



Courage & Conviction

# newsfront

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Supriya Tuladhar being crowned Miss Newa 2007 in the capital on Saturday.

Bhaswor Ojha

## Call of conscience

Whips defied by prominent ruling MPs

■ nf correspondent

At a time when G P Koirala and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) are going euphoric about parliament declaring Nepal a 'Republic', records show many members, especially belonging to Nepali Congress and the UML had defied party whips.

Out of 322 members in parliament, about 35 defied party instructions to be present and vote in manner instructed. Most notable of those who defied the whip include Taranath Ranabhat of the Congress and Khadga Oli of the UML. Their absence confirms their displeasure and belief that this parliament has no right to pass a resolution of this magnitude without a fresh mandate from the people.

"Yes, I followed the dictate of my conscience. I will not be a party to any process that undermines the right of the sovereign people to decide the issues of crucial importance for the country", Ranabhat told Newsfront. Former Prime Minister Oli was not available for comment. It is not yet known what actions the parties contemplate against them, but the UML seems to be more eager to punish the dissenters than Nepali Congress. The members had been issued whips to be present in the House and vote as per the official line that favoured Nepal being declared republic now and leaving it to the CA to implement it. "It's absurd and

unacceptable that a future CA has to work under directive from the present House", said Ranabhat.

Former Prime Minister K P Bhattarai and P L Singh are the only two members who have not attended any session of the revived parliament. "This parliament has outlived its mandate. My conscience does not allow me to participate in its proceedings", Singh told Newsfront. Former Home Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka is away in his home town Surkhet while another Congress member Govinda Bahadur Shah is abroad.

Although more than 50 MPs from the Congress party had warned Koirala not to go for the current resolution as that would 'amount to surrender' to the Maoists, they obeyed the party line once the whip was issued. But they have made their reservation known to Koirala. Those who obeyed the whip 'to save the party from a split' include former Ministers Khum Bahadur Khadka, Govindaraj Joshi, Bijay Gachedar and Arjun Narsingh K C. They had decided to fall in line after Koirala took the position that defiance of whip might invite disciplinary actions like expulsion from the party which will also mean their not being able to contest the CA poll as the party candidate.

A senior leader of the UML said that the party is investigating into the defiance and take stern action once full details are available. ■

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## BJP sore

Delhi's Nepal policy questioned



As India's main opposition, the Bharatiya Janata Party, appeared riding the crest of an electoral victory in two states—Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh—appears to be challenging the government not only on domestic issues, but on international policies as well.

A clear indicator of that came when L. K. Advani, the person party has projected as its Prime Ministerial candidate for the next general election, questioned Delhi's dual approach on Maoist problems in India and Nepal. He is also believed to have conveyed to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh that it was basically Maoist dictate that was shaping Nepal's political future than the genuine will of the Nepali people.

Advani's reported comments come in the wake of interim parliament in Kathmandu declaring Nepal a Federal Republic with the directive to the yet to be elected constituent assembly to implement it. Advani's stance is also being taken as his party's disapproval of the response of the government of India to the latest developments in Nepal. Rajnath Singh, National president of the BJP has publicly stated in October that the interim parliament should leave it to the CA to decide on the issue of monarchy.

But BJP's assertion has grown in the wake of its electoral victory in the states. The new electoral fortunes in state elections has created political difficulties for the Congress led regime at the centre. Yashwant Sinha, former Foreign affairs Minister and a senior BJP leader, said in an interview to Amarujala, a vernacular daily from Uttar Pradesh that the recent resolution declaring Nepal a Federal republic was more of an outcome of the pressure of the Maoist party than the true reflection of the will of Nepali people. In fact, many BJP leaders are criticising the government that South Block's Nepal policy was dictated more the CPI-M, a reference to party's politburo member Sitaram Yechury's visible engagement with Nepal's politics.

Incidentally, Prime Minister Singh had recently directed to senior officials of 13 states of India which are under grip of Maoist violence to 'crush the virus of terrorism' to restore order in the country.

# Koirala and Koirala counterfeit company

It may have been unintended candor, but Prime Minister G P Koirala has admitted that he and his legendary brother B P Koirala were involved in manufacturing fake Indian currency notes during their days in the political wilderness. Incidentally, the Koirala revelations have come on the eve of his brother's historic return to Nepal with an appeal for national reconciliation - a policy that G P Koirala has dumped - 31 years ago.

In his ongoing autographical interview series to Kantipur television recently, Prime Minister Koirala said that he had hired experts to produce counterfeit currency notes when he was in political exile in India after 1968. He asserted that all that was done with the consent of B P Koirala who was then living in Sarnath.

Giving graphic details of the family business, G P Koirala said he came into contact with forgery artists in Forebesganj in Bihar's Purnea district. Once he was convinced about their expertise to produce indistinguishable fake currency notes, he engaged them in the business. "BP examined the notes and could not distinguish between fake and real ones", said the Prime Minister.

In the revelation, the Prime Minister has also claimed that fake currency notes were produced



at the residence of Dr Devendra Prasad Singh in Patna. Dr Singh, a long time friend of B P was once the vice chancellor of Bhagalpur University and later a member of the Rajya Sabh-Upper House of Indian parliament. This is another of the shining examples of our people-to-people bonds in Indo-Nepal relationship.

The Prime Minister further said that once the fake currencies were produced B P gave them to be deposited in a bank to test whether it could be detected. "Within days, the money was withdrawn without the bank detecting it", says the Prime Minister.

G P Koirala also claimed that these were done to feed large number of party workers and tide over the financial crisis that the Koirala family was going through in exile. On another occasion, however, B P had apparently stopped his highly entrepreneurial younger brother G P from getting into a car-smuggling business in Bombay saying "if you get into these mafia activities, they will kill you." Had the warning not been heard, we would have never heard of Chhota Rajan and Haji Mastan.

The involvement of Nepal's most illustrious political dynasty in the forgery business will no doubt do much to raise the stature and social prestige so often denied to the con artist fraternity by society in general. The restored respectability is evidenced in the ease and comfort with which the fraternity in carrying out various forms of abductions, corruptions, ransoms and all other forms of income and employment generation. Al Capone could certainly learn from Nepal.

# TU launches MA Conflict program

nf correspondent

Tribhuvan University has recently started a new Masters program in Conflict, Peace and Development Studies (CPDS) program. The 2-year, 4-semester program is a multidisciplinary program that synthesizes insights from various social sciences and humanities for the study of contemporary conflicts around the world. According to the CPDS vision, the goal is to produce a new peace praxis that synthesizes critical social science theory and practioner work experiences from the field.

The new program, whose classes began in September, was formally inaugurated by State Minister for Education and Sports Mohan Singh Rathore last Thursday. The program currently has 38 students. Vice Chancellor of Tribhuvan University Prof. Madhab Prasad Sharma said that the new program was intended to offer relevant and timely topics of study that they



could use in society. Dean Prof. Ramesh Kunwar mentioned the various individuals and agencies whose efforts had made CPDS a reality.

The CPDS is a joint program between TU, University of Life Sciences of Norway, Eastern

University, Batticola and Ruhuna University, Matara in Sri Lanka. CPDS Coordinator Dr. Saubhagya Shah said that the goal of the new academic discipline was to produce graduates who can work on the issues of conflict and peace at the research, policy, and teaching platforms as well as working in humanitarian crisis, post-conflict reconstruction, peace process, governance, and complex emergencies.

One of the key features of the CPDS program is the regular exchange of students and faculty between Norway, Sri Lanka and Nepal to contribute to the exchange of experiences and knowledge between the partner universities. Apart from classes and workshops, CPDS program depends on extensive fieldworks and case studies from across the globe for teaching the students. CPDS has received support from Norway's NOMA program for four years.

## संविधानसभाको सवालमा राष्ट्रिय रेडियो बहस

तपाईंको बिचार. प्रश्न र भोगाई प्रत्यक्ष टेलिफोनमा

**पैसा नलाग्ने**  
फोन: १६६० ०१ ३४५६७

# नेपाल चौतारी

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## Newsbrief

## Price hike



Good news: petrol pumps have far less number of vehicles queuing up for fuel. And bad news: the petrol price has gone up second time in less than a month. According to the latest decision of the government, the price of petrol has gone up to Rs.80 from Rs.73 per litre. According to the Nepal Oil Corporation, the new hike is to adjust the price of petroleum products with the prevailing rate in the international market.

An official has said that the price of diesel, kerosene and other fuel also may be increased in the coming days, adding "but that has to be done carefully as it might lead to unrest among the consumers". But whether the supply and distribution of petrol will be smooth in the days to come will depend on how promptly the Nepal Oil Corporation pays back huge arrears to the Indian oil Corporation (IOC).

## Minister chastised

Minister for Industries and Civil supplies, Shyam Sunder Gupta often hogs media headlines for wrong reasons. He is no exception this time around as well. On December 29, parliamentary committee on State affairs chastised the Minister for ignoring the committee's summon to appear before it on the petroleum price hike issue. "It's unacceptable that a Minister ignores the committee's summon", said Mahendra Pandey, chief of the committee.



The committee has informed the Prime Minister as well as the Speaker about the Minister's defiance. Gupta faces charges of abduction, torture and wrongful confinement of his political rivals, mainly the ones who broke away from Nepal Sadbhavana party (NSP) recently.

## Durgesh in Delhi

Durgeshman Singh is being tipped as Nepal's ambassador to Delhi. He will be replacing Shailaja Acharya whose appointment was cancelled by the cabinet recently on 'health grounds'.

Although Shitwalniwas sources said they have no information about Singh's likely appointment, a senior cabinet minister told Newsfront that Singh was acceptable both to both the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sahana Pradhan.

Singh, an economist, has earlier served as member of the Planning Commission. He was also Nepal's ambassador to the European Union in the 90s.

## Diplomatic snub?

The G P Koirala government feels a bit embarrassed that three of the ambassadors proposed by the government may not be acceptable to the host countries.

France refused to accept Maoist leader Pampha Bhushal while Australia turned down Yogendra Dhakal's nomination. Dhakal, a nominee of the Maoist party, is supposed to have overstayed in the United States as an illegal immigrant. Similarly, Hameed Ansari, a nominee of the UML, has not been accepted by Saudi Arabia. "Now that the agreements have not come for more than three months, we can assume that they are not acceptable to the host countries", Foreign Ministry sources said.

In the meantime, Bhushal, a prominent Maoist leader, has been inducted as a cabinet-rank minister in the council of Ministers.



## Resignation galore?

Terai party formed, more MPs to quit

■ nf correspondent

The long awaited Terai Madhesh Loktantrik Party (TMLP) came into existence on December 29 with its founder President Mahantha Thakur declaring that the new party stands for an autonomous region with the right to self-determination.

He however, said the right to self determination is in no way a right to secede. "It is a right that the oppressed communities will have to create a separate province within a federal set-up". The party was launched nearly a fortnight after four parliamentarians along with Thakur quit their parties as well as their parliamentary seats.

The formation of the new party comes with clear ominous signs for the interim parliament as well as the government led by G P Koirala. The TMLP leaders have already questioned the validity of the current interim parliament and its right to exist and there are more resignation expected from Terai MPs.

In a parallel move, the National Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NFIN) which is still demanding proportional



Pic by newsfront

representation system for the constituent assembly has issued a call to members of parliament belonging to various janajati groups to resign their seats immediately and search for an 'alternative platform'. NFIN president Pasang Sherpa said on December 30 that the indigenous MPs should resign if the demands are not met soon. He however, did not set any deadline for the resignation.

Pasang's appeal comes at a time when more resignation from the Terai MPs are expected. The only parliamentarian from Terai to quit after Mahantha Thakur is Jaya Prakash Gupta. But to the disappointment of the MTLP, he joined the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF)

led by Upendra Yadav which many think is a signal of likely polarisation that might dominate future politics in Terai. While TMLP is dominated and led by the upper castes at the moment, MJF is emerging more like a platform of intermediary castes.

"We are expecting prominent leaders like Bijay Gachedar to quit the Congress and come to our fold along with his supporters any time", a TMLP leader said on condition of anonymity. As a counter move, Prime Minister G P Koirala has been luring Gachedar and some other prominent Terai leaders that they will be inducted in the council of ministers very soon.

## Unconvincing

Verification raises more questions

■ nf correspondent

The recently concluded verification of Maoist combatants has raised fresh questions about management of the Maoist arms and armies as more than 8,640 'combatants' skipped the process and their whereabouts are not known..

The final report made public by Ian Martin, Chief of the United Nations Mission to Nepal (UNMIN) recently revealed that a total of nearly one third of those registered with the UN were found not qualified as combatants. Altogether 19,602 out of 32,240 registered were qualified as 'combatants' on final verification. UNMIN chief admitted he had no information about those who deserted the camps after their registration.

The report said altogether 2971 were found to be child soldiers while another 4008 were found recruited after May 25, 2006, the day peace process had begun and were being disqualified on that ground.

Martin's way of making details of the reports public through a press conference also drew an angry response from the Maoists questioning his right to go that way. The report that confirms sizeable presence of the child soldiers in the Maoist army on one hand, and confirmation of mass scale defiance and desertion by more than 8,000 people is another issue that the party may not feel comfortable about.

On the other hand, the process of verification also raises some



important questions about the reliability of the UNMIN process itself. The large scale desertion naturally brings into question the reliability of the verification process was. In response to a question (during the release of the report) by a media person over the direct link between the disappearance of the combatants and the activity of the Young Communist League (YCL), Martin said the fundamental commitment was to keep the People's Liberation Army (PLA) out of the constituent assembly election. He hoped that the Maoist army would maintain full discipline over those in the cantonments as their future is under discussion.

But the government is more worried about the status of the disappeared combatants. "UNMIN is responsible for

monitoring the supervision of arms and armies of both sides. It must gather information and assure the government that its job is done thoroughly", Sources in the Prime Minister's office told Newsfront, adding "the Prime Minister is going to take up the issue both with Maoist leaders and the UNMIN."

In fact, Martin has already acknowledged that he had no information about how many of the deserters were in the YCL. He said, "frankly, we have a little information as to where those people are at the moment. Certainly some of the child protection agencies have come across some of them back in their own communities. It may indeed be that some are now active in the YCL in their own communities or elsewhere. But we simply don't have that information".



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**Point to Ponder**

Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe.  
 - Albert Einstein

# Price of Democracy

World community has condemned Benazir's Bhutto's assassination in one voice—that it was an act of cowardice. But it is also a major victory for all those who practice the politics and religion of hatred, fanaticism and intolerance. While it is yet to be verified independently, al-Qaeda with its base in Afghanistan has claimed responsibility for Benazir's killing. For al Qaeda, she was the most hated enemy as 'she was America's most precious asset out to defeat the Islamic militants. And the other reason that her killers did not mention is so open—that they would never want a woman to lead Pakistan.

Bhutto's assassination has now made the election process, and Pakistan's return to democracy totally uncertain. From Nawaj Sharif to Imran Khan, Pro-democracy leaders have withdrawn from the electoral process as the event triggered series of riots and clashes in parts of Pakistan. Bhutto who had just been back from nearly eight years in exile was not only seeking to lead Pakistan government, she was also looking for a larger endorsement of the people for her fight against militancy and religious fundamentalism. And she was right in her calculation that the state could defeat religious fundamentalists only with the support of the people.

But this event has a wider implication beyond Pakistan's border as well. The world community's anguish and unequivocal condemnation of the murder shows it is aware of such an implication. While it is Pakistan government's responsibility to bring those involved in the murder to justice, world community's responsibility lies in defeating 'terrorism' in any form and manifestation any where. In fact, it would be dangerous for any one to treat terrorists as 'short-term' ally even for a limited time and purpose. That will only grant them a platform and opportunity to grow. Great powers must desist from the short-term conveniences of one country's terrorist is another country's freedom fighter' calculations.

Any politics that preaches intolerance, hatred and execution of the 'enemies' needs to be dealt with collectively by those believing in democracy. Perhaps, President Musharraf has come to realise that state alone could not defeat the forces of terrorism. His facilitating the return of Benzir Bhutto and Nawaj Sharif from exile had apparently been influenced partly by his own belated realisation. and partly by the compulsion of the emerging domestic politics.

But far greater challenges are ahead for president Musharraf and pro-democracy leaders in Pakistan now. People's anger and anguish over the tragedy have taken the form of riots in parts of the country. A further deterioration in the law and order will only make fertile ground for the forces of authoritarianism to grow. In the meantime, government's failure to contain militancy will make Pakistan and the region under increased presence and interference from international community.

A consensus among the pro-democratic forces on how to face the immediate crisis and ensure Pakistan's smooth transition to democracy are the best way to move ahead. Ultimately, that will perhaps be the most appropriate homage to Benazir Bhutto who sacrificed her life for democracy in Pakistan.



## Letters

### Now-here to every-where

■ Vinaya Prasad Adhikary

When clouds gather in the sky and dissolve in the sky,  
 When water bubbles in oceans and dissolve in the oceans,

When thoughts manifest from no-where and vanish in the same no-where

Then,  
 I see the no-where in its naked form,  
 I see no-where now-here,  
 I see now-here every-where.

When I drink a cup of tea,  
 When I drink just a cup of tea,  
 I can see the taste of tea.

When I see birds chirping in the morning,  
 I can smell the melodious sounds,  
 When I see the blue ridge mountains,  
 I taste some deep resounds.

When I climb the mountain,  
 The mountain vanishes,  
 When the mountain vanishes,  
 stones, soils, pebble and trees emerge.

When I further climb,  
 I kiss the sky high,  
 When sky meets sky,  
 then it is a great fly.

When I smell a flower,  
 Smell flowers me.  
 When I write a poem  
 writing poems me.

Formless forms  
 shapeless shapes,  
 beginning endless extensions  
 what a dimension,  
 without any dimensions.

When my eyes blink,  
 and the lungs breathe,  
 When my ears listen  
 and mouth waters,

I see the no-where now- here,  
 I see the no-where now- here.

When there is birth,  
 They say a child is born.  
 When there is birth,  
 I say a mother is born.

When they see a death,  
 They say now the poor is finished.  
 When there is a death,  
 I say, now here it begins.

When I see no-where,  
 I see everywhere,  
 When I see everywhere,  
 It is simply now-here.

Then,

I see the no-where in its own form,  
 I see no-where now-here,  
 I see now-here every where.  
 I see every-where no-where

Every where!!!



### Free the judiciary

Your editorial 'Judicial emasculation' was very appropriate and timely. The supreme court is no more an apex representative of the judiciary, and it is only increasingly becoming the extended organ under the executive. Judiciary's independence was subverted completely the day Kedar Prasad Giri was nominated as the Chief Justice by the Prime Minister after the parliamentary hearing had failed to endorse him. Giri is more like Koirala's chief justice now, as his appointment is much against the provision of the constitution. But as your editorial rightly points out, this judiciary can not go against the government on crucial cases for the simple reason that we have an Executive's or the Prime Minister's representative as the Chief Justice. his first loyalty will be for the Prime Minister, and not for the constitution.

■ Ramesh Thapaliya  
 Bishal Nagar

## Spiritual Corner

### Transformed from scholar to devotee

**Chaitanya Charitamrita** (1486 - 1533) was a Vaishnava monk and social reformer in 16th century Bengal and Orissa in India. Chaitanya was a notable proponent for the Vaishnava school of Bhakti yoga based on the philosophy of the Bhagavata Purana and Bhagavad Gita. Specifically he worshipped the forms of Radha and Krishna and popularised the chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra. His line of followers, known as Gaudiya Vaishnavas, revere him as an avatar of Krishna in the mood of Radharani who was prophesied to appear in the later verses of the Bhagavata Purana.

There are numerous biographies available

from the time giving details of Chaitanya's life, the most prominent ones being the Chaitanya Charitamrita of Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami and the earlier Chaitanya Bhagavata of Vrindavana Dasa Thakura and the Chaitanya Mangala, written by Lochana Dasa Thakura.

In his youth, Chaitanya was primarily known as an erudite scholar, whose learning and skills in argumentation in his locality were second to none. A number of stories also exist telling of Chaitanya's



apparent attraction to the chanting and singing of Krishna's names from a very young age, but largely this was perceived as being secondary to his interest in acquiring knowledge and studying Sanskrit.

When traveling to Gaya, Chaitanya met his guru, the ascetic Ishvara Puri, from whom he received initiation with the Gopala Krishna mantra. This meeting was to mark a significant change in Mahaprabhu's outlook and upon his return to Bengal the local Vaishnavas, headed by Advaita Acharya, were

stunned at his external sudden change of heart (from scholar to devotee) and soon Chaitanya became the eminent leader of their Vaishnava group within Nadiya.

After leaving Bengal and receiving entrance into the Sannyasa order by Keshava Bharati, Chaitanya journeyed throughout the length and breadth of India for several years. He spent the last 24 years of his life in Puri, Orissa, the temple city of Jagannath. The King of Orissa, Maharaja Prataparudra, regarded him as Krishna incarnate and was an enthusiastic patron and devotee of Chaitanya's Sankirtan party. It was during these years that Chaitanya is believed by his followers to have sank deep into various meditational trances (Samadhi) and divine ecstasy (Bhakti).

# Buddha, Jung Bahadur and Prachanda



■ Yubraj Ghimire

It seems Prachanda is quite fascinated by Lord Buddha. He has invoked Buddha's name several times publicly. The first was when he surfaced at Prime Minister's residence in Baluwatar on June 2006 signaling the end of his more than two-decade long underground political life.

Recently, he predicted the birth of either Buddha or Jung Bahadur to steer the country out of the current crisis. And on December 29, a day after parliament finally succumbed to his party's diktat to declare Nepal a 'Republic state' leaving it to the future constituent assembly to implement it, Prachanda dwelt on the matter in further details.

In an interview given to Shuvshankar Kandel of Sagarmatha Television, the Maoist supremo just stopped short of admitting that he indeed was Jung Bahadur in the offing. Surprisingly, his dream to be the 21st century Jung Bahadur came less than a week after he signed a fresh 23-point pact with the government, with renewed pledge to go to the polls for the constituent assembly by Mid April. But the latest Prachanda utterances go against both the spirit of peace agreement and democracy. Prachanda appears to be conditioning the public that the Maoists prefer to seize power

'peacefully.' But should that option fail, Prachanda will be compelled to exercise plan B --that is to follow what Jung Bahadur did in 1846. But no matter how the Maoists seize power -- through peace or violence - democracy and the democratic process will be the casualty.

A parliament led by G P Koirala and chaired by Subhash Nembwang has already proved that Prachanda's bandwagon is gaining momentum by the day. But Prachanda's understanding of Buddha's way and philosophy is not only limited, but distorted as well. For Buddha, his journey and mission began with detachment from everything he had -- kingdom, power and privileges. He stood for truth, respect for human life and dignity, love, compassion and crusade against injustice and inequality—all through non-violence. Kindness and forgiveness together constituted his philosophy and way of life.

Prachanda path is just the reverse. He is driven by the lust for everything that does not belong to him legitimately. He has neither forgiven any one, nor even dared to repent for heinous crimes like Madi massacre that his party committed. It seems his understanding of Buddhism only means a convenient way of capturing



state powers without bloodshed, and of course, without facing the electorate. Unfortunately, G P Koirala has already lost the moral high ground to question Prachanda's interpretation of Buddhism in the current context. In the past 18 months of the controversial peace process and government, Prachanda has skillfully undercut G P Koirala of his historical standing and political stature which he had attained immediately after janaandolan II. Things have now come to such a sorry pass that how long Koirala hangs on to his position depends on the terms set by Prachanda.

G P dumped his visionary brother B P Koirala's policy of national reconciliation to appease Prachanda and continue in power. He has assumed the power of a dictator with no accountability to parliament—a role that Prachanda hopes to snatch any time now. Koirala has given a mortal blow to the independence of judiciary and reduced the parliament to a rubber stamp. Like any communist state apparatus, the Speaker of the House Subash Nembwang presides over a parliament without an opposition to the government. Worse, Koirala has been (mis)ruling the country on behalf of the Maoist

masters without facing the polls for the past 18 months.

Prachanda's present calculation is simple. If G P Koirala can rule in this fashion, why can't he? In fact, he has been successful in creating condition for the birth of Jung Bahadur. Koirala is just a 'dummy' in that exercise. Jung Bahadur massacred all his potential rivals in a coup in 1846—recorded as

Kotparva—and established the Rana dynasty that ruled the country for 104 years. Prachanda is now trying to convince and cajole the other left parties, especially UML's Madhav Kumar Nepal, that it is possible for the communists to rule this country for the next 150 years once all pro-democracy forces are annihilated. The clear message here being that the left should not care much for the election to get into power, there are other more efficient methods available.

Then what is the 23-point agreement all about? The 23-point agreement was authored for two main purposes in mind. First, it dilutes the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Secondly, it establishes the centrality and indispensability of the Maoists in interim constitution and the current political system. Once the

Maoists have become the core part of the new state, it will be much easier for the party to choose the timing of Kotparva, or the revolution from within as in the classic Bolshevik October insurrection. History appears all set to repeat itself in Nepal.

In that historical reenactment, Koirala can only imitate hapless Mathbar Singh Thapa who was a necessary stepping stone to Jung Bahadur's rise. What will happen to Nepal's peace process if things move in the direction that Prachanda has predicted? Nepali citizens have more or less abdicated their democratic duties in allowing a regime of questionable legitimacy to play havoc with the judicial independence, parliamentary supremacy, and constitutional rule.

Such an authoritarian trend is still fraught with other dangerous consequences: a possible revolt and defiance by the organs of the state, and a total non-recognition of the regime by the international community which is already annoyed at the government's failure to hold elections, twice on deadline. These are grave challenges which the current dispensation does not seem to have appreciated. ■

**G P dumped his visionary brother B P Koirala's policy of national reconciliation to appease Prachanda and continue in power. Now He has assumed the power of a dictator with no accountability to parliament--a role that Prachanda hopes to snatch any time now.**

ICIMOD has both mandate and capability to work for improvement of living conditions of mountain people and environment in the region.

■ Tone Bleie

# TAKING THE LEAD



## Lessons from Himalayan degradation

The Hindu-Kush Himalaya (HKH) continues to inspire religious devotion, conquest, and share wonder about its biodiversity riches for the region and for humanity. Often, the global community and national governments have given less attention to the lives of the mountain region's own people. Many millions of working children strive to combine their disparate family obligations. Several hundred thousands migrant youth in the Middle East and South East Asia have escaped conflicts and unemployment, and earn remittances which are critical for those left back home. There are innovative female and male mountain farmers, industrious long-distance traders and renowned faith healers who with little or no external assistance, contribute to community wellbeing and prosperity.

The region harbours a growing urban population living in increasingly congested, polluted and crime-infested hill and foot-hill towns. Their inhabitants may score higher than national averages on income and educational indicators, but they depend on very poor services from for example water authorities and police. Often both popular media and the scientific community have picked up overtly stereotypic meta-narratives about mountain peoples. Often they have been depicted as environmental culprits. As for example, in the increasingly discredited Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation, the Nepalese hill farmers' use of fodder and fuel wood collection was seen as the main cause for flooding and devastation in Bangladesh. Or hill farmers and high-mountain pastoralists were depicted as helpless victims of nature's wrath or of plain policies - utterly insensitive to the realities of mountain living.

Now there is a new alarm, the "meltdown" of the glaciers will create destructive floods, later on the rivers and groundwater sources will dry out. In our worst nightmarish scenarios of climate change we imagine involuntary migration

from increasingly uninhabitable mid-hills, and also tens of millions of people desperately escaping the lowest-lying fertile plain lands due to increasing sea levels and contaminated freshwater sources. The repercussions for human wellbeing, regional security, and for the current landscape of state-borders would be unprecedented.

In this atmosphere of alarm over the current, medium and long-term consequences of global warming, many could say there is a need for non-political knowledge institutions that do not succumb to panic and gross exaggerations, as was to some degree the case during the 1980's debate on Himalayan degradation. In other words, we are in need of institutions that collect, analyse and disseminate unbiased scientific evidence of micro-meso-macro-level trends. These can inform and facilitate comprehensive regional cooperation in key areas of scientific information sharing, policymaking, capacity building and the scaling-up and scaling-down of concrete action initiatives, which help users to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. One may ask, does the region have such institutions?

The good news is that there is indeed an institution who is about to respond to the demands from premier institutions in the member countries and to the renewed interest of intentional agencies in the HKH-mountains.

### An ambitious mandate

The International Centre for Mountain Research and Development (ICIMOD) is a regional institution with a mandate of contributing to improved living conditions of mountain peoples and environment in the eight member countries; Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. Since its foundation in 1983, ICIMOD's regional headquarter has been located in Nepal. In 2005 ICIMOD moved into its own new headquarters. The regional member countries have all contributed. As for example, the host country Nepal donated land; Bangladesh and Bhutan have contributed with two exquisitely carved and



decorated outdoor pavilions and China with the impressive heritage-inspired reception area. Is this symbolic demonstration of regional pooling, backed by a more active use of and larger financial commitments to ICIMOD? Indeed, the recently concluded meeting of the Board of Governors is indicative of an emerging trend of the regional members' countries greater interest for investing in ICIMOD.

Earlier on there has been a mismatch between the overall high expectations in terms of impact and actual results. The Centre's multiple users - including national research institutions, the international research community, the civil society, community-based and user-federations, and donors - in recent years principally Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands, all except the two latter, themselves mountainous

**The region harbours a growing urban population living in increasingly congested, polluted and crime-infested hill and foot-hill towns.**

countries - have from their different vantage points expressed responses varying from tempered appreciation to rather harsh disappointments over heavy-handed technical orientation, ICIMOD's attention to leading national institutions' mountain-focused work and to diplomatically touchy issues, of also regional

and international importance. Sharing of scientific data for transboundary cooperation and the linkages between social inequities such as ethnic conflict, poverty and environmental stress, are among these issues.

These external critiques from various national and international stakeholders have often, but not always, been rather well-founded. The critiques have for a variety of reasons, not the least purely financial viability, been taken increasingly seriously by ICIMOD's own governing bodies and management. In fact, the recently concluded meeting of the Board of Governors in Dhulikhel (Nepal), does provide decisions on strategic redirection which are

consultations were coordinated through the recently established country offices.

The new programme is planned to be implemented in much closer collaboration with national nodal research institutions, local and central governments, and civil society organisations than has hitherto been the practice. There are signs that ICIMOD is coming to age as regional convenor where critical issues such as landscape protection and water management, are placed within a broader framework for regional cooperation that realises ICIMOD's Mission. This mission also complements SAARC Vision Beyond 2000. ICIMOD will have to show diplomatic finesse, while

member countries must be parties to, most notably the growth engines China and India. If such a global compact fails to be established and astutely implemented, the interdependent global and regional climate systems will affect living conditions of both upstream and downstream populations in adverse ways we have yet to fully comprehend and design scenarios for.

The disappointingly limited tangible results of regional cooperation be it through ICIMOD or SAARC, are to a very large degree the result of troubled bilateral relations. These are a considerable degree related to the fateful Partition in 1947, and to subsequent contested nation-building projects built on homogenising

between earlier amiable local communities and between central governments-states and a proliferation of armed non-state actors.

ICIMOD as a non-political body would not touch upon these highly sensitive unresolved refugee issues. Yet, ICIMOD's partner-based programmes operating in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and in some of India's North-Eastern states, have an important role to play, by addressing rights to livelihood, access and benefit sharing for shifting cultivators and other small-scale farmers in mountain communities marred by militarization and intense political and resource competition.

As if the above frame-conditions do not pose enough challenges for strengthened regional cooperation, bilateral relations are marked by longstanding territorial disputes, contested treaties and not the least, stalled negotiations over major water management schemes. I will here confine my comments to this last issue, as it is sought to be addressed in one of ICIMOD's new strategic trusts in a double sense, as hazard management and co-management of water resources as services. Pro-active facilitation of multilateral cooperation for sharing of the headwaters of the Brahmaputra in the eastern Tibetan plateau (which flows through Assam Valley and into Bangladesh where it merges with the Ganges) emerges as a formidable challenge due to escalating competition over the precious high-plateau waters for economic modernisation in China as upstream country and India and Bangladesh as lower-riparian countries.

### A future for mountain and plains

The Nobel Laureate, the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) recently launched their fourth assessment report, which contained strikingly sparse data on the impacts of climate change in the Hindu-Kush Himalayas. There is a growing consensus that Himalayan glaciers are thinning and receding, melting will lead to increased glacial lake outburst floods and changes in melt water, all of which will affect ecosystem services, and the livelihoods of 150 million of mountain dwellers and the 1.3 billion of plain peoples downstream. How fast and uniform are these changes and what are the most likely scenarios for the future generation?

Will climate change provide new opportunities for agriculture and increasing yields in high plateau areas? What are the hydrological effects of climate change? How are ecosystems and human wellbeing already being affected and what are their' and societies' adaptive capacity for increasing water shortages, floods, other hazards, new pests, biodiversity losses, changed food-chains, erosion of cultural knowledge and conflict resolution mechanisms for averting and solving resource conflicts?

ICIMOD is currently preparing, in collaboration with partners in and outside the region, to play a key role in identifying and filling regional knowledge gaps and scaling-up and down good practices that may become vital for the regional governments' ability to formulate regional and national policies and action initiatives. Both in the area of climate change and in the other prioritised areas, the recently established Himalayan University Consortium with their good records of knowledge production and networking, customising of knowledge, and mountain-focus in policy advocacy can play a significant role. That is to say, if what the third sector (the civil society) have argued for quite some time - that social justice, environmental management and sustainable livelihoods have to become mutually supportive - is clearly and consistently articulated in ICIMOD's regional initiatives and in government departments' policies and plans.

*(Tone Bleie is a Professor of Public Planning and Cultural Understanding, University of Tromsø, Norway and outgoing Independent Member of the Governing Board of ICIMOD)*



encouraging for the following reasons:

The three strategic thrusts on (1) adaptation to environmental change and sustaining ecosystem services, (2) integrated water and hazard management and (3) sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction, are critically interconnected. For the first time has the Centre through good use of its recently established matrix-oriented programme organization, managed to integrate in a quite trustworthy manner, the cross-cutting dimensions of governance, social and gender equity, human resource development and knowledge management. These dimensions have often been found wanting in the earlier rather sector-oriented programmes. It is also encouraging that these trusts have been developed through stakeholder consultation in the member countries. In the case of China, Pakistan and Afghanistan, the

undertaking regular consultations and facilitation with key national stakeholders of upstream and downstream riparian countries if they are to prefer multilateral transboundary solutions that are bold, innovative and accommodating to all the stakeholders of this vast and underdeveloped region.

### Global commitments and bilateral relations

ICIMOD's mission of facilitating equitable and sustainable well-being for women, men and children in the high mountains, mid-hills and foot-hills of Hindu-Kush Himalaya through regional cooperation, hinges critically on that the follow-up of the Bali Conference leads to a very ambitious international environmental agreement, to which not only the currently worst Western culprits, but also ICIMOD's own

forms of nationalism, prestigious mega-projects claimed to spur national development, state discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, caste, religion and region, combined with weak legal protection of de facto second-class citizens and even more so of those who have been considered as illegal immigrants. These reinforcing processes have unleashed a number of massive involuntary migration movements over porous national borders, some of which has resulted in longstanding refugee problems like the Tibetan diasporas in Nepal, India and elsewhere, the Lhotsampas in eastern Nepal and the Biharis in Bangladesh. The involuntary migration has also led to dramatically altered demographic composition, political contestations over cultural, political and civil rights, and often "ethnification" of resource and political conflicts which reinforce poverty, environmental degradation and multi-scale violent conflicts

# Terai party's challenge and opportunity

It was an outcome of combination of various factors that have given birth to a new Political party in Terai. Apart from its negligence by the state, treating it more like an internal 'colony', its own leaders have betrayed it on occasions in the past. Terai does not have much hope and faith in the present leadership and the government to provide a new direction and hope either.

The fact that Prime Minister G P Koirala takes latest developments in Terai solely as India's conspiracy to weaken Nepal and his own leadership only proves his myopic vision. Koirala's agreeing to sign the 23-point agreement with the Maoists and his complete reversal of position on the issue of monarchy just within a span of six weeks shows how scared he is of that 'conspiracy'. In the special session of parliament in November, Koirala's Nepali Congress Party's stand was clear--'we are in favour of Nepal going republic, but that decision should be taken by the CA'. The reversal of that stand comes in the wake of Koirala's latest perception that the South is out to get at him, and as a counter, he must not lose Maoists.

Unfortunately for the country and the Terai, the three major parties are now asserting that the Terai issue has been addressed with the 23-point agreement signed. This is likely to be a costly misconception to hold for the ruling parties to hold at this point.



Manoj Dahal

The formation of the Madhesh-Terai Loktantrik in the aftermath of the 23-point agreement shows Terai leaders are not convinced by the claims being made by the ruling alliance in Kathmandu. In the past, Terai leaders terminated their movement for two goals - being co-opted into Kathmandu's ruling circle, and being recognised by Delhi as Terai leaders.

Going against this Terai political tradition, Mahantha Thakur has taken a new direction. He got out of Kathmandu's power centre to lead Terai's cause. He stated that it was not at somebody's behest, but for the love for his soil that he was forming a new party. He snapped his more than four-decade long association with the Nepali Congress, quit the ministerial post and Parliament position to earn

**India, despite a federal set-up of the government all these decades, has faced social and political movements, sometimes with demands for cessation.**

his eligibility to head the New party.

Terai was headed towards an unprecedented political vacuum ever since the peace process begun. Koirala's henchman Home Minister was instrumental in creating a situation in which Maoists and popular Terai forces frequently clashed. As a result, Maoists were forced to vacate most areas in Terai, but national level political parties failed to show their presence in the area. As a result, more and more armed groups came into existence for Terai's rightful share. But they could not take shape of political parties. Koirala not only chose not to give larger role to the likes of Thakur to keep Terai connected with Kathmandu, but deliberately chose to have him work under diktat of the likes of Sitaula. The other person used by Koirala to deal with the Terai issue was Ram Chandra Poudel, another hill Brahmin, equally despised in the Terai.

Yet, the formation of the new party is just a step towards correcting the historic mistakes. Any aberration in its conduct, however, might lead to serious accidents. Terai is a unit of the proposed Federal Nepal with its own challenges and pitfalls. Some of them might be common to other groups in the hills and mid-hills, while some could be fundamentally different. Secondly the new Terai could reproducing the historical injustices if the minorities and socio-economically backward groups within Terai as well if they continue to be marginalized. Thakur,



Mahantha Thakur

as a senior leader and a minister in Kathmandu in the past, has been on the side of Kathmandu when Gajendra Narayan Singh and his likes represented Terai aspiration. Similarly, the new political outfit and its leadership also need to be aware that creation of a separate state is not panacea for all problems and disparities. There could be more demands for smaller states from within on the same ground which Mahanath Thakur has raised while forming the new party.

India, despite a federal set-up all these decades, has faced social and political movements, sometimes with demands for cessation. But with the authority of the centre intact, it has been able to diffuse the situation. North east India still faces these challenges. The decade of the 90s saw a shift in India's policy to strong centre and empowered

regional states. That also saw the beginning of a process that encouraged inclusion of more regional and state parties in the political alliance governing Delhi. But political parties there have not gone to the extent of demanding local autonomy with the right for self determination.

This is where the Nepali leaders including the newly formed MTLF needs not only to be careful, but also lead the rest of regional and other groups that have been left out from the power groups in the past. A stable and united Nepal alone would be in the best interest of the country, and the way to address regional and other aspiration can not be found in isolation. Only a comprehensive package through an institutionalised mechanism will do the magic. The seven party alliance has shown any will or ability to lead Nepal in that direction. ■

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# Who killed Benazir?

The unusual press conference by interior ministry spokesman Brigadier (retired) Javed Iqbal Cheema on the death of Benazir Bhutto has created a controversy that threatens to linger on for weeks, perhaps even months and years. Cheema, releasing the transcript of a conversation that allegedly took place between South Waziristan Taliban commander Baitullah Mehsud, and an associate, has stated that the militant leader was behind the assassination.

He has also maintained that Benazir was not shot, or injured in the suicide bombing that took place at Liaquat Bagh on the day of her rally there, but died after hitting her head against the lever of the sun-roof of her vehicle, as she tried to sit down again inside it. At least one PPP legal aide has instantly denied the veracity of these claims. More details are expected to be provided in the days ahead by the PPP leadership. The problem is that the lack of official credibility makes it almost impossible to separate fact from fiction. This is all the more so as, on several occasions, the PPP's late leader had laid blame for attacks on herself on other quarters, close to the Islamabad government. That FIRs which the PPP filed, both after the Karachi suicide bombing of October 2007 and now, apparently naming these persons, have not been registered, only adds to the doubts and suspicions.

So grave is the nature of the assassination, and so profound its

potential impact on the future of Pakistan, that the truth must be uncovered. The fact that almost all the past political assassinations and unusual deaths in Pakistan's history — including those of Liaquat Ali Khan, Hayat Ahmed Sherpao, General Ziaul Haq, Murtaza Bhutto and Omar Asghar Khan — remain shrouded in mystery provides little assurance that questions surrounding this killing will be satisfactorily answered. Only an inquiry by a credible, neutral panel of international experts would hold any weight with people — and it is unfortunate the government has dismissed the possibility of permitting such an investigation, despite the fact that Benazir's death is no small matter.

It must also be noted that even if the official claims regarding the involvement of Baitullah Mehsud are accepted at face value (these were denied on Saturday by a spokesman claiming to speak for Mehsud), the regime itself must take responsibility for allowing so dangerous a criminal to operate freely. In August this year, after Mehsud and his men captured at least 200 army troops — almost an entire company — the Pakistani government, in exchange for the release of these men, caved in to the demands of Mehsud. Over 100 militants were released and the 2005 Sara Rogha accord, which restricts government operations in the South Waziristan area, including actions against the Taliban, revived. Some reports say pigeons and balloons



Slain former Pakistani Premier Benazir Bhutto's daughters Bakhtawar(R) and Asifa(L) offer prayers for their mother at the Bhutto family mausoleum in Garhi Khuda Baksh.

were joyfully released after agreements with Mehsud were reached. Perhaps if these dubious deals had not been struck, Benazir Bhutto would be alive and Mehsud behind bars.

There are also other facts that raise questions about possible links between the Pakistan establishment and Taliban elements. In the transcript of Baitullah Mehsud's conversation, released to the press by Cheema, there is a mention of ÖBadrwallahÖ in the context of one of the militants who allegedly carried out the attack, possibly a reference to a member of the Al Badr jihadi organization. It may be noted that the

Pakistan establishment is widely believed to have played a role in the setting up of this shadowy group. It is also unclear why, since Mehsud conveniently revealed his location and the home he is staying at in the intercepted phone conversation, why no effort has been made to apprehend him.

This may have served a more useful purpose than releasing a plethora of material to the press, which in fact would have only ended up alerted him — that is, if all what Brigadier Cheema said is true. There are, as such, still many questions that need answers.

*(The News International)*

## Bhutto's son to lead

As Pakistan remains in mourning and in crisis following the assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, CBS has learned that the Bhutto dynasty will continue for another generation. Bilawal, her 19-year-old son is stepping into his mother's shoes, taking over leadership of her political party.

Prospects for elections scheduled on January 8, 2008 look increasingly unlikely and the government continues to insist al Qaeda was responsible for Bhutto's death.

The government says it knows who carried out the attack, but Pakistani police say their investigation is just beginning.

Despite a government-released video which shows a gun being fired at close range towards Bhutto moments before the suicide blast, officials claim she died, not from a bullet or shrapnel wound, but after her head hit a lever on her car.

Violence in reaction to Bhutto's killing continued to rage in the streets of some Pakistani cities Saturday, with hundreds of demonstrators throwing stones and looting stores.

## Christians Fear Attacks by Hindus

Hundreds of Christians, fearing more clashes with Hindu nationalists, fled to government-run relief camps where authorities on Saturday were providing them with food, medicine and security.

The clashes left at least four people dead last week, including three killed when police fired on a group of hard-line Hindus that had torched a police station in Kandhamal district's Brahmaganga village. Another person also died in the communal fighting.

The Hindus had complained that the police were failing to protect them from Christians.

The killings and subsequent flight of nearly 700 Christians to four relief camps are the latest in a series of religious and political power struggles in the secular but Hindu-dominated India's eastern state of Orissa, which has one of the worst histories of anti-Christian violence.

In 1999, an Australian missionary and his two sons, aged 8 and 10, were burned to death in their car in Orissa following a Bible study class.

But relations between religious minorities — such as Christians, who account for 2.5 percent of the



Indian Christians stage a silent rally in Calcutta, India, Saturday, Dec. 29, 2007 to protest the recent violence on Christians and Churches in the eastern Indian state of Orissa.

country's 1.1 billion people, and Muslims, who make up 14 percent — are usually peaceful.

There were conflicting reports of what sparked the violence in rural Kandhamal, about 840 miles southeast of New Delhi. Each side blamed the other.

The Hindu hard-liners said Christians tried to attack an 80-year-old leader, Laxmanananda Saraswati, of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad group,

who leads an anti-conversion movement.

The New Delhi-based Catholic Bishops Conference of India said the fighting began when Hindu extremists took offense at a show marking Christmas Eve, believing it was an attempt to convert poor and lower-caste Hindus to Christianity.

That has long embittered Hindu groups who say Christian missionaries try to lure the poor and those on the lowest rungs of Hinduism's complex caste-system away with promises of money and jobs. Since Monday, Hindu nationalists have ransacked and burned about 19 churches, according to officials who say Christians burned down several Hindu homes in apparent retaliation.

Authorities were providing food, medicine and security to Christians moving into the

four relief camps, said Pradeep Kapoor, the inspector-general of police. Two police officers were suspended and a top district administrator was transferred for failing to prevent the violence, Kapoor told The Associated Press. Nearly 800 police and paramilitary forces were trying to restore calm.

At least 25 people have been arrested, Superintendent of Police Narsingh Bhol said. ■

## Hong Kong to elect their leader in 2017

In a rarest move, Hong Kong received an official acknowledgement from China to directly elect its leader in 2017 and its legislators by 2020.

to receive an approval for its region's public to democratically choose his successor and 60 members for the Legislative Council in 2012.



However, the decision disappointed some pro-democracy supporters who were pushing for electing a new leader in 2012.

Hong Kong, a former British colony, became a part of China in 1997. Currently, an 800-member committee elects a leader for the region, which in the past has tried to embrace democracy. Hong Kong's Chief Executive Donald Tsang was chosen for a five-year term in March by the committee.

Tsang had submitted proposals on Dec. 12 to the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress

After the region became part of China, the Chinese authorities had agreed to maintain social and economic autonomy of Hong Kong under 'one country, two systems'.

But achieving a universal suffrage by 2017 is still an important step in the region's history as on paper its constitution has no specific date to empower Hong Kong's public.

"Hong Kong is entering a most important chapter in its constitutional history," Tsang said Saturday in a press conference.

*(AHN)*

# Relying on meaning, not words

...In the Mahayana Sutras, there are more collections of deeper level teachings on realisation...

## Marshland Flowers

All such records are recorded in the Sutra Pitaka. There are the Mahayana Sutra Pitaka and the Sravakayana Sutra Pitaka. Of the Sravakayana Sutra Pitaka, today only that of the Theravada and the Sarvastivada remains intact.

■ Mahayogi Acharya Sridhar Rana Rinpoche

The Buddha's main two disciples called the Agrasravakas, who are always portrayed standing at his two sides - Maudgalyayana and Sariputra, were both Brahmins. Another very famous disciple Mahakashyap, already possessed miraculous powers even before he met the Buddha, and already had one thousand disciples even before he met the Buddha. He too was a Brahmin as his name Kashyap implies. The Buddha defeated him both in philosophical debate and display of miraculous powers and he became a disciple of the Buddha, along with his one thousand Brahmin disciples.

All such records are recorded in the Sutra Pitaka. There are the Mahayana Sutra Pitaka and the Sravakayana Sutra Pitaka. Of the Sravakayana Sutra Pitaka, today only that of the Theravada and the Sarvastivada remains intact. There are bits and pieces of Sutras of others like Mahasanghikas etc. too, available either in the original or in various translations.

However, in the Mahayana Sutras, there are more collections of deeper level teachings on realisation, insight etc. mostly conducted in paranormal dimensions whereas the Sravakayana Sutra are a motley of mundane and philosophic topics, conducted mostly within normal dimensions.

The second Pitaka is the Vinaya



Pitaka which is a collection of the records of the rules made for the Bhikkhus and Bhikkhus by the Buddha himself. Here too there were many, of which the Theravadin, the

Sarvastivadin and the Mahasanghika have managed to survive to the present day. Most of Mahayana schools use the Sarvastivadin and Mahasanghika Bhikkhu Vinayas to

make Bhikkhus.

In ancient India, as recorded by the famous Chinese traveler Huen Tsang of the 6<sup>th</sup> / 7<sup>th</sup> century, there were also followers of Mahayana who followed the Theravadin Vinayas too. But today due to various historical flukes, no such Bhikkhus are found. As the Buddha himself had given permission that if the Bhikkhu Sangha so deems it fit, it could change the minor Bhikkhu rules.

So as Buddhism spread to far away lands where the climates and cultures were so drastically different from India, some of the rules of the Vinaya Pitaka had to be changed. It must be said that the Theravadin Sangha claim that they have not changed anything from the time of the Buddha; but most scholars do not agree with this.

However, as the Buddha himself very clearly gave permission to change minor rules, and even if there are changes, it does not contradict the intentions of the Buddha. In fact, it goes along with the intention of the Buddha. In the Sutra, the Buddha has very clearly said, "Artha pratisharanam na vyanjanam" meaning, do not rely/depend on the words but rather on the meaning/intention. And this statement is found in Sarvastivada, Theravada and Mahayana Sutra Pitaka.

(To be continued)

(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)

## Democracy – Nepali Style

International media, CNN and BBC in this case, have trumpeted the headlines "Nepal abolishes its 240 years old monarchy", "Nepal ceases to be the last Hindu Kingdom in the world", and so forth.

■ By Roop Joshi

December 28<sup>th</sup> was another busy day for the unelected interim parliament of Nepal. With 3 dissenting votes, it approved the declaration of Nepal as a Federal Democratic Republic – to be "implemented" by a simple majority of the 601-member Constituent Assembly when elected by mid-April 2008. The declaration had been made public a couple of days earlier with the machination and blessings of the leaders of the three major political parties in Nepal.

International media, CNN and BBC in this case, have trumpeted the headlines "Nepal abolishes its 240 years old monarchy", "Nepal ceases to be the last Hindu Kingdom in the world", and so forth. The headlines, of course, ignore the "implementation" part of the parliamentary approval though it does appear inconspicuously in the body of the news stories. They do not question why the CA is needed if this parliament is going to do its work. For all purposes, the World woke up today to discover that in one fell swoop Nepal is now a republic. Voila!

I have always been under the impression that "democracy" is rule by the people (of the people, for the people – if you want the full American definition). I am bemused that a parliament which has not been elected, at the instigation of three political leaders – one an octogenarian with ambitions to be the first

President of Nepal before it is too late; another a leftist politician who has hopes of somehow being the first Prime Minister of a republican Nepal; and the third whose political party is in government solely from the effects and future threats of its guns – has declared this country a republic without finding out what the Nepali Public wants. Further, this declaration goes against the Comprehensive Peace Accord between the then government and the Maoists which clearly stated that the issue of republic versus monarchy would be decided by majority votes of the Constituent Assembly, when elected. Of course, the CA elections have been postponed first in June 2007, then in November 2007, and are now vaguely planned for April 2008. In short, the common Nepali in

the street has never been asked whether he wants a republic or wants to maintain a constitutional or ceremonial monarchy. This "asking" is commonly known as a Referendum.

If Nepal is to be a modern multi-party DEMOCRACY, it is time for Nepalis who love this country to practice wisdom and rationality and take this declaration as a direct insult to their intelligence and basic human rights. If Jana Andolan I (1990) put an end to the Panchayat system and Jana Andolan II (2006) to an autocratic government, it may be opportune now for Jana Andolan III. This one will put an end to the high-handedness of an oligarchic government controlled by a triumvirate of power hungry politicians.

There are already visible discomfiture over

this undemocratic political move. The Chief of the NA has clearly stated that the NA will support democracy and the legitimate government of Nepal. But legitimacy in the current context can not be delinked from basic norms and process of democracy.

Half of the world's population is below the age of 25. At a time when National Leaders all over the world are taking the helm of their countries while they are below the age of 50 – France's President Sarkozy is a recent example – the youth of Nepal confine their involvement in politics to senseless "mobism", indoctrination into obsolete political ideologies, or being the stooges of wily old politicians. As per data from the "2006 Demographic and Health Survey – Nepal", almost 40% of Nepal's population is between the ages of 10 and 29. If ages 30 to 34, which really are young enough to be considered youths, are included, the figure rises to over 45%. The present political leaders have followed the near-sighted power-crazed policy of not grooming young political leaders. This is one reason why our political leadership is well beyond the range of what can be called youths. This alone however does not give almost half the population of Nepal under the age of 35 the excuse to sit quietly while the country is robbed of its right to Democracy. It is time Nepali youths use their education, nationalism and vision to speak out with firmness and non-violence.



FIREFRONT

# Journeys within



■ Yuyutsu RD Sharma

Journeys are crucial to the makeup of a creative writer and his world. Journeys make us better human beings. They make you understand the basic facets of humanity that otherwise you might simply ignore or generalize.

The actual feel of the landscape and the people in it gives you a vision of what postcard simplicity or a touristy television show might not offer. As the New Year approaches, my visions of the days spent in London on the New Year Eve last year and the recent visit to Helumbu where I witnessed a ritual ceremony in a monastery make me understand the difference that these tourist destinations offer in the media.

Journeys made in the outer world cause a dramatic transformation within. You move out to turn deeper within. The paradox of journeys is

most vividly described in our folklore and legends. You feel the difference once you have traveled, the changes you perceive most when you see realize how human life in spite of all the changes has remained the same.

During my journeys, to most people in Europe the male behavior Nepalese man woman relations in Asia remained reminiscent of their own society some fifty years ago. The way I approached my spouse and the way she reacted to my so-called orders at every steps of life reminded people in Europe of their parents. In the middle class Nepalese families men are seldom allowed by women to do any menial work. "My father used to behave like you do in my mother's presence," one of my English friend remarked.

After my journey to Europe I can never ever write a poem or create an episode in a novel approving such a behavior that a writer who has not traveled could easily write. Nor can I ever dismiss the same sex relations as monstrous and unsocial. Even if you do not approve, you accept that these people exist, like you do. There is very little available in Nepali

literature on the same sex retaliations. They are simply ignored as obscene and probably the person showing such tendency would be at once be taken to a shaman or a priest. One gay writer I met in London seemed appalled by my aesthetics. He strongly disliked my "River" poem that most of my readers find very smart and enticing. To describe a man woman relationship, the River poem employs erotic images reminiscent of Sanskrit masters evoking the Shringar Rasa.

I had great difficulty in translating famous Irish language poet Cathal O' Searcaigh's poems into Nepali. Some Nepali critics refuse to understand the poems as they do not or can not comprehend the nuances of a poem celebrating the same sex relations. Also with male dominated Nepali verb, it's difficult to express the emotions containing the same sex relationships.

On meeting people from all over world in London, for example, you release how multiculturalism remains the future of modern world. And that in spite of tribal uprisings and rise of obsolete ideologies, the future of Asian society like its economic metamorphosis lies in understanding the essentials of the other world.

A journey outside become a journey within, leading you to the ultimate nirvana of the new millennium.

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## Brandy Off the Hook

Brandy can breathe a little easier now.

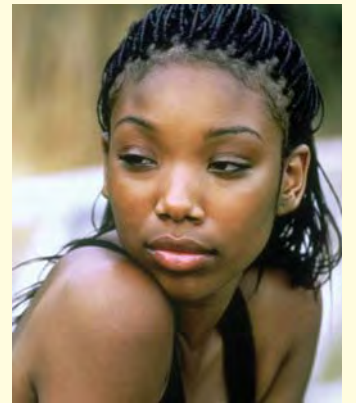
In a belated holiday gift, prosecutors in Los Angeles have decided not to file a misdemeanor vehicular manslaughter charge against the R&B songstress for last year's chain-reaction car crash that resulted in a woman's death.

According to a statement from the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office, authorities opted not to proceed with a criminal case after a probe found "insufficient evidence" that Brandy, whose last name Norwood, was to blame.

"After conducting a thorough investigation, which included consulting with some of the top accident reconstruction experts in the country, city prosecutors concluded there was insufficient evidence from which a jury could find Ms. Norwood guilty of such a charge beyond a reasonable doubt," prosecutors said.

The fatal collision occurred on Dec. 30, 2006, when the Grammy-winning ex-*Mo'Nisha* star slammed her 2007 Land Rover into the back of a 2005 Toyota Corolla at 65 mph, setting off a four car pile-up.

The driver of the Toyota, 38-year-old Awatif Aboudihaj, careened into the highway's center divider before being broadsided by another car. After suffering multiple



pelvic fractures, the wife and mother of two died the following evening in the hospital.

Weeks later, once news of the accident became public, Brandy issued a statement through her publicist in which she "express[ed] her condolences to the family of the deceased" and called it a "terrible tragedy."

After investigating the crash scene and testing Brandy's sport utility vehicle for any mechanical defects, the California Highway Patrol eventually recommended a misdemeanor manslaughter charge be filed against her, saying negligence was responsible for the accident.

A guilty conviction could have netted the 28-year-old entertainer anywhere from a year in jail and a \$1,000 fine to house arrest or a work-furlough program.

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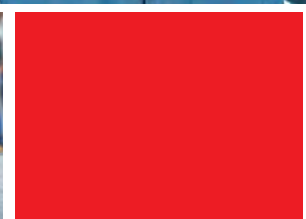
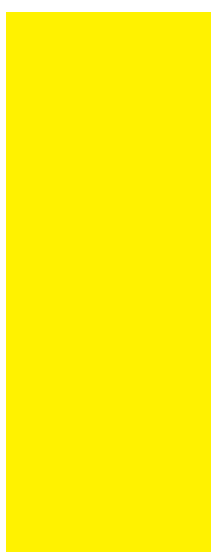
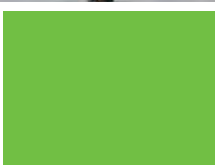
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# Between the pages

Brooks' historical novel tells tales of the lives linked to ancient book

Geraldine Brooks has enjoyed three successful phases of her writing career: first working as a foreign correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal* in Bosnia and other war zones, then writing nonfiction books, including 1994's acclaimed *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women*, and most recently trying her hand at historical fiction.

She hasn't done so shabbily at it: She won the Pulitzer Prize for her most recent novel, *March*, an imagining of the life of Louisa May Alcott's father.

Brooks' resume would seem to make her uniquely qualified to tackle the complex subject matter of her new novel, *People of the Book*. The tale traces the history of one coveted tome, a Jewish prayer book traditionally used during the Passover seder, through time as it travels through war-torn Europe of many eras and influences the lives of the people who create or encounter it.

In April 1996, rare-book conservator Hanna Heath flies into Sarajevo to inspect and repair the Sarajevo Haggadah, which has just turned up after being lost during the war. "The Sarajevo Haggadah, created in medieval Spain," Brooks writes, "was a famous rarity, a lavishly illuminated Hebrew manuscript made at a time when Jewish belief was firmly against illustrations of any kind." In the

afterword, Brooks notes that the novel is based on the true story of this Haggadah, though she has fictionalized her account, imagining the book's history.

In 1996, Sarajevo is still smoldering from its recent war: "half the houses weren't there anymore. They were just jagged bits of masonry, sticking up in ragged rows like rotting teeth." A Muslim librarian saved the Haggadah during the worst of the fighting, which destroyed Sarajevo's library, and now the city's officials want to display the book to boost the country's morale.

Hanna is only 30, but as she says, "I don't go in for false modesty: I'm great at what I do." She was chosen to complete this important work in part because her country of origin, Australia, offends none of the parties involved in hiring her.

Despite her skill at her profession, Hanna's egotistical, world-renowned neurosurgeon mother belittles it, and they clash frequently. Hanna is no less acerbic than her mother and is fiercely committed to her own independence.

While completing the work, Hanna has a fling with a man named Ozren, the librarian who saved the Haggadah from the bombing. During the war, Ozren's wife was killed and his child brain-injured from sniper fire. When Ozren invites Hanna to visit his unresponsive son in the hospital, she only reluctantly agrees.



During her inspection of the Haggadah, Hanna finds a fragment of an insect's wing, wine stains, salt and a hair, which she collects to consult with her colleagues who are experts in these subjects before carefully rebinding the book.

These objects serve as clues that launch the narrative into historical episodes from the Haggadah's past, beginning with the most recent times - the Haggadah's narrow escape from burning during World War II with the help of another Muslim scholar -

and extending back to the most ancient, the creation of the Haggadah's illuminations by an artist in medieval Seville.

These historical sections are richly detailed, enthralling accounts and could almost stand alone as short stories. The chapters, all in third-person, most depicting people trying to survive times of great suffering, contrast markedly with the punchy first-person narration of the Hanna chapters.

Although *People of the Book* contains scads of beautiful writing, the overall work is uneven. Sometimes the mystery-thriller aspects of the novel - such as globally dispersed expert analysts sending Hanna breathless messages about the incredible facts they've discovered about this bit of parchment or that bit of hair - sit uneasily alongside the finely crafted historical episodes. Brooks' effort to create an entertaining narrative in which to embed the historical vignettes is admirable, but she handles the *Da Vinci Code*-like thriller moments as if splicing *Masterpiece Theater* with *CSI*.

Additionally, a few of the plot points don't seem believable: Is it possible for a hair from the brush of the original painter of the illuminations to have been preserved throughout the book's travels and yet overlooked by all previous expert examiners of the Haggadah? Theoretically, sure, but when so many coincidences add up - including a similarly preserved insect wing and a suddenly revealed missing genius father whose heritage links Hanna culturally to the Haggadah - it strains the readers' suspension of disbelief.

देशको तात्कालीन  
कार्यदिशाका बारेमा तपाईं  
के सोच्दै हुनुहुन्छ ?



अनि राजनेताहरु के सोच्दै होलान् ?



शुभशंकर कँडेलको साथमा विशिष्ट व्यक्तित्वको दृष्टिकोण  
कार्यक्रम

**OUTLOOK**

मा

हरेक शनिवार साँझ ८:१५ बजे  
मात्र सगरमाथा टेलिभिजनमा



**सगरमाथा**

समाचारको शिखर नेपालको गौरव