



Courage & Conviction

news front

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Maoist's message to Terai : We are for you, but discard Madhesi Janadhika Forum

Bhaswor Ojha

No Trust

US suspends its crucial project as Maoists, still in its terrorist list, prepare to join the government

■ Yubaraj Ghimire

In what looks like a tough wait and watch approach, the US has suspended its project on judicial sector reforms in Nepal. The suspension order came into effect from January 15, the day Maoists joined the parliament and the news of their joining the interim Government a couple of weeks later.

The 5.6 million dollar project—Strengthening Rule of Law and respect for Human Rights in Nepal—is funded by the US Aid with the American company ARDINK as the contractor. It began its work in September 2004 and its completion was only six months away. Along with the judicial reforms, the project aimed at strengthening the anti-corruption measures and mechanism in the country.

US Ambassador James F Moriarty confirmed that the project has been suspended at the moment and "we are waiting for a response from Washington DC," he told newsfront. While the US has welcomed the peace process and Maoists joining the parliament, it has been insisting that Maoists conduct did not confirm with the 'public

commitments' it has made.

The suspended project covers a wide gamut of judicial reforms besides providing infrastructure to the apex, appellate, districts and the special courts. It involved providing computers, archiving documents and setting up mediation centers. Besides the Supreme court, Patan appellate court, district courts of Lalitpur and the special court had been the beneficiaries of the project.

"The project worked in close cooperation with the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Authority (CIAA), Vigilance Commission, and the office of the Attorney General. At least 13 NGOs including Nepal Law Society and Transparency International had been funded by the project as part of the mission.

Although substantial target of the project has already been achieved, the suspension of the particular programme is a statement of US doubts over Maoists adherence with the 'Rule of law' once they are part of the Government, and partly an indicator that it might review other projects as well. The US has not yet lifted the 'terrorist' tag on the Maoists. ■

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Soft target

Radicals approach refugees to join armed revolution in Bhutan

The apathy shown by the Royal Bhutan Government towards the people of Nepali origin might fast turn refugee camps of eastern Nepal into potential recruitment centers for guerrillas for the 'armed revolution' the Bhutani Communist Party (BCP) plans to launch there soon.

The "revolution" will be launched to "overthrow the monarchy" and "we are here to gather financial and other kind of support", a BCP leader said. Kala, a representative of the BCP-MLM (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist) has been given charge to mobilize the support from refugees in ten different camps based in Jhapa and Morang districts.

"We are aware that reactionaries might call it extortion, but what we are doing is essentially a political campaign which will involve giving political training and preparing the members of armed revolution", Kala told newsfront. Although, the BCP leaders do not state when they are going to start the armed revolution, they said, "it will be very soon."

The Royal Bhutan Government seems equally determined not to accept the refugees back declaring, "they all are terrorists." The vigil on the refugees crossing the border to India, possibly en route to Bhutan has increased. Bhutan police had arrested Shantiram Acharya and four others on January 23 on the charge of having entered Bhutan to "create network for causing sabotage, explosion etc." All of them were living in the Belgandi refugee camp then. Bhutani



Refugees at Beldangi camp

Om Astha Rai

officials claimed they were sent to Bhutan by the BCP Chief Chhabibal Pokhrel and General Secretary Bikalpa Chhetri. The BCP, through a press release has however, denied Acharya's association with the party.

In fact, the Bhutan government's fear has increased manifold in the recent times specially after the Communist party of Nepal—Maoists with possible links with the BCP—has

set up a separate cell to deal with the Bhutani refugees. Ram Karki, Maoist member of parliament and the central committee member heads the cell.

Bhutan Government has not only been saying that the Nepalese Maoists and the BCP have close links, it also claimed early last year that Maoists were imparting guerrilla training to some of the refugees in Danabari forest area of Ilam. Acharya

was alleged to be one of those trained. Kala however, denies any link with the Maoists in Nepal.

The BCP is also opposed to the U S move to have around 60,000 refugees settled in the U S and other countries and is approaching the refugees to prepare for the war so that they can go back to their country with their dignity and head held high.

■ Om Astha Rai in Jhapa



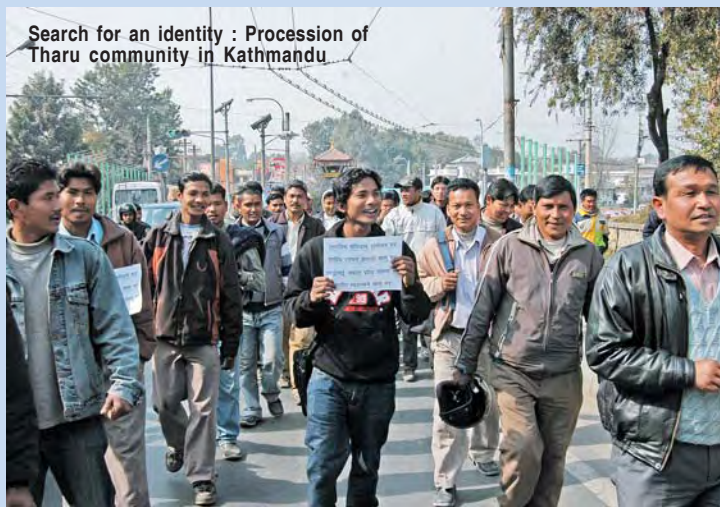
Newsfront

Nona passes away

Nona Koirala (80), a political activist and mother figure for many in the Nepali Congress party, died on Sunday. She was suffering from multiple ailments including diabetes and high-blood pressure.

Hundreds of congress workers who knew her as 'Nona Ama' bid farewell as her two sons—Niranjan Koirala and Dr Shekhar Koirala—lit the funeral pyre at Aryaghat.

Terai in focus but no respite



Search for an identity : Procession of Tharu community in Kathmandu

Bhaswor Ojha

The Madheshi Janadhikar forum led movement was fast snowballing into a major political crisis for the ruling coalition as one of its constituents—Sadhbhavana Party (Anandi Devi)—was contemplating to quit the Government if Prime Minister G P Koirala did not favourably respond to the demand. For forum, it is sort of an endorsement of the movement by a Terai based powerful political party.

Apart from the visible fissure in the coalition, Prime Minister Koirala and the Maoist leadership were also at loggerheads on the issue with the latter right away denouncing the forum leaders as 'criminals' who need to be ignored while addressing the Terai problem.

NSP's warning to pull-out

comes in the wake of series of protests, some of them violent in several parts of Terai which has claimed at least 7 lives after it erupted on January 19. At least 40 people have been wounded in police firing and clashes while half a dozen towns

NSP's warning to pull-out comes in the wake of series of protests

including Birgunj, Lahan, Janakpur, Gaur and Bara were put under curfew for various length of time during the period. The Prime Minister is yet to respond to the forum's demand for resignation of Home Minister K P Sitaula as the pre-condition for dialogue.

While Koirala defied Maoists clearly as he pledged that he was keen for

dialogue with the forum leaders to resolve, among others, the issue of 'representation in proportion to the Terai population' at the time of electing the Constituent Assembly. In the meantime, Indian Ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee who had a meeting with Yadav on January 27 is believed to have advised Yadav to stop violence at once as 'that would do the greatest disservice to the Madheshi cause'.

Prime Minister Koirala's plan to address the nation with an appeal to maintain communal harmony and seek solution to all major problems through peaceful dialogue scheduled on Sunday, however, had to be postponed because of his sister in law, Nona Koirala's death.

■ Bishwa Mani Pokharel

Sonia ignores Maoists

Though Maoists are like any other political parties in Nepal as far as the Government of India is concerned, the Indian National Congress heading the UPA coalition is apparently treating Maoists on a different footing.

At least four political parties; Nepali Congress, Nepali Congress (Democratic), Communist party of Nepal/United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) and Nepal Sadhbhavana party have been invited by Congress President Sonia Gandhi to participate in a symposium, Satyagraha and its relevance



in politics, coinciding with the death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi on January 30 in Delhi. But no invitation has been extended to the Maoists who are already in the parliament, and are going to join the interim government soon.

Maoists leaders however have been extended courtesy at par with other political leaders by the Indian embassy in Kathmandu and government authorities in Delhi on different occasions. In November, Maoist Chief Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai were received by ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee at his office in Kathmandu on the eve of their departure to Delhi to participate in the Hindustan Times leadership programme. The immigration authorities at the Indira Gandhi International Airport also extended special treatment to the duo. On January 26, the embassy invited Maoist MPs for the Republic Day celebration.



Upper Dolpo and upper Mustang

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Signifying a major step forward to simplify Visit Nepal rules and encourage economy tourists, the Ministry of tourism is considering slashing the entry fee to upper Mustang and upper Dolpo, both along the China border.

"We have already recommended reducing the existing royalty of 700 U S dollar by half", Madhav Prasad Ghimire, secretary of tourism told newsfront. He added, "since the issue is linked with immigration, it has to be approved by the department of immigration and the home ministry first."

The apparently exorbitant royalty fee was introduced from security as well as environmental point of view, but "we are considering the recommendation by the tourism ministry", a senior home ministry official said.

Thousands of tourists have been diverted to Tibet due to the steep royalty in these two hot destinations. Sources in the tourism

ministry said the whole purpose of the regulation was being rendered futile by a large number of tourists that visited the areas by bribing the local officials.

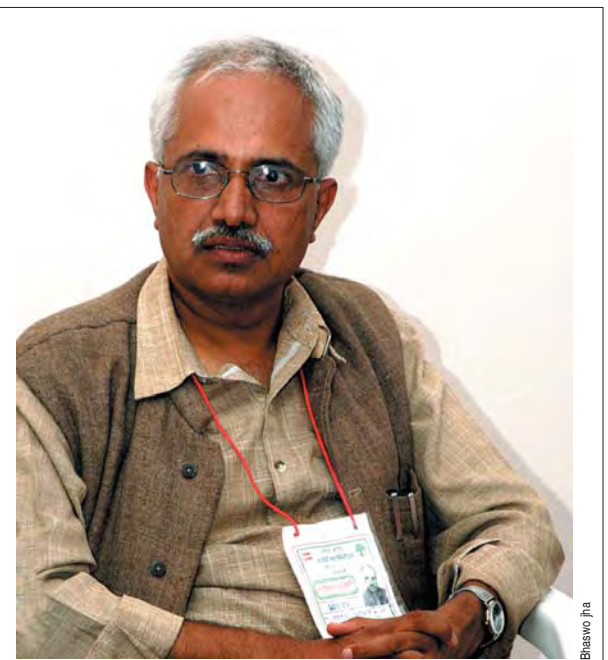
The latest decision of the Ministry of tourism is based on suggestions mainly from the Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAN). It's assessment on the move predicted a sharp rise in the number of tourists and thereby increase in foreign exchange earning.

A large number of potential tourists appear to be distracted by the more accessible higher plateau, Tibet. A 10-day tour package to Tibet from Nepal

costs only 700 U S dollar while the total cost to enter the two restricted areas of Nepal costs double the amount. A lot of anticipation by the tourism industry appears to rest on the new move.

The latest decision of the Ministry of tourism is based on suggestions mainly from the Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAN).

■ Madhusudan Poudyal



Koirala's new headache

A pro-republic campaign by an emerging group of Nepal Congress is all set to pose a major challenge to Prime Minister G P Koirala who has been advocating a pro-ceremonial monarchy line.

Party's Central committee member Narahari Acharya, joined by his radical colleagues like Krishna Khanal and Gagan Thapa have already toured 42 districts of the country campaigning for 'Loktantrik Sanghiya Gana Rajya (Federal Democratic Republic)'. "But it is not a programme the party has authorized and it's going to create lot of confusion", Party's central committee member Sunil Bhandari told newsfront.

While the central office has not officially reacted to the campaign yet, there are fears that this might lead to a tussle between the emerging radical group and the establishment led by Koirala.

Some of the district committees of the party have invited the pro-republic groups, but the central office has not yet endorsed it. Nuwakot district president of the party, Jagadish Narsingh K C has invited the republic group to launch the campaign in the districts early next month.

"It's the height of irresponsibility to carry out such a campaign without authorization and endorsement of the central office", Bhim Bahadur Tamang, member of the party's central committee said.

Prof Khanal however, differs, "It may not be the priority agenda for the central leadership. But what we are doing reflects the collective desire of the nation. We are doing this to create pressure on the central leadership to endorse the Republic line as the party's official agenda".

■ Bishwa Mani Pokhrel

The rise of Dalit force

The share of Dalit in the Maoist movement in terms of the number of those killed during the decade long conflict was much higher

In what could be taken as an indicator of Dalit empowerment, the interim parliament has an all time high number of the community constituting more than five per cent of the total strength of the House. There are altogether 18 Dalit members in a house of 330.

The largest block of the members from the community belongs to the Maoists with 12 members which accounts for 60 per cent of the total number of Dalit parliamentarians. The current number compared to just one Dalit, Krishna Singh Pariyar, elected in the first elected parliament in 1991 is a significant



recognition of the movement for Dalit empowerment.

"This is a very positive sign, but not enough", Tilak Pariyar, President of Maoist wings Nepal Dalit Mukti Morcha said. He added, "our demand is minimum 20 pc reservation in every sector of the government as a special rights which should also compensate for the past deprivation". The share of Dalit in the Maoist movement in terms of the number of those killed during the decade long conflict was much higher. At least 1100 Maoist Dalit cadres lost their lives in the conflict.

Despite the Muluki Ain, 2020 V S that declared eradication of 'untouchability' and caste discrimination, the community remains almost unrepresented in the legislature. The increase in participation by the Dalits today signifies a positive change.

■ Govinda Pariyar



Editor & Publisher : Yubaraj Ghimire
 Associate Editor : Sushma Amatya
 Design: Sunil Khadgi, Kishor Raj Panta & Ramkrishna Rana
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Costly Silence

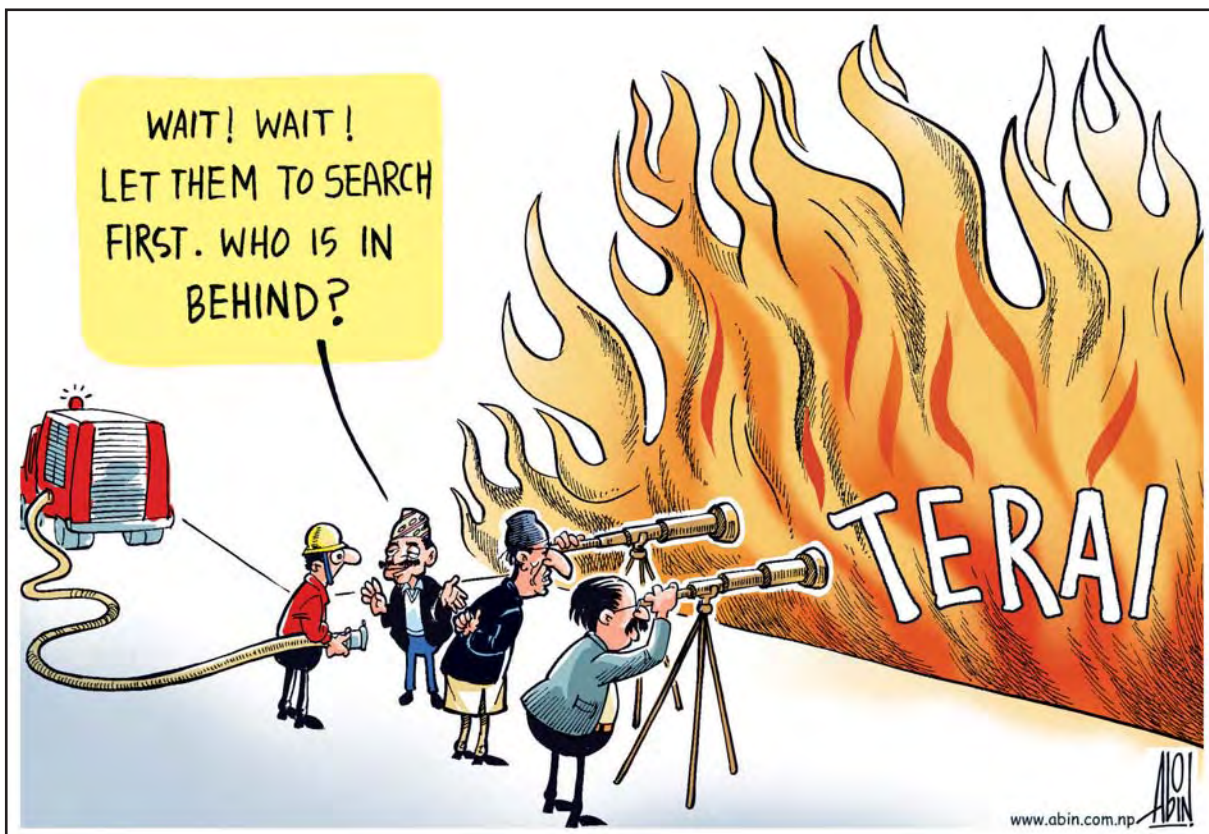
Managing transition of a nation is not only a challenge, but an opportunity as well. Misusing such an opportunity thrust upon the leadership of the day would not only prove their failure but would also lead the country to disaster. Timely intervention and an accommodative gesture is all that the Government ought to have displayed. A mature political approach was all the more necessary especially because the state's authority has collapsed, defiance and resistance have grown in the same proportion and a live volcano seems ready to erupt across the length and breadth of the country.

It's only natural that neglected, deprived and marginalised groups, regional and geographical entities would want to ensure participation in the emerging power structure during and after the transition phase. The hasty way the Government and the Maoists promulgated the interim constitution refusing to even take into account the grievances and anger visible in Terai was clearly a provocative act. Maoists calling the leadership of the agitation groups, "a bunch of criminals", only shows that despite their entry in the parliamentary politics, they have not been able to feel the pulse of the people, and gauge what an explosion of pent up frustration and anger might lead to.

Government has helplessly watched the fire leaping higher and higher in Terai instead of using it as a lesson and as an opportunity to take stock of situation there and elsewhere where people have deep rooted frustration and have not yet been able to orchestrate it collectively. Perceived sense of deprivation in scattered pockets of the country can be ignored only if the Government wants to invite trouble elsewhere as in Terai.

Leaders of the agitation in Terai have already set some conditions like resignation of the Home Minister before dialogue. After all, parliamentary system calls for full accountability and the Home Minister has not only to own up to the entire responsibility for the failure of law and order in Terai, but also for insulting their legitimate aspiration to be a part of Nepali nationalism by using words such as, "instigated by the palace".

On the other hand, everything that the agitators are doing like raising sectarian slogans in some parts, attacking private property and government offices is to be highly condemned. They are clearly acts of crime the full responsibility of which will be theirs. What the Government, especially the prime Minister needs to do urgently is to call for an all party meeting, evolve consensual approach on Terai and on similar issues in the hills and elsewhere. And he also needs to act with the authority of the state and make a choice between the incompetent home minister and emotional and political integration of Terai.



Letters

Simplicity of language

I applaud the Samay team, who dared stand by the ethics of journalism even under the king's direct rule. The new venture, newsfront, is striking for its simplicity of language and attractive presentation. Though there are comments that it appears similar to Nepali Times, I hope newsfront with its unique identity will give a stiff competition to any other English weekly.

Krishna Dahal
kathmandunewsline

Dev Khanal
Thimi

More development issues

Thanks to Samay team for their new endeavor. We would like to see newsfront come up with different information and more development issues. We used to follow Nepali times for news and current analytical writing but now we have another option.

Samir Ghimire
Koteswor

Bidya Timilsina
Volunteer, Maiti Nepal

Great presentation

In-depth investigation, scoops, different perspective on current affairs and on matters of all aspects of life, great presentation, photos are what I'd like to see in newsfront.

Ashesh Rajbansh
Photographer

Subhash Pokhrel
Trichandra College

Reflect realities

Newsfront should reflect the realities and strive to stand by it's logo of conviction and courage at all times.

PL Singh
Chaksibari

Sugat Ratna Kansakar
Managing Director, NTC

Helpline column

More social issues and especially a help line column for young people who are suffering from various emotional, psychological problems is what I'd love to see in newsfront.

Regina Shah
Supervisor of drug rehab center, Hathigoda

Speak out fearlessly

Be an icon in nonaligned journalism, speak out fearlessly and not mince words is what I'd expect from newsfront.

Sangeeta Lama
Journalist

Babina Kharel
Lazimpat

Space to Nepali Diaspora

News front is a happy news for the increasing number of English readers. Country is slowly moving towards peace and there is an increase in the number of tourists. Media can encourage both those positive trends. Newsfront should also give space to the Nepali Diaspora outside.

Capt. S. Sarkar
Bishalnagar

Expensive

It was quite nice to see your newspaper in the stand, but could not buy coz I find it quite expensive. Being a student, I could not afford to spend Rs. 25 per week. Anyway congratulations for the new venture.

Aditi Tiwari
Sanepa, Lalitpur

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Exclusion Exemplified



Inclusive democracy is much more than making the polity reflect the social demography of the country, as seems to be the general understanding

■ Deepak Thapa

It perhaps went unnoticed by many, but around a year and a half back when a Madhesi student group organised a press conference to protest the manhandling of some Madhesis by the army, not a single reporter showed up. Similarly, a couple of years ago, there was an academic conference on the Tarai in Kathmandu, perhaps the one and only of its kind so far. Again, although there was much appreciation from Madhesi leaders,-- social and political--for the attempt to raise the problems of the Tarai (and/or Madhesh) and bring it into mainstream discourse, there was a total blackout in the press about what happened at the meeting.

An issue that any objective individual should have recognised long ago as something much more serious than the Maoist movement could ever be was completely ignored by our media and, by extension, the

opinion-makers. That it took the recent unrest to energise everyone into 'doing something' indicates the reactive nature of our elite (as was evident throughout the 10 years of the Maoist conflict as well).

There is no need to go into the specifics of the disenchantment Madhesis feel vis-à-vis the Nepali state. These are manifold and most Nepalis are aware of it. And the salve is not for people like Girija Prasad Koirala to claim that he understands the cause as he himself is a Madhesi since he hails from a town in the Madhesh. That is pure hogwash. The grouse of the Madhesis has nothing to do with one's residence in that strip of land known as the Tarai; it has to do with their identity and what it portends in the larger Nepali sphere.

Now, finally, there is talk of talks to address the 'Madhesi issue'. Better late than never, since that perhaps will rouse the 7+1 party alliance into introspecting the manner



Defying curfew for a cause

Shyam Sundar Yadav

in which they have set out to reshape the future of our country. The flare-up in the Tarai is a symptom of what has gone wrong in the months since the king bowed to people's power. Having arrogated upon themselves to speak for all of Nepal, they have managed to shunt aside many groups who would contest the parties' claim to speak for all Nepalis.

There seems more than an element of truth in the claim that 'regressive forces' are instigating much of the violence happening now. But, then, that should only have been anticipated. It is a worldwide phenomenon that when elites become threatened by political change they resort to all sort of tactics to destabilise the new regime and that often includes rallying ethnic sentiments and promoting ethnic violence. And, with a population as disenchanted with the Nepali state as the Madhesis, no one would have had to try that hard to stoke their anger. All of this might have been averted if the 'new Nepal-in-the-making' had been able to accommodate or even sincerely acknowledge the different Nepals that are having to make themselves heard, oftentimes through force.

For all the current genuflections to the idea of 'inclusive democracy', the political compromise that resulted in the interim constitution seems to be equally a means for exclusion. Apart from the arbitrariness of the eight parties to keep

everyone else out of the discussions, and which they may have to revisit soon, the interim constitution does not allow political space to many other groups. Thus, we continue with the sentiment of the 1990 constitution and retain restrictions on partisans of religion, caste, community, etc, as well as those who seek the 'fragmentation' of the country. What is wrong with opening up the political marketplace to all ideas, howsoever abhorrent or alarming these may seem?

Let's take the question of secession itself, the most taboo of all political subjects. It is surely more civil to allow a group to argue its case for opting out of a state in a parliamentary forum, as the Parti Québécois has been doing for decades in Canada, than to silence it. For, regardless of the merit of its case, any party that feels ignored has ways to make itself heard (whether those methods succeed or not is a different matter). Ultimately, everyone has to submit to the test of the people's will, and the only civilised method of persuasion open to the state is to demonstrate by action that any such group is better off within the national fabric than without.

Inclusive democracy is much more than making the polity reflect the social demography of the country, as seems to be the general understanding. That is a start and the Maoists have been rightly commended for having led the

way. But there is much more to creating a genuinely inclusive democracy. As Iris Young writes: 'It is also a means of collective problem-solving which depends for its legitimacy and wisdom on the expression and criticism of the diverse opinions of all the members of the society. Inclusive democratic practice is likely to promote the most just results because people aim to persuade one another of the justice and wisdom of their claims, and are open to having their own opinions and understandings of their interests change in the process.'

Verbal sparring has to be preferable to its alternative—violence.
(The author is a free lance journalist)



An artist brings Terai in capital's focus



Bhaswar Ojha



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A Village A Family

Think of a product or a service that could be consumed in any rural part of the country and it can be readily provided for by the micro-entrepreneurs in Jaljale

■ Sudarshan Shrestha

The residents of a small sleepy village, Jaljale that lies close to Udaypur cement factory in the neighborhood of Ghaighat town in Udaypur share an unspoken bond of hardship and suffering.

The village is multi-cultural with an equal proportion of Brahmins, Chettris, and a large number of indigenous (Janjati) and ethnic groups; and also a considerable number of people from scheduled castes (Dalits) like the Musahar. The residents of the village are migrants from all over the country who came here during the construction of the Udaypur cement factory more than a decade ago. After the completion of the construction work, the labour force found themselves minus any jobs and with saving too little for them to go back homes with. This need to survive against all odds served to connect the people of Jaljale.

How best to improve the livelihood is a matter of debate, but the Jaljale experience could be seen as an indication to show that the micro-enterprise sector could be a way to strengthen rural economies

Unlike the configuration of political structures which bring people together based on ideologies, the Rais, Shresthas, Danuwar, Karkis, Sadas, Sigdels, Magar, Basnets, Lungeli, Boharas, Thapas, Chaudharys, Dhimals and Gurungs in the village bond together as a community of families whose priority is to make a decent living. Most households in the village have different political belief systems but the most pressing concern that transcends their political allegiance is their need for economic freedom and employment opportunities.

Musahar Dukhanidevi Sada, 35, is very

conscious of her social and political surroundings. She proudly identifies herself as a Musahar and says the social fabric that she lives in is the result of common shared value guided by economic needs. Dukhanidevi says she has political freedom to express but this she says, has less value for her if she does not have economic resource to support her family.

Think of a product or a service that could be consumed in any rural part of the country and it can be readily provided for by the micro-entrepreneurs in Jaljale. People in the village who strive to be self sufficient are entrepreneurs producing ceramic products, bamboo furniture, leaf plates (Saal ko Tapari). They also produce pickles, soaps, spices and fast food snacks (Dalmoth – Bhujija). A micro-service industry exists in the village that includes photo studios, beauty parlors, electronic service centers, numerous tailoring stores and blacksmiths.

Striking about the micro-enterprise village in Jaljale is the sense of belonging and support system the entrepreneurs share. Competition among the diverse multi-cultural population does not seem to be the overriding factor to guide their success but working in a spirit of partnership and assistance is what is helping enterprises to expand. An example of this is Shobha Danuwar who when she goes to market her Dalmoth – Bhujija takes along her fellow business women to market their individual products.

Aromatic sticks (Dhoop/Agarbatti) is another micro-enterprise that is flourishing in Jaljale. Although a large quantity of these aromatic sticks are imported from India, they are also manufactured in Jaljale with nominal investments using local resources and labour. The entrepreneurs have successfully decoded the ingredients and confirmed that the raw materials for "Dhoop" is

available in Nepal.

Parvati Rai who lives in a ramshackle house close to Jaljale provides employment to more than 50 women. She sees to it that there is a reliable supply chain management system to ensure bamboo files, coal dust, tree bark (Kaulo), scented herbal oils are in regular supply. Parvati sold more than Rs 26,000 worth of Dhoop when she made her first trip to Kathmandu in December 2006. She says "Aromatic stick manufacturing is appropriate for low income people and those seeking off farm income opportunities because it is a home based enterprise and could be an alternative source of employment and income for rural people". Not far away, a young entrepreneurs Rabita Rai, 17, makes pickles and markets them in local markets in Ghaighat and along the east west highway.

Given the present scenario in the country, the government and development agencies should pay attention to provide the disfavored rural population better opportunities to improve their livelihood. In the process, the youth force could

be allied with rural enterprise development to prevent a resurgence of yet another revolution by the youth for economic independence.

How best to improve the livelihood is a matter of debate, but the Jaljale experience could be seen as an indication to show that the micro-enterprise sector could be an alternative way to strengthen rural economies, improve basic social indicators and ultimately link rural economies to the national economy. It would also be worth assessing how micro-enterprises in the U.S accounts for 20% of all jobs in rural counties or how employment generated by micro-enterprises represents 17.9% of all private (non-farm) employment in the U.S. ■

(Shrestha, a former East West Center scholar is an independent media and communication consultant.)



Dare to dream

Vicky embarked on an impossible dream and now 14 years down the line she transformed it into a wonderful reality



pics by Bhaswor Ojha

■ Sushma Amatya

Victoria Subirana, 47, popularly known as Vicky followed what her heart dictated and never regretted it. Having always had an affinity towards the Tibetan cause, she decided to visit the Tibetan community in Nepal. Just 27, with a masters degree in curriculum and teaching from Michigan university, US; she instantly felt she had found the mission in her life when she saw children begging in the streets and fighting with dogs for food from garbage. "That sight transformed my life. I went back home in Spain and told my family I wanted to quit my job as a kindergarten teacher and go to Nepal to work for disadvantaged children".

She then moved to Barcelona to learn Nepali. Vicky recalled the adventure, "To save money to come to Nepal, I took up a job as a servant in the city and became best friends with the lady of the house who understood me very well. I didn't feel as a servant at all. You are what you feel, isn't it?" Not surprisingly, she had to face opposition from everybody. "Even my mother thought I had gone crazy. She even took me to a psychiatrist who declared me sane after I talked with him for two hours."

Vicky then came to Nepal and lived with a Shrestha family and learned to adapt to Newari – Nepali culture comfortably. She got in touch with a Tibetan refugee school in Boudha where marginalised children from different ethnic groups, speaking different languages with no communication with each other were under one roof. Experience with the children added a new dimension to her life. "They were defecating, urinating, sleeping as they wished and all parents were gathered inside the class. I wanted to run away! The idea I had about myself being well qualified was shattered and I realised I knew nothing. It was a great lesson on humility." She cried for many days in a row.

Gradually amidst the chaos, Vicky developed and

The methodology Vicky has created believes a brain of a child needs incentive to grow. Maturity of mind figures strongly in her curriculum that integrates formal education with problem solving, creative and inter personal skills.

applied another set of knowledge, a set of methodology suited to the new scenario and saw positive results in six months.

Trouble arose when her visa expired and she received notice to leave in a month—something she wasn't willing to leave just when things were settling down. The Tibetan community wanted her to stay and proposed she get married to a Nepali citizen so she could remain in the country. The idea though completely alien to her background appeared as a better alternative to a regular cycle of bribing the authorities. A list of candidates were arranged for her to review and finally she chose her now ex-husband with whom she lived for nine years. Those were difficult years for her to say the least as there were hardly any similarities between her and the man she married.

Vicky said with a laugh, "Marrying appeared to give me a sense of acceptance here and also in Spain where my arranged marriage served as an initial selling point to raise funds for my project to start my own school! If not for this novelty, nobody knew and cared about the children in Nepal. I raised funds, came back and opened a school with 19 children, mostly who were branded as untouchables." She trained teachers and helped families of the



children in small scale income generation activities. This encouraged them to send children to school instead of begging or working. She concentrated on raising the standards to meet her objectives rather than compromise.

She saw how the poor were suppressed based on caste and a host of superstitions. One day a Pariyar girl whose dream was to become a doctor came and told her that she was informed that a Pariyar had no right to become a doctor. "I decided to deal with this logically and suggested she look up all scriptures, search the Internet and verify where it says that a Pariyar or anybody else cannot be a doctor. This seemed to convince her and today she and her friends are in university and are preparing for their career".

The phase when she brought in medical volunteers to study parasitical worms in the children and to treat them stands out in her mind. After the children were given deworming medicines, some began to vomit and long worms had to be pulled out of their mouths. In the process some volunteers fainted and Vicky was at a loss how to handle it all. "We made a good analysis of parasites then!", was her witty remark.

To encourage children to be regular at school, she began serving food once a day and for most children, it was and still is the only meal of the day. Some children leading double lives, mafia threats and exploitation had to be worked on harder to keep their interest in school alive.

One day she came back home to find an empty fridge and no money even to feed her child. She was reprimanded severely by a good friend that served to get back her practical sense. "Intuitively, my feet led me to Lincoln school and guess what, a teacher had just given in her resignation and the job was waiting for me!" The job provided her with the financial support she was so direly in need of. After the school hours, she'd rush back to her school where she'd end up working till midnight with her son in tow. "I used to collect all the discarded materials from Lincoln school garbage and use them to make flash cards, number cards at my

school."

Slowly and steadily, the project VEDFON (Vicki Educational and Development Foundation Nepal) established in 1993, expanded from her first school, Daleki in Samakhushi to another extension, Catalunya school in Balaju. Both schools house a total of 530 students from pre-primary to class ten.

The methodology Vicky has created believes a brain of a child needs incentive to grow. Maturity of mind figures strongly in her curriculum that integrates formal education with problem solving, creative and inter personal skills. "A child brings with him/her the whole world that the child is exposed to. The children I work with come from highly complicated backgrounds and healing emotional problems figure strongly in our schools". Her credo is to encourage every child to dream and become architects of their lives.

The indomitable lady published a book in Spanish, Vicky Sherpa - A teacher in Kathmandu, in Spain in 2001. With two children that she dotes on and treats as her friends, she wishes she had more time for creative pursuits, "It's very tough raising funds. You can't be creative when you're always publicizing and advertising for funds. Now, I'd like to focus more on implementing my methodology and sell it to other schools. I've received a proposal to start a similar project for war torn children in Sierra Leone, Africa and see myself traveling a lot in future." But Nepal's poorest children to whom she strived to give the best education remain dear to her. ■

Nuclear waste

It is therefore necessary to start a dialogue or debate in this critical area

■ Saionton Basu

As India moves fast on the superhighway to civilian nuclear power plants and with Russia agreeing to give this country four more reactors, little thought has been given to the regulatory framework for safe and environmentally acceptable methods of disposal of radioactive wastes that would be generated. Given the emphasis that is being placed on nuclear power plants, it would not be premature at this early stage to chalk out a detailed regulatory regime governing disposal of (a) spent nuclear fuel from nuclear reactors; and (b) radioactive waste from the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel.

The Atomic Energy (Safe Disposal of Radioactive Wastes) Rules, 1987 ("Nuclear Waste Rules") is the only definitive law on the above point that we have, and I would beg to submit that it does not even begin to cover the bases, which would be thrown open by the installation of nuclear power plants. A law of this nature ought to provide

a reasonable assurance that the public and the environment will be adequately protected from the hazards posed by high-level radioactive waste and such spent nuclear fuel. The Nuclear Waste Rules only provides a sketchy Schedule, containing conditions and procedures for disposal of radioactive wastes by institutions handling small quantities of radioisotopes. It is therefore necessary to start a dialogue or debate in this critical area.

First and foremost, along the lines of the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, 1982, of the United States of America, site characterisation activities need to be carried out by the competent authority, which in the case of India would be the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board. Such site characterisation would include studying the extent of planned excavations, planning for any onsite testing with radioactive or non-radioactive material, planning for investigation activities that may affect the capability of such candidate site to isolate high-level radioactive waste and spent

nuclear fuel and planning to control any adverse, safety-related impacts from such site characterisation activities.

The Nuclear Waste Rules do not prescribe any guidelines for site characterisation and merely provide that no person shall dispose of radioactive waste in a location other than that which is prescribed in the authorisation granted under Rule 3. Thus it is not clear on whom the responsibility rests for site selection for disposal of radioactive waste. Ideally, the government should conduct site characterisation surveys and decide upon the most appropriate location for disposal of radioactive waste. State and public participation in the planning and development of repositories is essential in order to promote public confidence in the safety of disposal of such waste and spent fuel.

Secondly, on the lines of the Investor Education and Protection Fund envisaged under the Companies Act, 1956, a nuclear waste fund needs to be carved out in the Nuclear Waste Rules, composed of payments made by the

generators and owners of such waste and spent fuel, which will ensure that the costs of carrying out activities relating to the disposal of such waste and spent fuel will be borne by the persons responsible for generating such waste and spent fuel. A provision of this nature would indeed be a legislative crystallisation of the 'polluter pays' principle enunciated by the Supreme Court of India in the case of Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum versus Union of India, AIR 1996 SC 2715.

Thirdly, we come to the vexed question of the extent of private sector participation which ought to be permitted in the area of disposal of radioactive wastes. The analogy of privatisation of handling and disposal of municipal wastes, which is under way in several municipalities in India, though an useful starting point, runs into troubled waters, given the extent of sensitivity of the waste in question.

(expressindia online)

The writer is advocate, Supreme Court of India



Inside Afghanistan The battle for Kajaki

The war in the open spaces of Afghanistan is very different from the one being waged by the Americans in the streets of Baghdad. But for British Royal Marines engaged in daily firefights with the Taliban, it is no less dangerous

Royal Marine Andy Mason, on Sparrow Hawk ridge, sighted his heat-seeking Javelin anti-tank missile and squeezed the trigger. Eight seconds later it smashed into the target, a large house from which Taliban insurgents were firing at British forces.

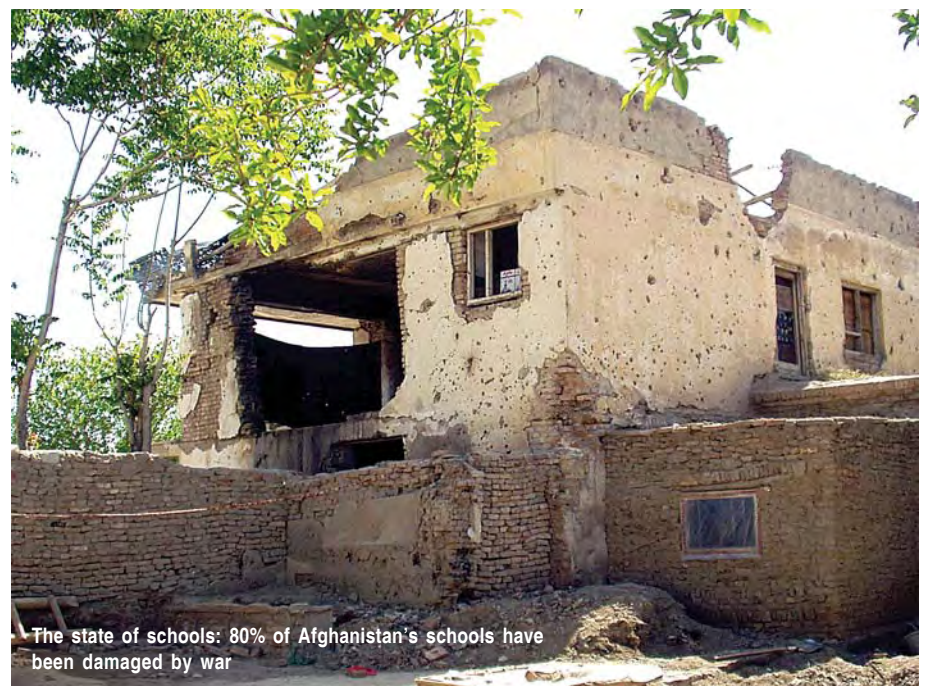
Half a dozen insurgent fighters jumped off the first-storey balcony just before it disintegrated. Others in the compound were trying to flee when air strikes were called in. A Tornado GR7 dropped a 1,000lb bomb, leaving the building a pile of rubble and billowing smoke.

This encounter took place on Friday night in Kajaki, one of the most ruggedly beautiful parts of Afghanistan, but also the

most dangerous, with daily fighting between Royal Marines and insurgents. Just before our helicopter landed from Camp Bastion, the main British base in southern Afghanistan's troubled Helmand province, the Taliban had begun shooting at the British position, starting a firefight that went on into the night.

While violence has ebbed away at other flashpoints in northern Helmand such as Sangin and Now Zad, and a truce of sorts holds at Musa Qala, it has escalated at Kajaki. Flanked by mountains and a deep-water lake, the area has become a symbolic and logistical prize for both sides. At its heart is the Kajaki dam, the biggest United States aid project in Afghanistan, which, when fully operational, will supply power to the provinces of Helmand and Kandahar.

The US construction company Lewis Berger has refused to begin work until a 6km safety zone has been established around the dam. That is what the Marines of 42 Commando are creating, in attritional warfare across some of the country's most inhospitable terrain.



The state of schools: 80% of Afghanistan's schools have been damaged by war

In one week, starting on New Year's Day, British forces said they had killed more than 120 Taliban. One Marine and one member of the Parachute Regiment have been killed, and around half a dozen injured.

"I could see the guys on the balcony in my sight when I fired the Javelin", said 27-year-old Marine Mason, from Harlow, Essex. "They had received fire from us and would have known what to expect. All they would have seen was a flash. They jumped off the balcony and the Javelin followed them down. These are awesome weapons, but it's a sobering thought that each time you fire them it is costing £65,000. We come in constant contact with them, but we have firepower they can't match."

From three vantage points - Sparrow Hawk, Athens and Normandy - the Marines attempt to control and then expand into the valleys. They live and fight from old Soviet positions where one still comes across the debris of a lost war - twisted artillery wreckage, spent shells and also personal items like spectacles and books, abandoned when Soviet forces left in a hurry. Down below, groups of men, suspected insurgents, can be seen moving along the narrow tracks and a deep wadi between walled compounds. British convoys leaving Kajaki come under frequent Taliban fire.

(The Independent)

Healing exercise



Khalanga buried its passed but the future is uncertain

■ Chhatra Karki in Jajarkot

Bheri's water has often turned red as she has silently borne witness to the wounded and dead bodies being dumped in the waters over the years of the conflict, leaving no evidence. It may all be relegated to history what with the relative peace prevalent now but wounds are still raw in those who fought and suffered all those years. A mix of hope, despair and uncertainty flits across the minds of those who are trying to adjust to life today.

After crossing Bheri I met two young boys in the hills of Kale Gaun. "We never felt tired walking even for 10 hours everyday as soldiers of the people's war, but now we find it difficult to walk for an hour", said the Maoist guerrillas, out of breath. They were on their way back home from a cantonment located in Surkhet, Dashrathpur.

Their house is about a day's walk from Khalanga, the district headquarter of Jajarkot. The duo identified themselves as comrades Sandesh and Prajwal. They supported the party line on the contemporary peace process but were clearly worried about their own future. One of them said, "We gave up our studies when we were in class nine. I hope the conflict will be resolved but what will be our role in coming days?" The effect of dreams sold to them appear to be wearing thin. What worries them now is how they will adjust to the new reality and the future society.

It took an hour for us to walk to Khalanga from Kale Gaun. The situation has changed drastically in this remote mid-western district compared to the days of conflict. The place smothered by curfew for five years can now finally light their lamps in the evenings. The people can walk around without fear and have begun to experience what peace used to be like. The wish that this peace to be a lasting one is on everybody's minds.

Security personnel were doing their jobs minus any fear. They have also started going

"We are going to all villages of the district to draw support and the people are enthusiastic and optimistic"

home on leave, something they couldn't do during the conflict. En route, I met an army soldier hurrying back to his barracks in Surkhet. "My other colleague can go on leave once I report on time", he said, expressing his happiness at being able to see his family after three long years.

Khalanga in peace is different, and so are the people who are no longer afraid.

Clashes between security forces and Maoists were common, and the security wall around the District Administration office (DAO) was getting higher. The wall is now being brought down. "Our perceived proximity with the other side, Maoists or the army used to put us under constant risk of attack," the locals said.

Peace that has prevailed has enabled those who once were considered the Maoists now to freely talk about their likes, dislikes and affiliation with the non-Maoist parties, mainly Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML. Prem Bahadur Shahi, 63, a resident of Dhime-9, Jajarkot, said the two parties are very strong here. He was attacked by the Maoists five years ago and was given up for dead. Today, he's quite active in the Nepali Congress party.

The local Maoist leaders and cadres walk around with no fear of reprisal.

An election to the local body two years after the conflict saw CPN-UML sweep 30 village development councils, the Nepali congress getting the second place. But, when Maoist took to guns, all the elected leaders either moved to Kathmandu or to the district headquarters in Jajarkot, which made the two major parties almost invisible.

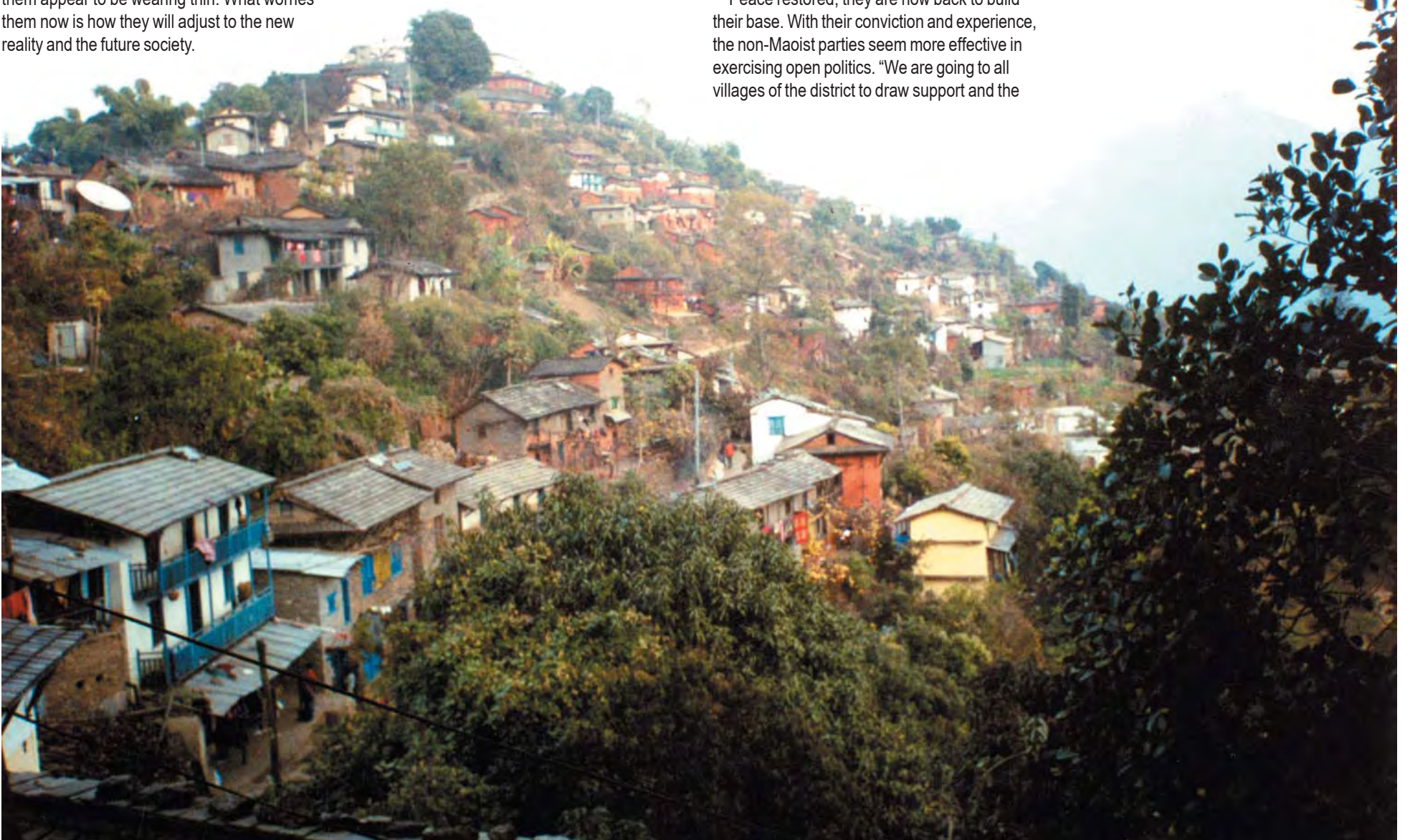
Peace restored, they are now back to build their base. With their conviction and experience, the non-Maoist parties seem more effective in exercising open politics. "We are going to all villages of the district to draw support and the

people are enthusiastic and optimistic", Dambar Bahadur Singh, local CPN-UML leader said. But it's only the grass root cadres of the Maoists who are trying to establish their contacts with the people. Their leaders from district level and above are still based outside.

It's not only the grass root workers who are confused about the nature of politics that Maoists would be pursuing in the future. "The party should not give up its revolutionary line," Tek Bahadur Rawal (Darshan), President of the now dissolved district Janasarkar said, "people will start the war again if Maoist leaders forget all about what they fought for." But local mood appears hostile towards the Maoists as many of them openly talk about the atrocities by their cadres and leaders against ordinary villagers in the time of conflict.

With the return of Government civil servants and the police posts, central level leaders of different parties mainly the congress, congress (D) and CPN-UML have frequented these areas many times to re-establish their holds.

Khalanga, despite its political awareness, lacks connection with the outside world to overcome which a ten kilometer link road with Chhinchu (Surkhet) is being built.





The politics of Civil Society

■ C. D. Bhatta



Civil society debate has reached a new height in recent years. If, as Amartya Sen has claimed, the pre-eminent development of the 20th century was the rise of democracy then it is widely believed that civil society has re-emerged in the new millennium as a global force essential to ensuring just and equitable society.

Likewise, in recent year's donors and donor supported NGOs have given renewed emphasis to strengthen local civil society organizations in third world countries including Nepal. There are three main reasons behind this approach - first to accelerate democratisation process, second to uplift economic conditions of the people and third to engage civil society organizations in conflict resolution process. No doubt, this is a complete package for the advancement of any society/ country if implemented with full faith.

The practice of engaging civil society *per se* in political process is neither new nor an old phenomenon. It has, nevertheless, taken a fresh momentum after the end of the Cold War following the triumph of liberal democracy and capitalist routes to development. Interestingly, the civil society project itself has been developed by the Western developed countries and enforced upon developing countries, some even say to further their own interest(s).

Besides this, the western countries saw non-western civil society - a traditionalistic, ritualistic built on familial and kinship values, which they

believe in no way can deliver public goods and meet civic duties in a true sense.

There are many but contrasting school of thoughts whether the NGO led Western Governmental Organisations (WGOs) approach really paves the way towards democratisation process, civil society development and economic development. What is true, however, is that donor support to the local NGO executives has given birth to the middle class elites in the third world.

The bottom line here is can NGOs with no known source of funding really be the part of civil

society? There is no straight forward answer to this. Yes, they can be part of the civil society if they work in line with civic values. But they certainly cannot be, if they are just spending their donors money on the imported agenda. To our dismay, the latter part is true in most cases here.

Different countries have different views towards the civil society and the role it has played. In case of Japan the civil society is not so strong but the country is economically unbeatable and politically stable. Same goes for the South

East Asian countries – once known as 'Asian Tigers' for their economic success even with minimal political and civil rights. What mattered in these cases is the sense of national belonging and loyalty among citizenry towards state.

Civil society can promote democracy definitely, provided its constituents rise above vested interests. What can we expect from civil society in Nepal? It is divided on different 'columns' based on their partisan association. The 'worldwide rise' in the phenomenon or growth of 'civil society' is not without its impact on Nepal. The respectability

like inclusion and exclusion are influenced by these indices. Donors and donor supported NGOs have never genuinely attempted to bridge this gap without glorifying or pitting one against another, although it clearly deconstructs societal base and divides society on vertical lines. It is understandable that every society needs to be civilized but they should not be encouraged to act as catalyst agent of conflict in a given society.

Who constitutes the civil society in Nepal? – They are no doubts known names drawn from various walks of the society, but they are the ones trusted and promoted by donors at one or the other point of time. And the visible face of the present Kathmandu based civil society virtually controls Nepali civic sphere and NGO business.

Nepali civil society has contributed heavily in waging 'movements' *per se* but failed to advocate most important issues like representing marginalized groups and forming peace constituencies in order to institutionalise democracy in the country.

Finally, the challenges for Nepali civil society and others who are engaged in civil society strengthening project is to democratize society horizontally and not divide society vertically. What is needed for its significant prevalence is to ensure more inclusive culture to build networks and coalitions among poor groups to strengthen voices of unrepresented mass. That will surely help in changing people's perception about civil society and mobilize it for a greater cause— Nepal's transformation into an inclusive society. (Bhatta is a Phd scholar in London School of Economics)

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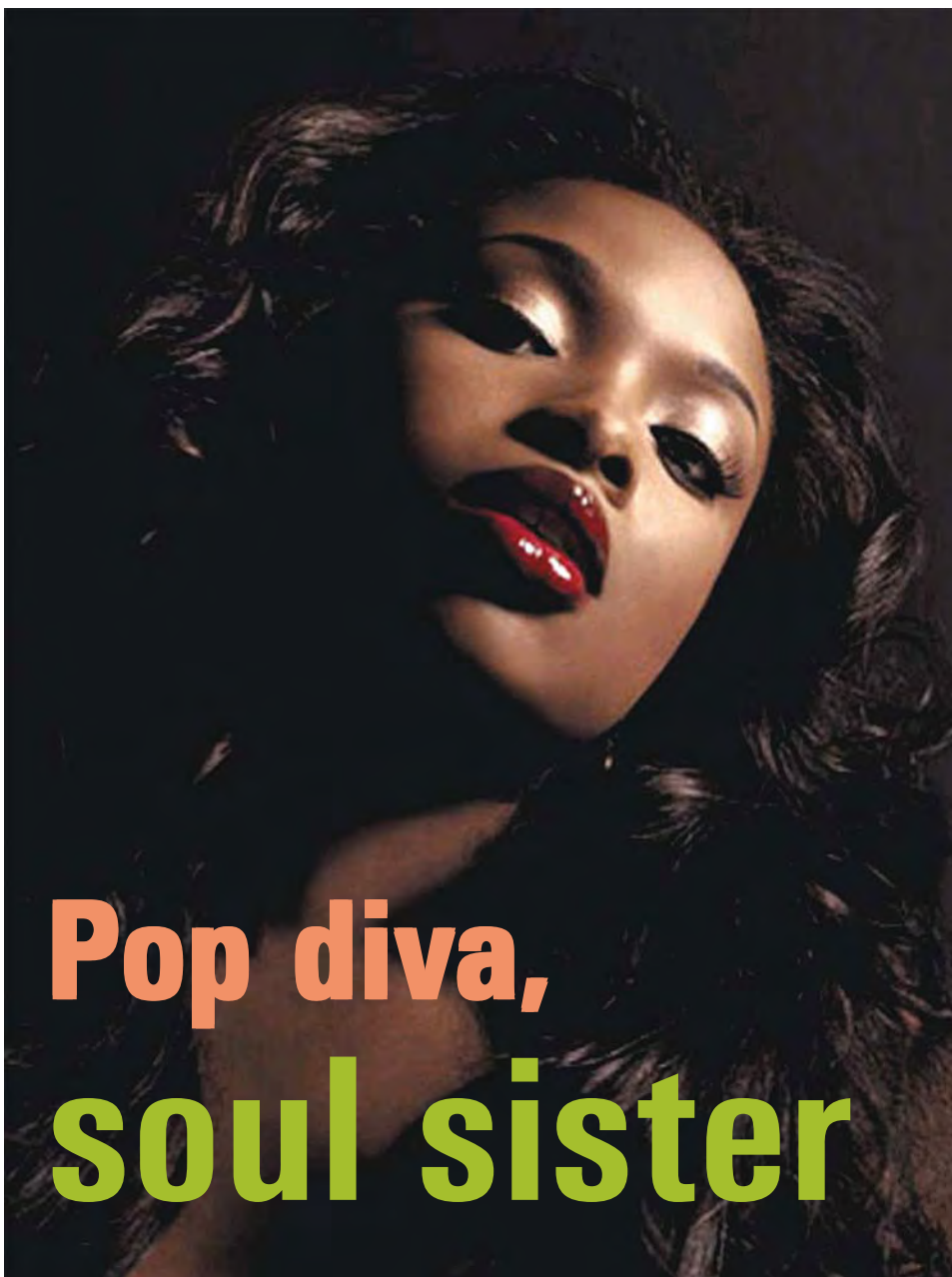


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Pop diva, soul sister

Jennifer Hudson, Golden Globe winner, Oscar nominee and wailing embodiment of the American dream, is today's hottest new star. Arguing against that is like arguing against the weather — literally.

Various writers have described Ms. Hudson's turn as Effie in the film version of "Dreamgirls" as more than a mere performance: It's an act of God. To quote from recent reviews, Hudson "blows away" the bigger stars in the cast, "tears

Various writers have described Ms. Hudson's turn as Effie in the film version of "Dreamgirls" as more than a mere performance: It's an act of God

the screen apart" and "takes you sky high"; she is "grandly shattering," "explosive" and "pyrotechnic." Hurricane Effie's eye wall, the pop aria "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going," is propelling audiences to their feet nationwide.

Contrast this with the tepid reception for Beyoncé Knowles — the most powerful young woman in popular music today — as the blasé alpha Dreamgirl, Deena. This top-billed role has earned Knowles barely any public notice; even a trumped-up feud between the superstar and Hudson quickly fizzled, drenched by the rapturous Hudson hype. But there's more to the battle between Effie and Deena than the victory of an underdog. Beneath this feel-good story lurks a century's worth of assumptions about self-expression, femininity and race.

Effie versus Deena, translated into top-of-the-lungs gospel soul versus meek commercial pop, narrows the range of black female expression to a pair of clichés. Hudson makes Effie human, projecting sassiness, rage, pride and desolation. But Effie is also a stereotype — the authentic black "sister," built from working-class values, earthy humor and the raw artistry of blues and gospel. Deena is even more flat, the race-negating black princess sneakily beating out the supermama. This split reinforces the worst habits of thinking about "real" black artists as rough-hewn, over-emoting and probably destined for tragedy. Such misperceptions have deep roots — it's what drew white blues fans in

the 1960s to obscure Delta itinerants instead of the sequin-gowned, smart-talking women singers who really popularized the blues and, before that, forced geniuses such as Louis Armstrong and Mahalia Jackson to sometimes pose as corn-shucking country folk. It's one reason why black artists who don't fit the mold — from Paul Robeson to Charles Mingus to, yes, Diana Ross — have been cast as trouble-makers.

Aren't we past these stereotypes now, even if we weren't when "Dreamgirls" first appeared on Broadway in 1981? In the year of Barack Obama's likely presidential candidacy, shouldn't a pop-culture "triumph" like this film offer a more complex view of black culture?

IN "Dreamgirls," the divide between Effie and Deena represents not just a vocal approach but a way of being. Effie is non-nonsense and psychically free. Her body gives her problems (like Oprah, she fights the fat) but makes her trustworthy; her Svengali, played by Jamie Foxx, is drawn to her because she reminds him of the sisters who raised him. She is grits and combread, a living home truth. And she sings straight from the gut. ■ (LA Times)

Pyre-side reflections



■ Sushma Amatya

The thought, 'this too shall pass' has helped me through thick and thin. Every phase in life, every situation including shifts in one's moods flows past. The river of life doesn't stop though at times it may appear the flow has solidified.

People, events and things connected with their lives are in a constant state of flux. Everything is changing every nano-second. This is a proven fact but our minds are so deeply conditioned to concepts of what reality should be that we don't find it easy to accept changes, especially those that are not to our liking. Changes in life like illnesses, adverse life situations, growing older and eventually, dying and death.

Death is something we barely talk about. We have trained ourselves, if not to deny the eternal fact, to postpone even to think about it. We treat it as something we eventually will have to face but till that time comes, we are just not ready. We are too busy living right now. And most of the time, we treat it as something that happens to somebody else, not to ourselves or those around us.

But when it does, it strikes us like a bolt of lightning and catches us unawares. We devise ways to cope with it, create layers of self protection to hide under and rarely do we learn to accept the fact that we indeed are impermanent like those who passed away and death could strike us at any moment.

Personally, I was very afraid of death, especially of those close to me. Instinctively, whenever I could feel the shadow of death approaching, I managed to distance myself from the event. A phone call of someone passing away or even a visit to the Ghats, I thought was better than to watch somebody close to you die. I knew I was a coward in this aspect and I was willing to accept my cowardice rather than to face the reality of dying and death. But deep down inside the fact that that I was avoiding a crucial part of growing up emotionally and mentally by indulging in this denial would nag me often.

Recently, when I had to deal with suffering of a family member who was fighting a losing battle with last stages of cancer, I decided not to run away; no matter how bad it turned out and how long it took. I got involved as one of the caretakers of the ailing, did my share and prayed the best I knew during the ordeal. Despite the best

medical attention, all the Poojas performed, death soon loomed large and then, I changed my prayers that used to be focused on his recovery and extension of life to another one - that his soul gets prepared for the journey ahead and prayed he be blessed with strength to bear his suffering that we were unable to alleviate.

We watched cancer devour all the life force manifesting in extreme weakness and helplessness as it reduced him to skin and bones. Gradually there were signs of life force receding that put the him at the mercy of tubes for all his bodily functions. Finally, there was only breathing left as a sign of life. Soon, it too stopped, he was declared dead and the body taken for cremation.

Once the pyre was lit, despite the urging of other relatives to leave the Ghats along with other women, I stood adamant and watched the body burn — something I had never done before. It was a cathartic process of a kind. As each log was added and every body part consumed by flames, I visualised my own end too, and empathised for the soul that no longer had a body and faced an unknown crossing ahead minus a name, form, possessions, status, fame and what have you while you were living.

I reflected on the kind of life that just ended. How much energy, effort and resources the deceased spent in trying to please and be pleased, to fit in the often outdated, unreasonable expectations of the society and as a result how elusive happiness turned out to be for him. It taught me a huge lesson in getting my priorities right in all spheres of my life.

Standing alone in silence, I focused on the fire that devoured all traces of the tragic struggle of the deceased. It was painful but through the pain, I found myself growing stronger. I realised I was free of one more bondage of fear when I went back home and no longer bothered about quizzical looks and sarcastic comments of well meaning relatives. Their criticism failed to affect me this time. And their flattery too.

Death now for me is no longer something to be afraid of but just another transition point that I think we all need to prepare for. The awareness of my mortality makes me appreciate life all the more. It has brought home the importance of living every second with full alertness, humility and gratitude. ■



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