fresh drop to drink. **N**



SARA SHNEIDERMAN



TAMING AJIGARA TAL

BY DEEPENDRA JOSHI
IN KAPILVASTU

WAIST-DEEP IN THE murky waters of Ajigara Tal, the women of Ajigara and Bhilmi village development committees in Kapilvastu are lined up, extracting the fronds of the medicinal plant, *hadjod* (*Equisetum ramosissimum*). It is a hot afternoon, and it can take days of backbreaking labor to extract this increasingly rare plant. To take their minds off their hard labor, the women are singing and trading jokes—eliciting loud, wicked laughter that resonates across the wetland.

Hadjod has been used as a paste to treat fractures for hundreds of years in these villages. But as its wetland habitat degrades and is lost, there is growing concern that the plant and the traditional healing practices surrounding it will die out.

IUCN Nepal has been supporting a wetland conservation project in Ajigara

since August 2003. The project is aimed at developing local capacity to manage this important natural resource in a sustainable manner for better livelihoods and resource conservation.

According to Narayan Poudel, chairman of the Lumbini Kapilvastu Bachao Abhiyaan, an NGO that works with IUCN Nepal to implement the project, there has been an upsurge in local interest concerning the efforts to restore Ajigara's habitat. The community realizes the rapid loss of the resource; they also see the promises of local collaborative efforts. The locals have formed a community-based organization and registered with the District Administration Office for the sustainable management of Ajigara wetland.

The campaign has successfully incorporated socio-economic and ecological issues. The locals now want to restore an ecologically important marshy area wedged between Ajigara and Bhilmi VDCs, 20 kilometers southwest of

Taulihawa, the headquarters of Kapilvastu.

Through its local partners, IUCN Nepal has facilitated various wetland conservation awareness activities such as researches, survey and participatory demarcation of wetland boundaries and development of community action plans. It also clarified the legal tenure of the wetland and convinced the owners—the local VDCs—to hand over management responsibilities to the community-based organization.

The 17 hectares of wetland are a valuable in-situ repository of two wild rice species, *Oryza rufipogon* and *O. nivara*, out of four species reported in Nepal. The presence of these species of wild rice continues to be the invaluable source of new genetic material for developing disease resistance. In addition to providing critical habitats for over 42 bird species, the wetland also supports the globally threatened Sarus crane (*Grus antigone*), as well as a number of reptiles and indigenous fish.



“Our dream is to see the wetland as we remember it 20 years ago,” says Abdul Rahim Manihar, a local farmer. “The people will support this because they realize how important the wild rice is for the whole village. It’s not just their resource; it’s for their children too. No one wants to see the wild rice habitat disappear. We want to conserve our wetland and the rice for all time.”

The community approach has been found to be effective in managing and conserving the Ajigara wetland. “In fact, now that the communities feel a sense

of ownership, the prospects are very promising,” says Modraj Dotel, chief district officer of Kapilvastu. “It has demonstrated to communities, the local government and policy makers how successful the community approach to natural resource management can be.”

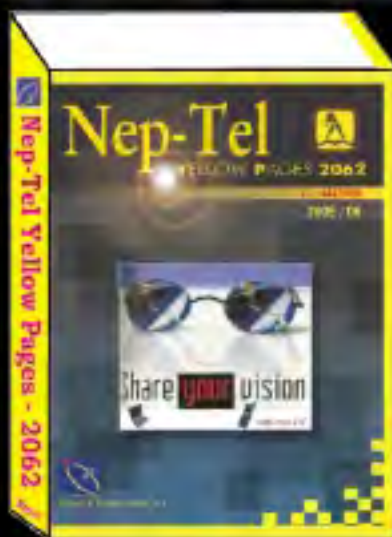
The secretary of the Ajigara wetland conservation committee, Rijesh Kumar Shukla, says the community participation holds the key to the sustainability of the project.

The most encouraging part of the Ajigara gene pool conservation is the tremendous shift in attitude the

project has brought about among the locals. From bleak fishing communities south of the wetland to the deeply rural people in lush Karma village, the roughly 390 households of the project area display a near-uniform enthusiasm and a new sense of confidence.

The opportunity to do something about the degrading local environment has raised hopes and expectations. The idea of belonging to a group entrusted with the task of renovating the wetland has conveyed a new sense of ownership in these two VDCs. **N**

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URGENT LESSONS FOR NEPAL

Reconciliation is an integral part of building lasting peace in a conflict-ridden society. It is a goal as well as a process.

BY BISHNU RAJ UPRETI

ANY ARMED CONFLICT induces deep divisions in a society. It creates severe negative psychological impact such as fear, agony, empathy, frustration, hopelessness and feelings of revenge in individuals who are the victims of the conflict. Proper understanding of conflict victims provides a basis for reconciliation. The question concerns on defining the victim.

In this context, the United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victim of Crime and Abuse of Power and the U.N. General Assembly Resolution 40/34 of Nov. 29, 1985 defines victims as “persons who, individually or collectively, have suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic losses or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights, through acts or omissions that do not yet constitute violations of national criminal laws but of internationally recognised norms relating to human rights.” If we use this definition of a victim in the context of the

armed conflict here, hundreds of thousands of Nepalis are conflict victims. Every day we come across new cases of killings, disappearance, torture, rape, forced donations, threats of attack and arrests and so on. Peace is a distant dream. The conflict actors say they are not anti-peace, but people hardly believe what they say.

The armed conflict has seriously undermined the very notion of democracy, a system of managing differences without recourse to violence. Democracy and reconciliation are intertwined in shaping a peaceful societal system, particularly in a war-torn society. In Nepal none of the parties to the conflict is too worried about establishing a link between reconciliation and democracy in a bid to restore peace. Conflict scholars such as David Bloomfield, Tersea Barnes and Luc Huyse, in highlighting the relationship between democracy and reconciliation, argue that while a democratic compromise produces solutions regarding issues in conflict, reconciliation addresses the relationships between those who will have to implement those solutions. Hence, reconciliation

strengthens democracy by developing the working relations necessary to successfully practice it.

However, reconciliation, it seems, has neither been properly understood nor is there a serious attempt to use it as a democratic exercise in building peace. Reconciliation is an integral part of building lasting peace in the conflict-ridden society. In essence, reconciliation is a goal as well as a process of achieving peace. At times, the victims of a conflict feel that reconciliation ignores their sufferings and provides an excuse to the offenders. But this will only be so if the concept behind reconciliation process is misunderstood by those involved as only a goal—to forgive and forget—and not a combination of both process and goal.

But the most important aspect of the reconciliation is its attempts to address justice, healing and truth. As reconciliation is a voluntary process, no one can impose it. The victims themselves acknowledge, remember and learn from the past and find ways to live in the future, rebuilding relations and expanding hope. It is a process in which changes with reconciliatory underpinnings taken place in individuals—“forgive but not forget.” Reconciliation is not an excuse for impunity.

How is reconciliation possible in an escalated conflict such as ours? It might be interpreted as a post-conflict issue, starting only after a settlement is reached between the Maoists and the government. This argument is only a half-truth. In fact reconciliation is an ongoing process of peace building. Nepal has to start reconciliation efforts immediately to prevent the triggering of the escalation of the conflict. If the state is not concerned with the victims of the conflict, the frustration of the victims can turn into revenge and retaliation that contribute to further escalation. The government interprets the provision of temporary rehabilitation at Dhakaltar confinement camp of those Maoists who surrender as an important achievement in rehabilitation and reconciliation. But in fact, it is neither rehabilitation nor reconciliation.

If we examine the efforts made by the governmental and non-governmental sectors in reconciliation, there are no deliberate attempts and plans. In fact, all peace-building approaches seem “reconciliation-blind.” How can you anticipate durable peace without rebuilding trust, healing animosity and improving the relationships? In pointing out the importance of reconciliation as a means of peace-building, Desmond Tutu, chairperson of the very famous Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa once said: “There is no handy roadmap for reconciliation, no simple prescription for healing the wounds of the divi-



sion of a society ... creating trust and understanding between former enemies is a supremely difficult challenge. It is however, an essential one to address in the process of building lasting peace. Examining the painful past, acknowledging it and understanding it, and above all transcending it altogether, is the best way to guarantee that it does not and cannot happen again.”

Truth, justice and reconciliation are strongly interrelated. If we revisit the history of conflict-ridden countries, many inquiry commissions have been established for “truth and reconciliation.” Revealing truth and seeking accuracy about the past is extremely important to shape the reconciliation process. Seeking truth, giving justice to the victims and making offenders accountable for their wrongs can heal the wounds of war and re-establish relations. There is no standard method or universal model of reconciliation that anyone just picks

up and applies. It is context-specific, depends on the actors involved and is an evolving process.

If Nepal wants to use reconciliation as one of the means of conflict transformation and peace-building, the following basic principles suggested by David Bloomfield and his colleagues can be useful:

- *Begin early, when attitudes are most receptive to change and challenge.*
- *Stick to the commitments, and deal with the hard issues: They will only get harder with time.*
- *Give it sufficient time. It cannot be done in haste.*
- *Be transparent about the goals, the difficulties, the timeframe and resources.*
- *Create an environment that replaces fear with non-violent co-existence, which consequently leads to the building of confidence, overcoming of mistrust and the development of empathy*
- *Initiate the reconciliation process not only at of individual level, but also with groups and communities as a whole.*
- *Provide immediate justice to the victims.*
- *Repair both the physical and psychological damage inflicted on the victims of war.*

Experiences of Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Guatemala, South Africa, Mozambique and Cambodia demonstrate that reconciliation is an effective means of conflict transformation and peace-building. It enables victims and perpetrators to get on with their lives and live in a society; it helps to establish political dialogue and the sharing of power at local levels. Nepal needs urgent attention in initiating reconciliation as a part of the conflict transformation strategy. If we do not take this issue seriously now, we will face more complications later. **N**



CITY ThisWeek

EVENTS



Martini Mania

This February, Hotel Yak and Yeti serves you luscious martini. Martini is a bartending mystery. The martini cocktail has no single inventor like in the case of any masterpiece. One of the oldest legends to the mystery of the birth of Martini takes us back to the 19th century at a hotel in San Francisco, when a traveler on his way to Martinez, California, asked the hotel's barman to prepare something special. The unusual drink in a small glass with an olive dropped into it was called the "Martinez cocktail," now known as the "martini." The traditional recipe of martini contains 60ml of chilled gin or vodka with a dash of dry vermouth, shaken or stirred over ice. There will be off-beat creations using flavoring and coloring agents to mix and match the moods of every individual. The quest for the perfect martini continues. Martini bars abound and the popularity seems to grow with each generation around the world. Enjoy the succulent flavor of this cosmopolitan drink at the Hotel Yak and Yeti this winter. Till Feb. 12. Time: noon to midnight.

ART EXHIBITION

The Solitude of Color

Binod Pradhan, an artist with more than 13 years of experience, exhibits his new range of paintings. Pradhan uses strong basic colors to express his emotions. Forms are featured in-between a variation of colors that creates a kind of zing in his paintings. Combination of solid colors, decorative forms and lines display the artist's expressions and nuances of his style. The artist enjoys painting cityscapes, temples and the life of Nepali people immersed in daily chores. He likes abstraction and has evolved a personal style to depict his subjects, which mirrors his individuality. Cultural and architectural perspectives are more open in his paintings. His recent series pays more attention to details in the form of stupas, temples and streets with the dingy colors. At the Siddhartha Art Gallery. Date: Feb. 2-18. For information: 422-0735.



Trip of all Times

In Rs.5999 for Nepalis and \$199 for expatriates, the Jomsom Mountain Resort provides two nights and three days accommodations. The price will also include roundabout airfare from Pokhara to Jomsom, daily buffet breakfast and dinner, pick up and drop from the airport to resort and a walking tour of the Marpha village in Jomsom. For information: 449-7569.

Margarita Night

Dwarika's Hotel presents the Margarita Night serving Churasqueria BBQ, Latin American Delicados and refreshing margaritas. Also enjoy the Latin beats by Abhaya and the Steam Injuns. Every last Friday of the month. Price:Rs.799. Time: 7p.m. onwards. Happy hours from 4p.m. - 7p.m. everyday at Fusion Bar. For information: 4479-488.

P U B L I S H E D



District Development PROFILE of NEPAL 2004

COVERAGE

Divided mainly on three parts, the publication covers

i. National ii. Districts iii. Municipalities

1130 Pages

District Section includes-

- District Maps /Development Indicators of Each District /VDC data on Population & Infrastructure /District wise database on-
- Topography, Demography, Household Characteristics, Economic Activities, Social Characteristics, Agriculture, Irrigation, Forest, Co-operatives, NGO's, Transportation, Communication, Energy System, Education, Health, Drinking Water, Gender, Children and many more
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Night For Little Heroes

Celebrating life and Lhosar, musicians from the east and the west join hands to support sick, destitute kids in the hospitals of



Kathmandu. Funds go to the Ganjala Outreach, a new initiative by Ganjala Children's Home. Date: Feb. 12. Time: 6:30p.m. Venue: 1905, Kantipath. Artists: Kutumba, McTwisters, Vijay Lama, Willow, Ganjala Troupe and the Hyolmo Sherpa Dance Group. Price: Rs.1000 for singles and Rs.1750 for couples, including a cocktail. For information: 9841350008 (David Tashi Lama) and 9841348563 (Lucia de Vries.)

Malaysia Dream Holiday



ONGOING

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Seasons Special

Exotic Thai, sizzling tandoori, traditional Nepali and Italian encounter daily for lunch at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-la. Price: Rs.450 including a bottle of soft drink or mineral water. For information: 441-2999.

Krishnarpan

The Nepali specialty restaurant at Dwarika's Hotel offers fine dining ceremonial cuisine. Four to 16 course ceremonial

meal. Open for lunch and dinner. For information: 4479-488.

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 sarangi played by Bharat Nepali with a well-blended mix of western tunes played by The Cloud Walkers. Every Wednesday. Time: 6

p.m. onwards. For information: 449-1234.

Winter Splash

Want to sweat in the winter? Go and experience Shahahshah's indoor heated pool and relax in the steam and sauna. Price: Rs.350 per person. Exclusive ladies' day on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Time: 7 a.m. - 7 p.m.

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Hotel Radisson features an array of stunning new BBQ combinations. BBQ Dinner every Wednesday and Friday with happy hours from 6-8p.m. Also BBQ Lunch every Saturday and Sunday with happy hours from 12- 3p.m. Special offer: Drinks, buy one get one free.

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SHRINKING REMITTANCES

The flow of money from Nepalis abroad is drying up. It could get worse.

BY INDRA ADHIKARI

With tourism down, industries weak and exports off, remittance money sent home by Nepali workers abroad has been more than a silver lining: It has kept the economy afloat. Not any more, according to figures from the first three months of the current fiscal year. Remittances from July to September last year decreased by more than 16 percent, in stark contrast to 80 percent growth during the whole of the previous fiscal year. According to the Nepal Rastra Bank, Rs.2 billion less came in during those three months from last year.

The weak economy had come to depend on the remittances and had expected them to continue their sharp growth. That doesn't look likely anymore. Economists point out to a multitude of factors that could have caused the decrease.

The first is the weak U.S. dollar. The low exchange rate has shrunk the rupee value of remittances made in dollars and many other currencies. At its peak, one dollar sent home was worth almost Rs.78. This fiscal year the rate has never exceeded Rs.72 to the dollar. Analysts

say that workers have been holding their earnings abroad rather than sending them home, hoping that the rate will improve.

Recent events at home seem to have affected remittances too. The Sept. 1 riots following the killing of 12 Nepalis in Iraq apparently slowed the remittance rates. During the Dashain and Tihar that followed, the flow also decreased, a major surprise, as this is normally a high point of the year. There is a lot of concern that remittances during the post-holiday period, always slow, will decline further.

If that happens, the poor will be the most affected. Remittances drive the rural economy. Most of the money sent home goes to the countryside, significantly improving the living standards of the people. Jagannath Adhikari of Martin Chautari, who has been studying remittances in the rural areas for the last 10 years, says people in remote areas are the hardest hit by decreasing remittances. Many families in these villages have at least one family member abroad and depend on the money they earn for household expenditures. Adhikari says that 60 to 70 percent of the money earned abroad is spent by rural families in Nepal to buy food. The

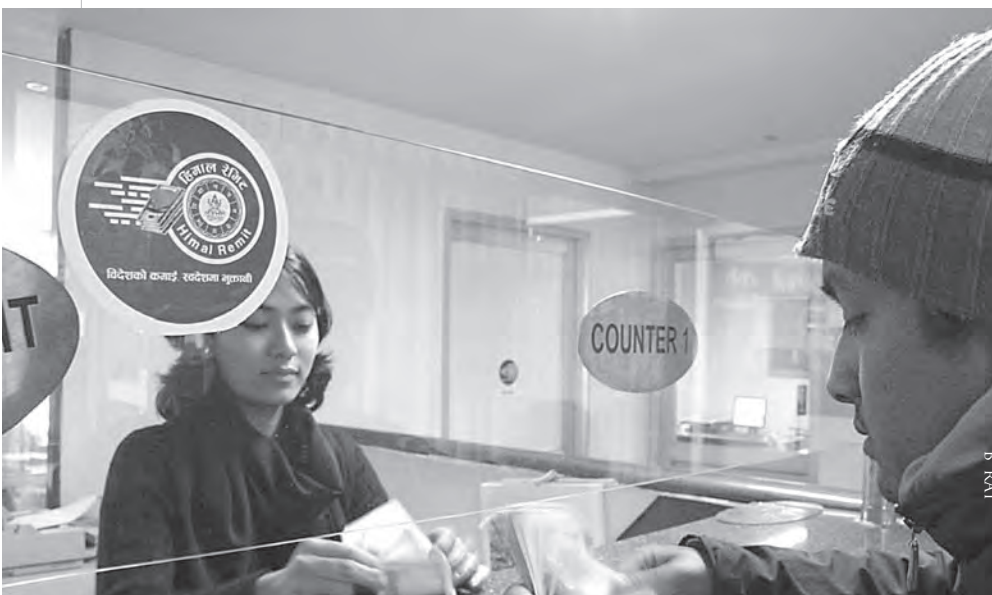
remainder goes into buying luxury goods, educating children and in increasing the fixed assets of the family.

The districts of Kaski, Syangja, Parbat, Lamjung, Gulmi and Baglung are most affected, according to Adhikari, by the decreasing remittances: Nearly half of the the total inflow goes to these and a few other surrounding districts in central and western Nepal. If the decline continues, the people in these rural districts will face a major food crisis. The families depend upon the remittances to sustain themselves for at least half-a-year because their farm produce can feed them only for half the year.

Remittances through unofficial channels, put at two to 20 times the officially documented flow, are also down. Workers abroad use the *hundi* system or send cash through people coming back to Nepal on leave or after termination of their contract, avoiding tax and transaction charges but taking the risk that the money will be discovered during security and customs checks. Nepalis in India—a million or so of them, about a quarter of all Nepalis working abroad—often choose to send cash with people heading home, because the porous border makes the risk of discovery low.

These workers in India are unaffected by exchange rates of the U.S. dollar and have an easy way to get the money home. But even then rural areas—from where these workers mostly go—is seeing a drying up of money sent in. “People going abroad from these areas are reluctant to send their hard-earned money, since they are hardest hit by the Maoist insurgency,” says Suman Neupane, a senior manager at the Himalayan Bank. “After the family debt has been cleared, most workers prefer to keep the money safe with them.” That’s also true for Nepalis working in countries like the United States, Japan, Germany and other European countries.

With no sign of peace at home and the dollar still weak, the flow of money could dry up further. **N**



Puppy Love

A saucy bark in favor of our four-footed friends

BY KUNAL LAMA

Since mature female dogs come into heat at least twice a year, it's very common to see miserable bundles of fur padding about despairingly in the streets of Kathmandu. My heart hurts every time I see a little puppy, unkempt and injured, desperate for food and shelter. It's not possible, however, to rescue all of them. But last August, I did rescue one.

I'd seen this pup running up and down my street for two weeks, artfully dodging taxis, the kicks of shopkeepers and the bites of bigger dogs. He had brown-yellow coat, black-tipped furry ears and bushy tail, beautiful kohl-lined eyes, a dark muzzle and long legs, the typical look of a Tibetan mastiff crossbred with a German shepherd. He somehow caught my eye, so much so that every time I heard him yelp, I would rush to the window to check if a vehicle had hit him or someone was being horrid to him. Then he started entering my compound, aiming for the rubbish no doubt, but also to rest and hide from the crazy and hurtful world outside. One day I found him curled up in front of my door. He lay there quietly, watching me with big eyes. He made no attempt to ingratiate himself with me; neither did he try to run away. It was as if he was offering friendship but, at the same time, would not hold it against me if I did not respond. There was something noble about him, a feeling reinforced when he allowed himself to be collared and leashed and, instead of gulping the food placed in front of him, ate slowly and carefully. For reasons unknown, the Hindi film song "Jimmy, aaja, aaja" kept playing in my head.

How was I to know that within days, regularly fed, cleaned of fleas and ticks and with plenty of people fawning over him, Jimmy would turn into a cheeky, playful pup, full of vim and vigor? In the few months he's been with me, he has chewed several pairs of slippers and shoes, a chair, a couple of cushions, my favorite pajamas, a scarf, an expensive pair of sunglasses, a whole jar of Vaseline and a 1,000-rupee note. I've woken up in the middle of the night only to tread on his excreted dinner, spending several shivering minutes ridding myself of the mess and smell. He drives me mad barking senselessly every time

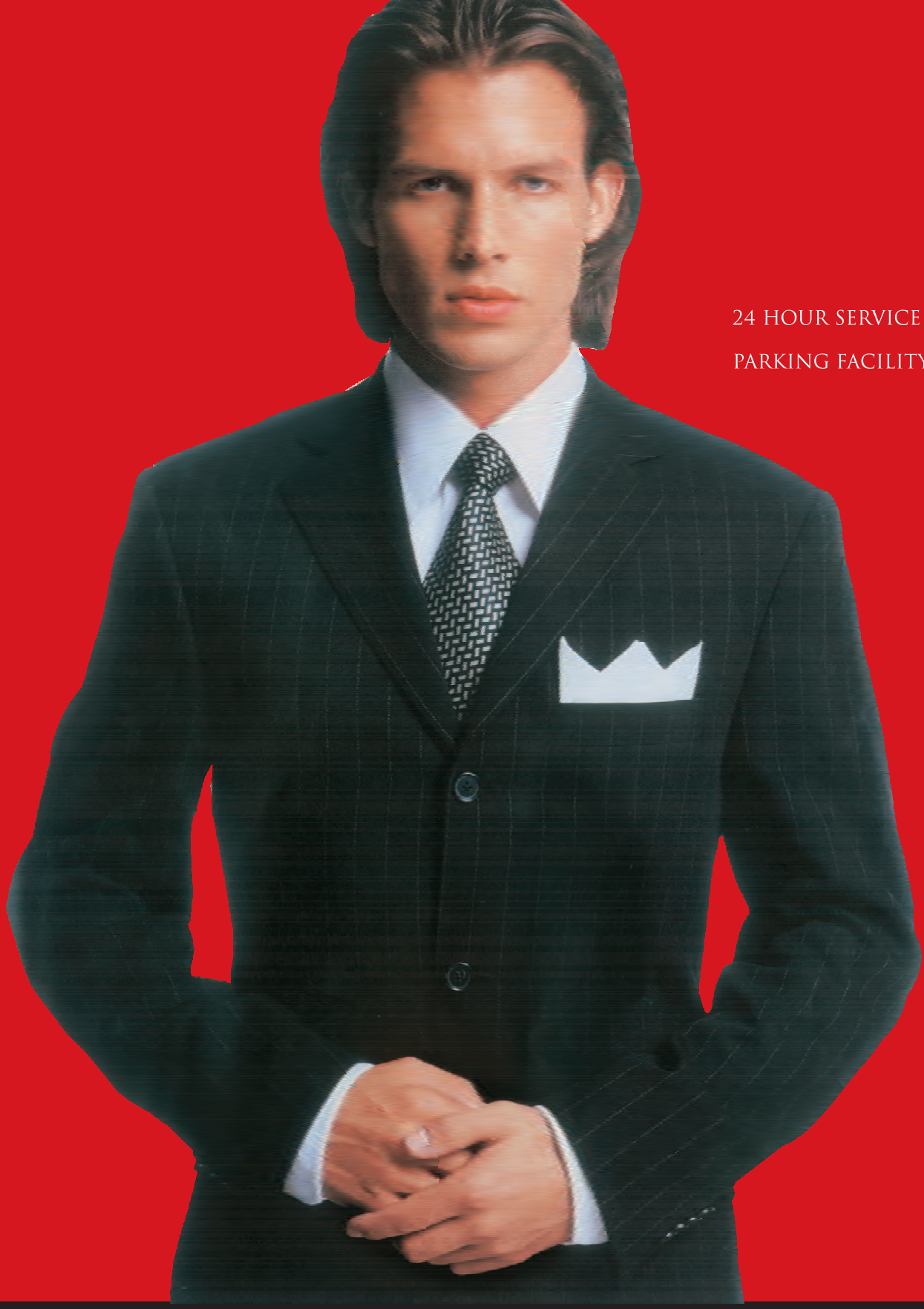
the neighbors' dogs do. Perhaps I should be thankful he doesn't howl like a Siberian husky or yodel like an African basenji! He sleeps on my bed, the sofa and on the shower tray, and wakes me up in the morning with a big slurp on my face, then immediately begins to nip my exposed extremities. Basically, he has succeeded in taking over my flat and life.

Members of *Canis familiaris*, dogs as we know them, are related to wolves, foxes and jackals. Humans have actively intervened in the evolution of man's best friend through the most rudimentary form of genetic engineering, breeding to accentuate instincts that were evident from their earliest encounters with us, creating 400 distinct breeds as need or desire arose. They have lived with us for over 12,000 years as hunting companions, protectors, objects of scorn or adoration and as friends, giving rise to many an idiom reflecting this complex and historic relationship. When something abysmally destructs or is ruined, we say, "gone to the dogs", as in "Nepal has gone to the dogs." Of course, one can then say of Nepalis that they "lead a dog's life," a life of misery or of miserable subservience. This happens when we "wake a sleeping dog," that is some person or influence that is for the present quiet but, if aroused, will create a disturbance. Oh, hell, why didn't anyone tell us this before October 4, 2002? It would've been wiser if we had "let sleeping dogs lie," but now it's a bit too late, I'm afraid. We can, however, look forward to the future, albeit slightly tremulously, after the Maoists have been van-

quished; the army has withdrawn to the barracks; fair elections have been held; parliamentary democracy has been restored; the principles—written AND inferred—of constitutional monarchy have been actively followed; and the nine elephant calves born in the country's only elephant breeding



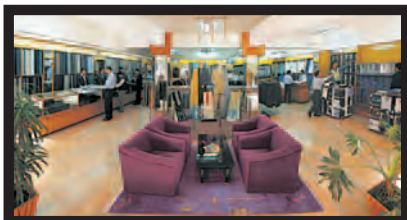
center in the Royal Chitwan National Park have been named so that their training program can commence immediately, when, like "every dog has his day," we, too, will enjoy a time of action, a period of power or influence. Then, "like a dog with two tails," very pleased and delighted, we can, "like a dog's dinner," strut about the country dressed or arranged in an ostentatiously smart or flashy manner. Unless, as fate will have it, it "rains cats and dogs" on our parade. **N**



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TELEVISION



SS/WN

The Making of a Superstar

Nepal 1 could be as big a winner as the “Nepal Star” finalists

BY BISWAS BARAL

Nepal’s version of the widespread “Idol” TV talent shows recently premiered on Nepal 1. If the format does as well here as in other countries,

it will dominate its timeslot and generate huge advertising revenue. The prospects look good: Huge numbers of people turned up for the show’s audition.

Thousands lined outside the Bluestar Hotel in Tripureshwore on the morning of Jan. 9 to try out for “Nepal Star,” a reality television show modeled on “Pop Idol.” That show, the forerunner in the Idol franchise of television shows, premiered in Britain in 2001 and has re-

mained on the top of the television charts since. The show’s format—it’s a talent show that focuses on the contestants and judges as much as on the contest—has caught the imagination of audiences around the world. The U.S. version, “American Idol,” plays on local cable and has a huge following; recently India got its own show, “Indian Idol.” Twenty similar shows have been licensed worldwide. Now a Nepali program is trying to emulate the success here. The Nepal Star is an independent venture of Nepal 1.

The line of would-be stars started early and lasted all day. Eventually the line from Tripureshwore reached Maitighar. That’s a great start for the singing competition, the first of its kind on such a scale in Nepal. The show premiered on Nepal 1 on Friday, Jan. 28 and will air from 7 to 8 p.m. on Friday and from 7:30 to 8 p.m. on Sunday. Even before “Nepal Star’s” first show, NTV was reportedly planning a similar competition of its own, “Nepal Tara.”



SS/WN



WANNA BE A STAR: The lines outside the Bluestar Hotel in Tripureshwar

“Shows like these are here to stay,” says Nina Sharma Mahalaya, corporate communication manager at Nepal 1. The organizers say they decided to do the show because they believe that many singers lack opportunities they richly deserve. Nepal Star aims to give them just that: The winner of the contest will be signed on by the famous Indian producer-director Mahesh Bhatt to sing in his

future films. The Nepal Star will also get to release a music album, through the label, Music.com. Moreover, if the Nepal Star also has screen appeal, Bhatt has promised the winner a role in an upcoming movie. Good fortune is likely to shine on other contestants who perform well too. Many top-ten finishers on the U.S. and British shows have gotten recording contracts.

With prospects like that, more than 4,000 people from the ages 16 to 35, mostly 20-something men, auditioned for the program. Initial auditions were held in three cities, Kathmandu, Biratnagar and Pokhara. At least 2,500 people turned up for the Kathmandu auditions alone. Seventy percent of them were students with little training in music, say the organizers. But there were also many semi-professional participants, from bar singers to music fans, seeking a career in music.

“The response of the people has been overwhelming,” says Mahalaya. “We had to reject hundreds of candidates because we were not able to collect all the entries in the limited time we had.” Out of the 4,000-plus who auditioned, a team of six judges, all trained music professionals, selected 57. An elite panel of three judges, singers Jems Pradhan, Sukmeeta Gurung and Nima Rumba, selected 50 of these and judged the rest of the contest. After several rounds, 10 finalists were selected.

Not all contestants came to the auditions with serious hopes of progress-

ing to the higher rounds. “Some came only to see our faces, to say that they were our fans; others just dropped by to say hello,” says Pradhan. But there were many serious contenders as well. According to Pradhan, the top ones were clearly a cut above the rest. But even so, after developing amiable relationships with many of the contestants, the judges said the task of deciding who went on and who went home was an unenviable one. “We made some tough decisions,” says Pradhan.

Those tough decisions were mostly received well, but the contestants’ disappointment gave way to anger in some cases. A few contestants complained of unfairness. Minor complaints notwithstanding, Nepal 1 thinks that the project will pay off. It has invested a lot in the show, from production costs to the expense of grooming the participants and housing them in Kathmandu. The channel’s hopes are high.

So are those of the 10 finalists, among whom one will be selected as the Nepal Star after 33 episodes. Twenty of those episodes have already been filmed. At the end of all the episodes, the Nepal Star will be chosen based on the marks of the three judges and a poll of the television audience.

According to Pradhan, the finalists are all good. One among them will be the next Nepali superstar. “The Nepal Star will be a very talented person, not just somebody randomly picked out from the crowd,” says Pradhan. **N**



NW/SS

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CASHING ON CATCHY TUNES



Radio and TV jingles are catching on. Business houses love the results, and singers and composers, the easy money.

BY KUMUD NEPAL

Between Kamalpokhari and Putalisadak, a narrow alley branches off the main road. Down the alley a curious pink building houses Music Work, the recording studio of popular pop singer Jems Pradhan. Pradhan has huge mass appeal as a recording artist, but he is also a hit with advertisers: His baritone voice is perfect for radio and TV jingles. The demand for catchy ads is booming, and Pradhan is riding high.

Pradhan is the man behind Closeup Toothpaste's "Timi Closeup Kina Gardainau" jingle and the very catchy "Yo Ho Jagadamba" advertisement for Jagadamba Cement. He has already won two consecutive Crity Awards, most recently for the Jagadamba jingle.



nw/SS

Pradhan is only a part of an increasingly big business. Jingles are the hot new thing in advertising. In the west, pop songs are replacing jingles in most television and radio commercials, but for 50 years jingles were a mainstay of American and European advertising. The trend in catching on fast here: Advertisers now demand a catchy tune and memorable lyrics as part of an ad campaign.

"The jingle boom can be closely linked to the spate of radio and TV sta-

tions, particularly private FM and cable channels," says Ranjit Acharya, the CEO of Prisma Advertising Agency. Acharya believes the increasing number of FM stations make it easier for businesses to reach out to their target group of customers in a particular age group or locality. With growing competition, advertising can make the difference between success and failure in business.

Ravi Shrestha, former RJ and now manager of Superstar Media and Recording Studio in Naxal, says jingles are catching on because businesses are becoming aware that they can't survive without embracing new forms of advertising. With cheap Chinese radios flooding in, jingles reach every corner of the country. Jingles are more memorable than print ads, especially when performed by well-known artists. "Everybody listens to music, so people's attention is invariably attracted by popular tunes," says Shrestha of Superstar. "There is a huge difference between merely saying, 'Buy our 55- grade cement,' and packaging a catchphrase with trendy music."

Various researches in the United States have shown that humans are 10 times more likely to remember a jingle than an all-talking advertisement.



BROTHERS-IN-ARMS: Sanjay and Ravi Shrestha of Superstar Media

nw/SS

Jingles can leave such deep impressions in the brain that they may be permanently recorded in our long-term memory. The famous advertisements in India like those of the Close-up toothpaste and Pepsi have been noteworthy for their catchy lyrics and the hip music. In Australia too, jingles have made a comeback, bucking the worldwide trend. Advertisers are resorting to the hit jingles from the past to sell their products. A rendition of the golden oldie, "C'mon Aussie, C'mon," is the new tune for a Cricket Australia advertisement.

The jingles have been around for a long time in Nepal as well. Cigarettes and alcohol advertisers were early adopters and sustained the initially small business until the 1999 ban on radio and TV adverts for those products. By then, jingles had caught on. Now even the government is using jingles in its awareness campaigns, including the rendition of "Sasuralima," a popular folk tune, by Badri Pangani in an anti-smoking campaign.

The Advertising Agency of Nepal's Crity Awards honor the best jingles and also the best jingle maker. It's recognition of how important they are to the industry. Revenue from jingles is second only to that from newspaper ads, say the agencies. Prisma

Advertising, for example, is contracted by such popular brands as Kodak, Coca Cola, Samsung, Kawasaki, Campino Candy and Hulas Steel. Prisma charges anywhere between Rs.15,000 to Rs.30,000 for each jingle. The agency then hands over the project to jingle makers. Big studios like Music Work and Superstar get a lot of the work, but there are smaller studios in business as well. There are also in-house production teams in various organizations.

"The competition in the field is good," says Sanjay Shrestha, who composes and makes jingles at Superstar Media, "but at times unhealthy." He says that low prices charged by some studios hurt the industry and musicians. But Pradhan of Music Works is not worried. He says that the good jingle makers will always find work, as there is demand for quality jingles.

"The growing jingle business is opening up new opportunities for many," says Acharya of Prisma. "The people with good voices can easily get jobs at studios these days." In the end, the bottom line speaks louder than anything else. "Jingles have been boon for me," says Pradhan of Music Work. "Today, I earn more from jingles that I do from singing." **N**



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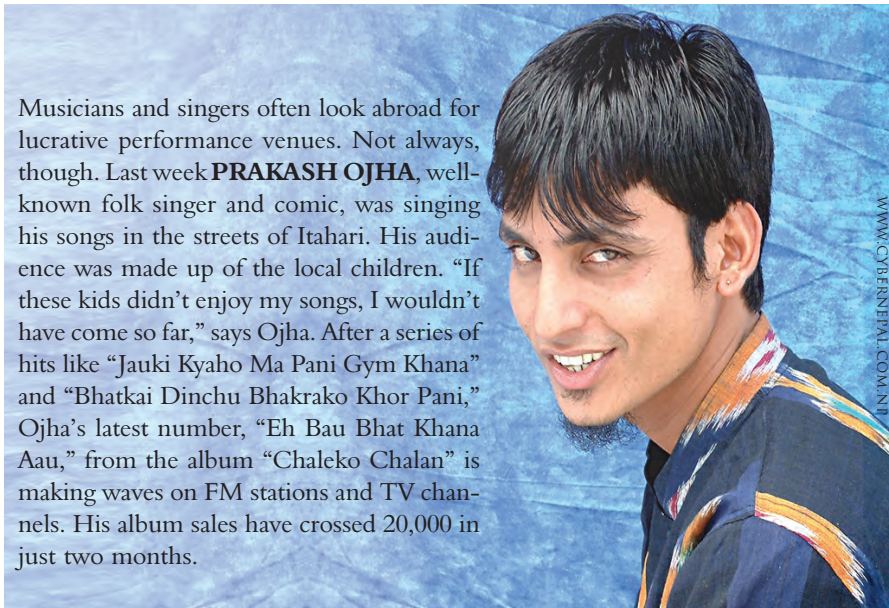
SNAPSHOTS BY DHRITI BHATTA

Fresh off the Stands



MANJUSHREE THAPA started out in 1992 with a travelogue, "Mustang Bhot in Fragments." In 2001, she came out with the highly acclaimed novel, "The Tutor of History." Thapa's latest book, "Forget Kathmandu," hit the Nepali markets last week. Starting with an account of the royal massacre and ending with a record of her trek into Maoist-held territory in western Nepal, Thapa, in her new book, looks at the ongoing political crisis. "Unlike 'The Tutor of History,' which was work of fiction, I've heard the new book is a non-fiction; it examines the situation in the country directly," says Sanjeev Uprety, a lecturer of English at the TU. "I enjoyed the last book and am looking forward to this one as well."

Local Audience



Musicians and singers often look abroad for lucrative performance venues. Not always, though. Last week **PRAKASH OJHA**, well-known folk singer and comic, was singing his songs in the streets of Itahari. His audience was made up of the local children. "If these kids didn't enjoy my songs, I wouldn't have come so far," says Ojha. After a series of hits like "Jauki Kyaho Ma Pani Gym Khana" and "Bhatkai Dinchu Bhakrako Khor Pani," Ojha's latest number, "Eh Bau Bhat Khana Aau," from the album "Chaleko Chalan" is making waves on FM stations and TV channels. His album sales have crossed 20,000 in just two months.

Two in One



DR. ARUN SAYAMI, one of the top cardiologists in the country, is also a well-known writer with six novels under his belt. Many of his poems have also been recorded as songs. On Jan. 16, the doctor received the National Citizen Golden Honor Award from the People's Forum Nepal for his contributions to both the literary and medical fields. The doctor thinks he's ideally suited to write. "It's rather impossible for anyone to see life, death and human emotions as clearly as a doctor," says Dr. Sayami. "So it's easier for me to write about what I've actually felt and seen."

VACANCY

ANNOUNCEMENT

Pro Public, a leading civil society organization, calls for candidatures to the following positions for its Civil society Anti-corruption Project (CSACP). Funded by the Enabling State Programme / DFID, the Project will be implemented in ten districts (Jhapa, Morang, Dhanusha, Parsa, Chitwan, Kaski, Rupandehi, Dang, Banke and Kailali District over a period of 3 years. It invites applications from energetic, self-driven and dynamic candidates to be a part of this growing and high-spirited team of professionals. The dalits, ethnic, indigenous minorities and woman are encouraged to apply. All positions are required frequent visits to the above mentioned districts.

TITLES OF THE POSITIONS WITH REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS

Project coordinator-1 (Kathmandu)

Responsibilities: coordination, managing project staff and finances; overall management of project activities; maintaining regular contact with local clubs and central level civil society organizations; good analysis, negotiation, communication, leadership and advocacy skills.

Qualifications: Postgraduate degree in social science or management with 7 years of professional work experience at national level in planning, programming, implementation, management and evaluation of anti-corruption and governance programs. The candidate should be able to work in a multidisciplinary team. Understand quickly the technical aspects of the project and should be able to work under extreme pressure.

Advocacy Officer-1 (Kathmandu)

Responsibilities: Develop overall advocacy tools and organize advocacy campaigns at different level; ensure working coordination among the project's experts, consultants and support staff; coordinate the work of field project coordinators; submit regular progress reports to the project coordinator.

Qualifications: Graduate degree in social science with 4 years of work experience in advocacy campaign.

Monitoring & Evaluation Officer-1 (Kathmandu)

Responsibilities: Initiate overall monitoring and evaluation of project released activities in consultation with the Project Coordinator; develop appropriate activity monitoring check lists of Project activities and prepare periodic outcome reports.

Qualifications: Postgraduate degree in social development management or relevant with 4 years of work experience in monitoring and evaluation.

Admin/Accountant-1 (Kathmandu)

Responsibilities: Develop project administration and accounting system for project expenditure and income in line with project's requirement; prepare regular statements of account for submitting to the donors.

Qualifications: Bachelor degree in BBA/BCoM/BBS with 3 years of work experience.

Office Secretary-1 (Kathmandu)

Responsibilities: Assist in the overall project related information system.

Qualifications: Bachelor degree in social science with 2 years of secretarial work experience.

Training Officer-1 (Kathmandu)

Responsibilities: Augment overall training related activities; organize intensive training/public hearings on anti-corruption for national/regional and local level for various stakeholders; prepare training proposals and implementation reports as and when required.

Qualifications: Postgraduate degree in social science or management with 5 years of professional work experience in designing training and implementing on governance issues.

Communication & Publication Officer-1 (Kathmandu)

Responsibilities: Prepare reports/features and able to edit Nepali and English Bulletin; assist Project Coordinator to prepare periodic implementation reports; prepare regular press releases and notes of Project activities for appropriate dissemination of information through the national media.

Qualifications: Postgraduate degree in media communication with preferably 3 years of reporting skills in national level media.

IT Manager-1 (Kathmandu)

Responsibilities: Conduct a system analysis on the computer based management information system; design and maintain electronic archival system; initiate, design and maintain CSACP website/homepage; maintain and supervise the Local Area Network (LAN) system in Pro Public.

Qualifications: Graduate degree in information technology with 3 years of professional experience in the reputed organization.

Communication/Publication Assistant-1 (Kathmandu)

Responsibilities: Assist Communication and Publication Officer to Publication Officer to publish bulletin; prepare regular press release and notes of project Coordinator to organize advocacy campaign.

Qualifications: Bachelor degree in communication with 3 years of work experience in reporting.

Expressions of interest must be delivered to the address below by **February 11, 2005** with an application, updated CV and with a photo. Please mark the title of the Post you are applying for clearly on the envelope. You should mention the name of two referees. Only short listed candidates will be notified for further tests. Any form of canvassing, soliciting or influencing will be treated as a disqualification; telephone enquiries will not be entertained.

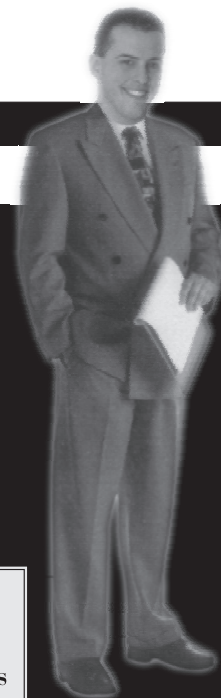


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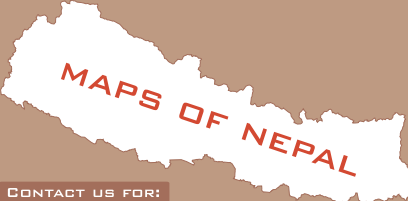
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Winds of Change

In 2001 **Sadhana Shrestha** was appointed country representative for Ashoka, an NGO whose aim is “to develop the profession of social entrepreneurship around the world.” Ashoka Nepal is one of 53 branches around the globe. Shrestha was selected from a pool of 40 candidates, after Eugene Watrin, the then

volunteer representative for Nepal, passed away. Shrestha comes from a business background: She headed the family businesses, Sresco Woollen Mills and Srijana Cotton Webbing Industry, for 16 years. It’s no surprise that this business entrepreneur was chosen for the task of identifying social entrepreneurs whose causes were worth promoting. Ashoka wants to blend entrepreneurship with social work, and Shrestha had experience in both: She is a founder member of Tewa, a philanthropic organization. Dhriti Bhatta talked to Shrestha about Ashoka Nepal and its activities.

How do you define a social entrepreneur?

Social entrepreneurs are individuals with groundbreaking ideas. They recognize a part of society that is stuck and find new ways to get it unstuck. They relentlessly persevere until they see the change they want to bring. These are people who collaborate with others and mobilize them to replicate their innovation.

Ashoka looks at many proposals each year and funds the best ones. Those behind the best projects are selected as Ashoka fellows. What exactly are you looking for in an Ashoka fellow?

They are obviously social entrepreneurs. But just any social entrepreneur cannot be an Ashoka fellow. It’s a rigorous process. The person must have an idea that looks to change the system in any one of six sectors: education, health, human rights, environment, civic participation and economic development. Candidates can either file their candidacy themselves or can be nominated by others. In Nepal,

about two fellows are selected from a pool of seven or eight applicants each year. They go through a rigorous three-phase interview process; the second interview is conducted by our representatives in Washington.

Among these six sectors you mentioned, which one sees the most activity and which one the least?

Looking at all the proposals we receive, Nepalis seem to have plenty of innovative ideas for promoting human rights in the country. But health and education, such crucial sectors for our development, get very few proposals.

It isn’t easy to come across people with creativity, ethics and the entrepreneurial qualities

There are more than 1500 Ashoka fellows around the world. Nepal has had 33 in the last 17 years. Do you think that is a small number?

The number might not be too large. But I wouldn’t consider it small for a country such as Nepal. An Ashoka fellow is considered “one entrepreneur in a million.” It isn’t easy to come across many people who have that sort of creativity and ethics and also the entrepreneurial qualities all bundled up into one. Even India with its huge population only has about 200 fellows.

Might not the smaller number have to do with your low-key approach. You don’t take the limelight too often ...



SS/WMS

Ashoka has always believed in remaining a low-key organization. Before 2001, the late Eugene Watrin was the volunteer representative of Ashoka. But he also had many other responsibilities—with the Social Service Organization, Social Action Volunteers and so on. I believe he wasn’t able to fully dedicate all his time to Ashoka. Today, I work as a full-time representative. So, I hope to significantly add to what Fr. Watrin established here.

So what is Ashoka doing these days?

I have always believed that Ashoka fellows need to work together in order to multiply the effects of their efforts. At present I am trying to bring them together and keep them in contact with others around the globe. Last October a few of them from Nepal met with 14 fellows from South Asia—India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan—to share ideas and explore possibilities for collaboration.

You were involved with the social organization Tewa. Are you a social entrepreneur yourself?

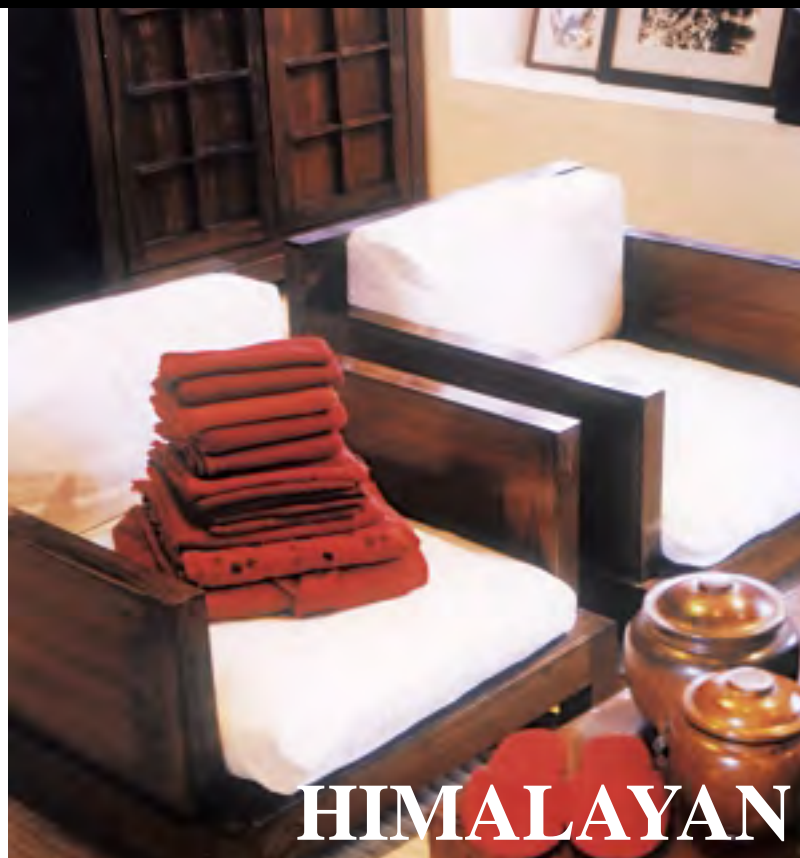
Well, I wouldn’t consider myself a social entrepreneur now. I don’t think I am doing anything big to bring changes in the society. I think I had the qualities of a social entrepreneur in me from the very beginning, from my school and college days at St. Mary’s and Loretto, Darjeeling. Maybe not like the Ashoka fellows whom we select. They bring changes in the whole society, but I did my best then to bring changes in my school and college communities. Then I got involved with Tewa for a while. I guess that qualifies me as a social entrepreneur, before if not now. **N**

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Goodbye and Thank You

THIS IS MY FORTY-SECOND EDITORIAL for Nation Weekly and the final one, I am afraid. Its been a great ride for the past 10 months. The reader's response has been tremendous; that more than anything else has made up for the hard work of starting up a magazine. On more than one occasion, I remember members of my young editorial team asking me, "What keeps you going week after week?" My answer was simple: I want to see a new issue, all spick and span, come out every Monday.

Our part-time copyeditor John Child came up with the most fitting description for the weekly—and frequently crazy—news cycle: "The Sausage Factory." What it means is this: If you were to visit a sausage factory and see the mess there, you probably would never ever touch sausage again. But on your dinner plate, it looks pretty yummy. Indeed, on many occasions, the hangover and the smell of the "Sausage Factory" was so strong that it carried well beyond the weekend and would threaten to spoil our news cycle the following week. It was then John would come to the office (he works from the sanity of his home in Sanepa) and patiently explain to us that the articles that week were not as bad as some of us thought. Because we were so involved in various stages of the articles' production, we failed to appreciate the result.

The sausage has been pretty good after all. Our hard work, handsomely reciprocated by the non-editorial support team, began to pay off a couple of months ago. Nation has made solid inroads in the market; its circulation has shot up.

We have tried to live up to your high expectations from the very beginning (April 19). "You've set high standards to start with," wrote a reader, Peter Neil, about our 30-page first issue. "Best wishes to keeping this up or, even better, improving it further." In the following weeks we added content, became a full-feature 60-page newsmagazine and made ourselves fairly visible in a crowded media market. The trendy getup and reasonably well-packaged news and analyses found ready readers. But our offbeat essays, opinion articles, arts and society pieces and lifestyle sto-

ries seem to have really touched the hearts of our readers.

When I left the Kathmandu Post in November 2004, I had little clue what I would do next, but I felt it had better be journalism. So when Ajay Ghimire, then a venture capitalist, and Sunil Raj Shrestha, who had done well for himself as the publisher of ECS, offered to start a magazine under my stewardship, I took the bait, somewhat reluctantly, though. Magazines are not my forte. I had worked for the Kathmandu Post daily for more than 10 years and trained myself at New York University, again as a newspaperman.

Fortunately, I found the transition fairly smooth and was blessed with excellent writers. Two of our staffers—Tiku Gauchan and Sushma Joshi—gave the magazine much-needed energy and variety very early on. Both were voracious readers and well versed in the nuances of the English language. If Nation Weekly looked different from other newspapers and magazines from the word go, it was thanks to this new brand of writers and editors, and to our columnists. The current group of staffers inherited that rich legacy and added value to it.

Suman Pradhan and Jogendra Ghimire, former staffers of the Kathmandu Post, were reasonably well-known names, but Swarnim Waglé was little known outside Sajha.com, where Paschim (Waglé's nom de plume) had a near-cult following. Then we were lucky to get Samrat Upadhyay and Sanjeev Uprety in our fold. Later, another young writer, Aditya Adhikari added a lot of value to our content. In recent months, Kunal's "No Laughing Matter" has attracted a new legion of readers—people who like good writing but detest political fare, the staple of our newspapers.

Thanks to all of you and thanks above all to all the readers who wrote to me, both those with the message of congratulations and encouragement and also those who found our content, indeed my own writing, wanting. Goodbye.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor

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