

Courage & Conviction

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Fragile State

Nepal in Afghan, Sudan category

■ nf correspondent

Despite the tall claims by the ruling seven party leaders about Nepal's irreversible march to democracy, Nepal is almost headed not only towards bankruptcy, but is being categorised as a fragile state by many friendly countries.

The 'fragile category' includes country with the level of anarchy prevailing high as a result of poor governance and bad law and order situation. This indirectly brings into question the legitimacy of the government and its delivery capability.

According to a senior government official, Japan which has always been forthright in giving generous grants with least interference in the country's internal affairs, has put Nepal in the category of fragile states. That, in other words, means Nepal being treated at par with countries like Afghanistan and Sudan. As a result, the ministry of foreign affairs expects a drastic cut or withdrawal of grants from Japan unless the situation miraculously improves in the country.

According to the indication available, the worsening law and order situation, government's failure to enforce the rule of law, erosion in people's hope for the peace process moving on track, and high level of corruption in

the government, all have contributed to the growing negative feeling of various countries towards Nepal. The 'fragile' status, sources say, may create a situation for 'humanitarian intervention' as elsewhere.

While the US and European Union countries are still favouring that Nepal must hold election in a credible manner, with improved law and order situation as one more crucial condition, they have not gone to the extent of treating Nepal as a 'fragile state.' They have however, raised serious concern about the government's commitment, or lack of it to the human right violation cases.

The 'fragile' status, sources say, may create a situation for 'humanitarian intervention' as elsewhere.

Similarly, India, which officially 'encourages' Nepal to hold election to the constituent assembly in April, has made it clear that the legitimacy of the entire political system and that of the government cannot be established if it is postponed once again. The current Indian position vis a vis Nepal has a lot of ambiguity with a veil of warning that its way of dealing with Nepal would be drastically different if Nepal fails to hold the election.

But for countries like Japan, the legitimacy factor alone would not be sufficient for review of its current position. For that, the government should have a strong law and order machinery and enforcement of the rule of law. ■



Niraj Shrestha

BACK AS A HERO : Grateful citizens paying homage to Prithvi Narayan Shah, the architect of modern Nepal, on his 285th birth anniversary on 10 Jan, 08. People from different walks of life gathered in front of Simha Durbar where the late King's statue lies shrouded in red cloth. The figure was damaged during last year's vandalism.

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Sujata crowned

Long live 'Loktantrik' dynasty

■ nf correspondent

The Congress circle was expecting it at any moment. Given Prime Minister GP Koirala's known weakness for his only daughter; Sujata Koirala, being brought into the centre stage of the national politics had ceased to be a matter of speculation. It was only a question of when it would happen.

Koirala chose to make her the all powerful minister without portfolio on January 9, barely three days after he declared that the country will have a woman prime minister soon. Sujata's inclusion in the cabinet also settles the leadership issue in the extended Koirala family. While the BP family suffers a total eclipse with his sons - Prakash Koirala and Shashank, totally marginalised, PM's another rising nephew, Dr. Shekhar Koirala, has been sidelined once again.

The PM had nominated Sujata as a member of interim parliament a year ago. "Sujata's elevation as a cabinet rank minister is an insult to the Congress party. The PM knows that almost all the leaders are like his slaves and they cannot oppose to what he has done," a senior functionary of the party said. "But there is a much deeper game yet to unfold."

Sujata's inclusion in the cabinet took place

after her series of statements in favour of the 'monarchy' even after the party adopted a resolution in favour of the republic. "She is tutored to do that by her father. Otherwise, how will she vote in favour of the parliamentary resolution to declare Nepal a republic now?" - a central committee member told newsfront.

The issue has invited many sarcastic comments within the party. "Look, the PM has not given a portfolio to his daughter. If he was actually trying to groom her, he would have given her a major ministry," Party Vice President Gopalman Shrestha retorted when some Maoist leaders teased him for having kept mum over the beginning of this new political 'dynasty.'

But the issue has irked many senior leaders of the party. "More than six dozen parliamentarians and central committee member will soon be sitting to assess the latest political scenario including the mishandling of the situation in Terai," a former minister and a parliamentarian said.

According to him, Koirala's move to include Sujata in the cabinet has twin objectives: If he fails to hold election once again, he might step down in his daughter's favour; and if elections are held, the elder Koirala would want to be the first 'president of the republic' with his daughter as the PM. ■



Sujata Koirala

PH: by newsfront



Election Commission

One more date

Skepticism over election grow

The cabinet once again dictated a new date to the Election Commission that the country must go to the constituent assembly poll on April 10, and the EC complied. But there are growing signs and fears, at home and abroad, that the election may not take place.

Chief Election Commissioner Bhojraj Pokhrel said, "We are ready and committed to hold the election

and seek cooperation from all the parties concerned." The model code of conduct has been brought under effect from January 16. Yet there are more doubts than hope about the election taking place.

The biggest fear comes from Terai where the Terai Madhesh Loktantrik Partry (TMLP) leader, Mahanth Thakur besides the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum leader, Upendra

Yadav have begun talking in more militant tones, that election cannot take place without their demands being met.

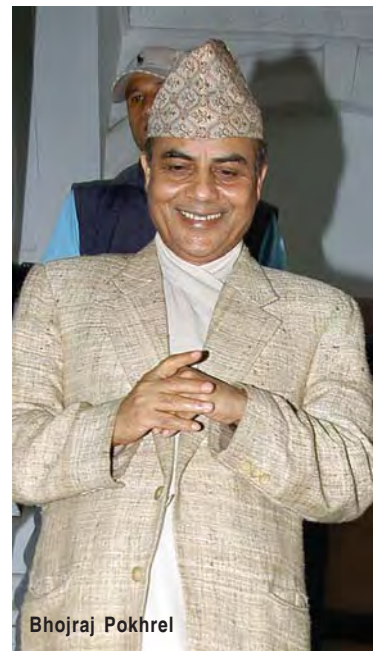
That means a guarantee from GP Koirala that the promised Terai province will have an autonomous status with the right to self-determination. These groups are to launch their movement soon; and minorities and the people of hill origin who have

been living there for generations are under threat of attack from the majority groups.

Seasoned politicians like Surya Bahadur Thapa have been questioning the intention of the parliament and the government behind declaring Nepal a republic, dictating what the future constituent assembly election should do on the issue. "This is not the sign that the government is sincere and serious about election," Thapa said in a public meeting recently.

"I think election will take place in April. The seven parties appear more determined than ever before, and even the Maoists have no other option now," Shekhar Koirala, Central committee member of the Nepali Congress, told newsfront.

But that does not seem to be dispelling the doubts. The disbursement of funds from the state exchequer to the sitting MPs at the rate of rupees one million each is being questioned by many individuals and groups. "This is unfair and violates the spirit and essence of the law of equality," a Congress member



Bhojraj Pokhrel

said, adding, "I will be happy if someone challenges it in the court of law."

"Yes, it is unacceptable and it amounts to influencing voters on the eve of election in the interest of the ruling seven parties," said the Rastriya Prajatantra Party leader, Kamal Thapa. ■

CONGRATULATIONS

We congratulate Mr. Santosh Shah, publisher & editor of *Today's Youth Asia*, for being appointed as Spokesperson of SEBS (Society of Ex-Budhanilkantha Students).

We hope his leadership in SEBS helps in mobilizing the SEBS members throughout the 75 districts to uplift the opportunity for both the genders in all the aspects of life.



Santosh Shah
Spokesperson, SEBS

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Newsbrief

RAW and plane hijacking

Prime Minister GP Koirala has of late been revealing his years of political adventurism. He has admitted having been involved in counterfeiting Indian currency notes while in exile in India. He also recently admitted that he was lured towards gold smuggling to raise money for 'struggle for democracy in Nepal' but had to give it up on BP Koirala's advice. Koirala however, has claimed that he got into the fake currency business with the consent and knowledge of the legendary BP Koirala.



GP Koirala has however, withdrawn the content of his version regarding his involvement in the hijacking of Royal Nepal Aircraft in 1975 and robbery of Rs. 40 lakhs. Koirala had stated that the hijacking of the aircraft that took off from Kathmandu was done after the then Chief of RAW cleared his move.

Although the interviewee has taken the blame for the content saying, "it was wrong translation of what GP Koirala had said in Hindi," there are repeated references of the event in Nepali in which the PM quotes BP Koirala categorically asking what the government of India would do after the hijacking.

GP's answer to BP, in his own words was that government of India would not do anything to the hijackers. There are reports that a senior official of the Indian embassy in Kathmandu approached the PM, about the damage that his confession could cause to the image of RAW as an outfit that encouraged terrorist activities like plane hijacking.

No to impunity

The international community has taken serious note of the government's move to grant general amnesty to the Maoists in cases involving violation of the human rights of serious nature and that of the international humanitarian laws.

The issue was taken up by a delegation of diplomats comprising British, US and Danish Ambassador; the French Chargé representing the EU Presidency; and a representative of the European Commission with Minister for Peace and Reconstruction Ram Chandra Poudel.

The government, following a 23-point agreement among the members of the ruling alliance, is going to withdraw all cases against the Maoists leaving the proposed Truth and Reconciliation commission without jurisdiction to reopen those cases. The embassy of Norway has also endorsed the plea.

Although there was no categorical response from the Minister, the delegation said that some of the provisions of the proposed TRC bill did not meet the international standards and, "will not advance democratic principles." "This is of particular concern in regard to the potential granting of amnesty for serious violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law. This is not the basis on which lasting peace can be built," the delegation said.

Bisphot in police net

Bisphot Singh, leader of the Samyukta Janatantrik Terai Morcha, has been arrested. Singh, wanted in several cases of murder, abduction and possession of illegal arms was arrested by the Armed Police Force from a hotel in Lahan on December 11. They have also recovered some arms and ammunitions from him.

The police said that along with one set of revolver and rifle each, they also recovered ration cards issued in his real name, Ram Shankar Shah, by the Bihar government. Singh who was associated with Jaikrishna Goit - now heading a separatist group, broke away from Goit to form his own outfit.

Sujata speaks

While there are intense debates over what happens if elections are not held by April, the newly appointed minister without portfolio, Sujata is clear about the outcome. "The constitution of 1991 will return," she asserts.



In her interaction with Press Union in Biratnagar on January 11, Sujata said, "If new hurdles come in the election, the old constitution has to be revived," she said. She was equally candid and forthright that now that she has become a minister, she would not be reiterating her earlier demand for resignation of Home Minister KP Sitaula. "I have kept that in abeyance for now." But she has managed to have her loyalists appointed as Minister of State for Home. Ram Kumar Choudhary, the new Minister of State for Home is a Sujata loyalist.



Police interrogating a youth in BICC on Saturday after a group of protestors clashed with police at the Job Fair 2008 which was cancelled on the first day because of youth protests against the organiser. Job seekers began to protest as job interviewers demanded exorbitant sums for the training.

Bankruptcy

A generous government with a begging bowl

■ nf correspondent

As the government of Nepal demonstrates unparalleled generosity in opening its coffer, there are signs that the country is headed more towards bankruptcy. A highly placed government official forecasts tough days ahead in which disbursement of regular salary to government employees would be another problem.

The government needs to allocate nearly rupees two billion for the election proposed in April; and is in urgent need to make arrangement for payment to the Maoist combatants -both qualified and unqualified. As its coffer is getting emptier, the government recently allowed its mass plunder by allocating rupees one million each for over 330 members of the interim parliament which altogether makes a whopping 330 million rupees, ostensibly to carry on development activities in the areas they choose.



In addition, the government is hard pressed to clear debts to the Indian Oil Corporation that almost runs to an amount of rupees six billion, without which the normal supply of fuel including petroleum may be hampered in the days to come. "The government may have to raise some bonds," said a senior government official. There are already moves to

sell shares of government undertakings to the private sector.

In the meantime, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has pleaded with the international community to generously support Nepal, as humanitarian assistance and developments would require at least 6.65 billion Rupees (140 million US dollars) for the coming year.

COAS firm

Chief of Army Staff, Rookmangad Katawal has asserted that Nepal Army (NA) is firmly committed to sovereignty and supremacy of the Nepali people, besides country's independence, territorial integrity and democracy.

He said it is an army that belongs to an integrated Nepal, and will be functioning under a legitimate national government. "Please keep it away from politics," he said during his brief chat with the media representatives on his return from China, at the end of his week long official visit, barely a month after a similar trip to India.



"The army belongs to the whole country." He reiterated that it should have no place for politically indoctrinated and politically motivated people. Asked if he was still opposed to integration of the Maoists combatants in NA, he said his views were clear and, "no attempt by any quarter to bring Nepal Army into controversy would succeed."

In response to a query by newsfront about the outcome of his visit to China, Gen Katawal said that it was a visit in deference to a long tradition of friendly relations and added, "China's understanding and good-will for Nepal deserves appreciation."



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Point to Ponder

Trust only movement. Life happens at the level of events, not of words. Trust movement. - Alfred Adler

Integration debate

Nepal's peace process and its journey have suffered many hiccups. The latest one is the position that the Maoists and the Nepal Army (NA) have taken on the issue of Maoist combatants' reintegration in NA.

General Rookmangad Katawal has said he is opposed to induction of any 'ism' or politically indoctrinated and motivated cadres in the army. Prime Minister GP Koirala, known for taking convenient position on any given issue, depending on whether that comes to his personal political advantage or not, has swung from, "You are right, Gen Katawal" to, "I did not say that comrade Prachanda," in less than 48 hours.

Effective democracy based governance envisages its army to work under its parliament, but the assumption that it shuts its mouth when it is constantly vilified or is being targeted by one and all, has been proven wrong. Ever since the peace process began, NA is being constantly needed, beginning with Prachanda's public accusation that, "It is a bunch of rapists," right in the presence of Home Minister KP Sitaula at the official residence of the Prime Minister who also happens to be the Defense Minister.

Koirala has never stated clearly where the issue of integration lies in terms of the priority issues of the peace process. Is it an altogether isolated issue, or related with sincere implementation of other provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and adherence to the code of conduct by the two sides of the conflict? This is not an issue that can be unilaterally dictated just because Maoists or Koirala want it.

Army speaks rarely, but it does. That is what the US army and NATO alliance did in deference to the order of US parliament and the alliance in Iraq and in Kosovo a few years ago. Indian Army acted and spoke out in public when it carried the order of its political masters in Punjab in 1984 during the Operation Blue Star. One sees people in uniform speaking frequently about their determination to defeat their enemies in Kashmir, or when places of worship and ordinary public have been targeted in Gujarat and elsewhere.

Unfortunately, Koirala and his political clans who ruled this country during the height of Maoist insurgency are not owning up their role, but simply making the army and the security agencies the scapegoats. Koirala quit in July 2002 because King Gyanendra turned down his proposal to let NA be used against the Maoists. He was the one who chaired the government when the Nepal police was used against the Maoists in the name of the Operation Kilo Sera Two.

It would be prudent not to engage outside agencies in the name of Security Sector Reform which if done would invite dangerous consequences. It needs to be totally indigenous as the past 18 months have shown. Mere arrival of agencies like UNMIN will have no magic effect on peace process and the related issues. It must be decided by an elected government answerable to the legislature; not by the one without people's mandate. The issue of integration can be settled easily if the Maoists and GP Koirala go in for serious implementation of the provisions of the CPA.



Letters

Citizen speak

Former Speaker Daman Nath Dhungana's interview published last week reflects the current political crisis and Seven Party's leaders' autocratic rule. I want Nepal to be republic but not in that way. I wish that all Nepali citizens should take part in the decision so that we can feel and play our role as citizens.

The Interim House of Representatives approved the Seven Party's decision to write in interim constitution that Nepal is a republic now, but in a strange way they put the line in the constitution. They wrote that the decision will be implemented after the first meeting of constituent assembly. I, as a Nepali citizen, feel that the leaders are taking us and our country for a ride.

Dhungana himself is a republican but he condemns the path the leaders have taken. The Seven Party has forgotten the people's mandate and proven themselves to be no different from the autocratic King Gyanendra.

Narendra Prasain Kathmandu

UNMIN - beyond its mandate

UNMIN has, under the very difficult and confusing context of Nepal, has a

mixed record in tackling its job. It is unlikely that UNMIN is going to deliver miracles anytime soon. The Maoist combatants are still being used as the final blackmailing point and UNMIN can do little more than pay lip service to curbing the YCL lawlessness. Mr. Martin and crew came to Nepal with a limited mandate and are at the fag end of their given tasks. In this context, Mr. Martin is lobbying hard to do what UN missions do the world over, elongate and expand his mandate and survive. UN mission experience is nothing new

deliver on its original limited mandate, is going to succeed in an impossibly wider mandate?

Dipsu Niraula New Baneshwor, Kathmandu

Readers, your reactions, criticisms, comments, suggestions are most welcome. Please address it to:

newsfront@bhrikuti.com



Spiritual Corner

The word is the guru

Guru Nanak (1469-1539) was one of the greatest religious innovators of all time and the founder of the Sikh religion. Intrinsic to the Sikh faith is the holy book Guru Granth Sahib. It is founded on the teaching of Guru Nanak and the nine Sikh gurus who followed him. This book is treated with the greatest of respect and is the cornerstone of the religion.

"There is one reality, the unmanifest-manifested Ever-existent, he is Naam (conscious spirit) The creator; pervading all without fear, without enmity; The timeless, the unborn and the self-existent; complete within itself.

Through the favor of his true servant, the guru, he may be realised.

He was when there was nothing; he was before all ages began;

He existeth now, O Nanak, and shall exist forevermore.- Guru Nanak

Guru Nanak's quotes:

Let no man in the world live in delusion. Without a guru none can cross over to the other shore.

The word is the guru, the guru is the word,



for all nectar is enshrined in the world. Blessed is the word which reveal the lord's name But more is the one who knows by the guru's grace.

God is one, but he has innumerable forms. He is the creator of all and he himself takes the human form

One cannot comprehend him through reason, even if one reasoned for ages.

The lord can never be established nor created; the formless one is limitlessly complete in himself.

He who shows the real home in this body is the guru. He makes the five sounded word reverberate in man.

Even kings and emperors with heaps of wealth and vast dominion cannot compare with an ant filled with the love of god.

As fragrance abides in the flower, as reflection is within the mirror, So does your lord abide within you, why search for him without?

For the sake of it, you journey to sacred shrines and holy rivers; but this priceless jewel is within your own heart.

- from Guru Granth Shahib

Institutionalised plunder

There could be no better example of rampant plunder than this exercise of the government in which Prime Minister GP Koirala and Maoist leader Prachanda besides Madhav Nepal are involved in.



■ Yubaraj Ghimire

In an act of quiet servility, Finance Ministry has committed an unscrupulous act. This is far more tragic since it happened when Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat presides over the ministry. All the sitting 330 odd members of the current parliament - a body that does not represent people - have collectively robbed the state exchequer. The nation is poorer by 33 crores of rupees overnight, just 48 hours before the cabinet decided on the election date.

The Election Commission, which is packed with members of the major political parties, with the notable exception of Chief Commissioner Bhoj Raj Pokhrel and another member - Dolakh Gurung, can only react to it with mute helplessness.

There could be no better example of rampant plunder than this exercise of the government in which Prime Minister GP Koirala and Maoist leader Prachanda besides Madhav Nepal are involved in. All this extortion of the state exchequer by 'law' is aimed at improving their respective parties' prospects in the election. This all is taking place in the name of carrying out developmental activities, at a time when nominated members of parliament do not represent any constituency and people.

There could be no better example of rampant plunder than this exercise of the government.



A bizarre practice of Nepali parliament chaired by Subhash Nembwang, a professor of law, is in the process of seeing three new members who are to be nominated by leaders to fill up the vacancies caused by various reasons. Even those nominees would be entitled to Rs. one million each during the coming four months now that the CA poll date has been fixed for April 10.

The government's decision is not only morally and constitutionally flawed, but is also a test case for the independence and impartiality of the election commission. Its silence when the members are walking away with their pockets filled would only mean it is just a rubber stamp of the executive.

The Finance Secretary simply said the decision was taken by the previous government. Which previous government was that? This is a clear



Pix by newsfront

The government's decision is not only morally and constitutionally flawed, but is also a test case for the independence and impartiality of the election commission.

violation of the law or equality as it gives clear advantage to the sitting MPs over their political rivals when they go to the poll for CA.

Why should the state be favouring a set of politicians against another when fairness is the ground rule for election? Even the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists is a party to this mass plunder. They justify the deed on the plea that in any case, the fund is not going directly to the Member of Parliament, but is being routed through the ministry of local development and the district development committees.

This feeble defense ignores the fact that more than Rs. two billion are still unaccounted for as the report of the Auditor General of Nepal would suggest. This is clearly a politics that will give birth to new feudalism; which is something the Maoists had pledged they would fight against. The state is giving birth to new patrons of the politics and political system above rule and accountability.

In George Orwell's term, they are an emerging breed who is more equal than others. The government has also taken advantage of the existing situation as it knows that the Supreme Court has been substantially brought under the influence of the executive, and the chances of such decisions being nullified are far less than when the country has a free and fair judiciary.

A brief history of the situation reveals the parliament that was elected in 1999 and dissolved in 2002 was revived purely as



None of these MPs have faced the electorate. People have already resented the size of the proposed CA which will have 601 members; since the poor country cannot afford the luxury of these MPs. All the sitting members now who are lavishly drawing their allowances and salary have already become liability to the people. This is a mega version of the institutional corruption in the past. This is also an opportunity for any member or party to turn it down and win people's respect when the country goes to the poll.

Although Rs. 33 crores look much smaller compared to Rs two billion that the government has promised to pay to the disqualified Maoist combatants; this will establish a new feudal rule in the country. Of course, the country is not at all unfamiliar with similar exercises in which donors do select like minded people and create a group to implement their agenda through their money. Civil society has acted as such a tool. And so have many NGOs.

The only difference between the donor patronised NGOs and civil society; and the state patronised MPs is that with the former, the targeted groups benefited largely by weakening the apparatus of institutions of the state; and in the latter, the state has assumed the role of all powerful and an instrument above the law.

The state that is not accountable to any law or institutions like the parliament can only be authoritarian by definition and conduct. However, given the fact that both lack transparency, it is unlikely that such civil societies and NGOs, perhaps with some notable exceptions, will oppose the State's arbitrary en masse 'Bukshish' system - a modern revival of what the Ranas used to do.

This arbitrary bungling of the state exchequer without even a rubber stamp parliament debating it, should not go unchallenged. This case of brazen corruption among the Congress, UML and Maoists and their top leaders in this plunder shows they have a remarkable meeting of the minds - that plundering the state for narrow partisan interests is fine if it suits them. Does the foundation of new Nepal lie on such deplorable mind-set? ■

The state that is not accountable to any law or institutions like the parliament can only be authoritarian by definition and conduct.

What went right?

Saving a huge number of women from the death risks arising from pregnancy and childbirth.

■ Dr. Rita Thapa



Amidst the chaos of social and political transitions occurring in Nepal, a few bright ones can be spotted.

The decline of the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) for the first time is one of such bright spots. As reported by the 2006 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey, the number of women's death occurring in the life giving process has declined from 539 in 1996 to 281 per 100 000 live births.

This is no small gain for a country marred by poverty, internal conflict and difficult terrain. It has earned Nepal a prestigious place among the countries that are more likely to achieve the health objectives of the Millennium Development Goals. The recently held Sixth Conference of the Perinatal Society of Nepal had rightly devoted its scientific deliberations on this important subject with the theme, "Reduction of Maternal and Neonatal Deaths: A Critical Look."

What is more interesting is that Nepal was able to cut down its appallingly high maternal mortality to almost half within a span of ten years with only 19% of births attended by skilled health personnel (SBA). When viewed against the existing epidemiological norm, this decline seems a bit paradoxical. For a 20% SBA births is associated with maternal mortality ranging from 400 to 1500 per 100 000 live births. To this effect, Nepal's model presents a new paradigm of maternal mortality reduction.



Women in Jumla

following the amendment of Nepal's Civil Code in 2002 is being provided through trained government and private institutions. This would greatly contribute to saving women from the complications of abortion.

Clearly, the effect of these interventions at the population level over the long period has mitigated the risk of maternal death by lowering the fertility as well as improving maternal health. To cite a few example, the total fertility of more than six in the 1960s came down to the current level of three children per woman, thus lowering the risk exposures to maternal death. The declining birth rate among adolescent girls in 15-19 years would significantly contribute to the MMR reduction; because a pregnant adolescent is two to five times more likely to die than that between 20-25 years.

Similarly, the impressive use of maternal health interventions at the population level like antenatal care, three cleans, iron supplements by pregnant women including the use of oxytocin medicine after childbirth to stop bleeding; would have greatly contributed to saving a huge number of women from the death risks arising from pregnancy and childbirth.

Lastly, the current decline of the maternal mortality in the country should be cheered as a new emerging paradigm that has worked to saving the lives of a countless number of women and their babies, the most valuable resources required to making a more functional, happier and wealthier Nepal. ■

The question is how such reductions could be achieved with only 19% births attended by skilled health workers? True, the presence of skilled health personnel at birth is central, but this is not the only determinant of maternal mortality reduction. Historical and recent evidence show that reduction of maternal mortality is a multi sectoral entity. No specific factor can be pinpointed to its decline.

Several interacting health and social factors come into play to influence the fertility i.e. the exposure to the risk of becoming pregnant and the maternity factor - the risk of dying of complications of pregnancy & childbirth after becoming pregnant. A reduction in either component or both can effect a reduction of maternal deaths.

As reported by the 2006 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey, the number of women's death occurring in the life giving process has declined from 539 in 1996 to 281 per 100 000 live births.

Evidence shows that both the fertility and maternity factors have been effectively addressed in Nepal.

Since its inception in mid '60s, the MCH/FP services have been expanded at the population level through primary health care approach. Family planning, antenatal care, clean safe delivery and essential obstetric care constituted the basic safe motherhood package. These services were delivered at village levels through the network of front line health workers such as Village Health Workers (VHWs) and Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHVs) with the back up support of health posts and district hospitals.

Though limited, safe abortion care

■ Subrath Shrestha



It is the characteristic of humans to 'struggle for existence' that creates the status of livelihood. Poverty is beyond cultural diversity, economical wellbeing and social conditions. When identifying etiologies of poverty, often mental health (psychological) features are not contemplated.

Depression is the mental disorder that creates havoc in a poor person's psychological wellbeing; be that self-confidence, self-esteem, delusional guilt for being poor, hopelessness, and suicidal thoughts.

A person struggling at least for a period of two weeks with depressed moods or loss of interest or pleasure in nearly all activities is likely to be diagnosed with depression. The person can be experiencing changes in appetite, sleep, decrease in energy, feeling of worthlessness or guilt, difficulty in thinking, concentrating or making decisions, and recurrent thoughts

of death, suicidal plans or suicidal attempts.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV), depression can be identified, analysed, and divided into depressive disorders, the bipolar disorders, depression due to general medical conditions, and depression due to substance abuse.

The significant point to observe for depression with poverty is the substances induced features. It is more likely for a person who is poor and depressed to be addictive to alcohol or drugs. The addiction may manifest defense mechanism and denial of poverty. There are many types of defense mechanism such as irrational beliefs, avoidance, rational guilt, and social disorientations to name a few that a poor depressed person can manifest.

Such defense mechanism can be channeled into coping mechanism with professional consultation and help from clinical counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric nurses, and psychiatric social workers. These professionals can help depressed persons to identify possible coping mechanisms, install hope, reach out for

Poor and depressed

Therapeutic approaches and interventions such as art and play therapy can be effective...

support, and build self-confidence and self-esteem.

Carl Rogers person centered approach is genuinely humanistic which help a poor person assimilate that he/she is a person first. It supports in gaining human dignity. Cognitive behavior therapy when applied can facilitate a patient in dealing with irrational beliefs through tools such supportive confrontations. Solution focused brief therapy can be a very effective intervention for depressive issues as it helps in install positive thinking, and is solution oriented. It has encouraging techniques and tools such as miracle questioning and scaling questioning. When in need the depressed patients

can be referred for generic or non-generic anti-depressive psychiatric medications.

Culturally and gender wise, depression may be associated differently with men, women and children. As most of the Nepali communities struggling with poverty are patriarchal, men may often tend to take immediate liabilities for poverty. Therefore they end with risks of being addictive to alcohol or drugs, and at times take their own life.

Women may notably observe poverty and internalise it with feelings of helplessness, fatalism, pessimism, and delusional guilt. Children may realise being poor with their own

world views and from their peers. Finding self-vulnerability they may as well internalise their depressive feelings. Therapeutic approaches and interventions such as art and play therapy can be effective with depressed children.

To address the issues of poor and depressed men, women and children; multi-system family sessions, group sessions, as well as individual sessions can be implemented in interventions and treatment plan designing. Depression is an unseen pain of the communities struggling with poverty, and it is clearly noteworthy that poverty is a deep root cause of depression.

For these reasons, poverty of Nepal needs to be addressed to alleviated depression and the associated mental disorders. A holistic approach for poverty eradication should be designed and implemented from government or non-government organisations. Mental health indicator needs to be integrated along with economical, social, cultural, and political measurements. ■

(Subrath@gmail.com)

WHAT HILLARY MEANT TO US



■ Tashi Jangbu Sherpa

Executive Director, Everest Trekking & former President of Nepal Mountaineering Association.

What has been mostly written and published about Sir Edmund Hillary following his death is something quite stereotypical; saying that he opened so many schools and health centres in Nepal. That is no doubt true but there are many more interesting aspects of his personality that made him truly great.

Firstly, he himself admitted on many occasions that luck played a part in his success. In 1953, he was lucky enough to scale the Mt. Everest. Many people, stronger and more experienced than him had tried to establish the record, but with no luck. However, he and Tenzing succeeded. But he was respectful always to all those who had made such attempts in the past.

Hillary must have been asked a million times about who stepped on

the mountain top first. It was perhaps in his book 'Looking from the top' in which he said that he was the first to get to the top. But otherwise, he had always responded to the question diplomatically saying, "we two brothers got there together." He had his own way of respecting people and also telling the truth.

Did Erwin Mellory actually die on his return after ascending the world's highest peak? Hillary always referred to Mellory as 'my hero.' His answer to the puzzle was invariably, "I would have been very happy if that were the case... But you know, a mountaineer's success lies in his being able to return and tell the world about all those adventure and experiences involved. Getting to the top alone is not success."

In our own context, Hillary and Mt.

He said he never was a bright student but we saw that he was always humane.



Everest have been synonyms of each other. One gave fame and recognition to the other. It is not the world of today when he scaled the top. It was a different era unlike today when all details about the Mt. Everest is available with one touch on a computer. It was in the fifties when Nepal was still a forbidden land, little exposed to the world outside. It was mountaineers who first visited Nepal from the world outside. They were the first tourists to our country.

Once Everest was conquered, more tourists started coming in. The adventure and lust for mountaineering took almost an institution's form. The department of tourism was expanded into the ministry of tourism.

Dr. Harka Gurung worked on Sir Hillary's mission to give tourism and mountaineering a wider meaning and respect.

Hillary had a tremendous understanding of what we, mainly Sherpas, were in need of. I will give you just one example. Once the number of students wanting scholarship or those asking for his assistance in other fields from the remote areas increased, the Himalayan Trust began scrutinising the petitions received. Some of us suggested that it was perhaps time to decide the cases on merit basis. Some others raised issues like whether it is possible to meet the increasing expenses on education.

We also suggested that as more and more people who the Trust had funded were leaving the country and settling down abroad, our policy should be reviewed. Some suggested that maybe the trust should focus its priority on providing health care facilities. While Sir Hillary was not opposed to the Trust getting into other areas, he said merit alone should not be the consideration.

"We must give opportunities to more people". He said, adding, "After all I was never a bright student." But he was always humane. "As long as they have the drive and the will to study, we must give them a chance." That is what Hillary meant to all of us – he was so full of drive and will. ■

My association with Sir Edmund Hillary goes back to 1962. I saw him first as a little boy that year at Khumjung in Solu district where he had set up a primary school. He was perhaps attached with the village as some people from the village had worked for him during his expedition. He opened more schools in the area later. This injected some awareness in other villages that education was the key to overall development.

I recall one incident. In 1963, residents of Thame village, about three hours walk from Khumjung, petitioned to Hillary saying, "We are people who have eyes but are unable to see." What they meant was that one needs to be educated to see things around. Hillary, who we used to call Bada Sahib then, responded positively. He used to visit the area and those schools almost every time he came to Kathmandu. We used

He used to come there sometimes to find out how we were doing.

In fact, he had made some arrangements with the British embassy and Brig. Richardson would often visit the school to clear our dues. There was one understanding with Edmund when I was admitted to Anandkuti; that once I pass out, I will go back to Khumjung and teach there. I went back and took over as a headmaster of the school that Hillary had founded.

My association with him grew deeper here. It was during that period that an idea to make Khumbu area the national park was mooted. Hillary's role in having roads, schools, health centres and the airport at Lukla is well known, but not too many know that his was the mind and spirit behind creation of Sagarmatha National Park.

The construction of the airport



■ Dr Lhakpa Norbu Sherpa

Co-Director, Himalayan Programme, The Mountain Institute (South Asia Regional Office)

to line up to offer him Khata during his visit to the school.

I completed class six in Khumjung. Since there were no high schools in the area, Kathmandu was the only option for those who wanted to pursue higher education. Edmund began sponsoring students who stood first, second and third in the class for higher studies in the capital. I was one of those lucky ones. I was admitted to Anandkuti Vidyapeeth.

made its own contribution towards environmental degradation. The issues of land and resources management needed a fresh look with focus on conservation. The idea of having Sagarmatha National park was an outcome of that concern. He took the lead in that project and used his clout with the New Zealand government. A project manager was deputed for that purpose. But he was clear that the without the involvement of the local people, the project could not run effectively.

Hillary was the mind and spirit behind creation of Sagarmatha National Park.

I was one of those drafted to study the National Park Management in New Zealand under a scholarship programme. Once in his home country, Hillary was host to many students from Nepal. He would invite all of us during Christmas and other occasions. I met him last in April 2007 in Kathmandu. As always, he would mostly talk about Solu and other areas that he loved so much. For the past few years, every time we met him, we thought it is going to be his last visit in the country he loved. We were happy to be proved

wrong so often.

But last time he said, "You know, actually I am not in very good shape." Sadly, his words turned out to be prophetic. I accompanied him up to the airport, spent few moments at the VVIP lounge at the airport before saying goodbye. All that he achieved and all that he gave, appears so impossible for one person to do in one life time.

He was possessive about us, especially the Sherpas. I met Helen in college in New Zealand. When we were married, I think Hillary was not very pleased. His fear, that since I am married to a foreigner, I will settle down abroad and forget Nepal, was understandable and so touching. We owe a lot to him.

He has created one institution - Himalayan Trust with its chapter in Nepal and some other countries. Hopefully, it will give continuity to his dream and mission. His demise, no doubt, will create a big gap, hard to fill up. We will definitely miss him. It is a big loss. He has helped raise our livelihood and life standard. We the Sherpas have also become more resourceful now and we will give continuity to all that, but we have lost a powerful ally of international repute. We have lost a guide.

It was in 2003, on the 50th anniversary of his ascent to the Mt. Everest, that he spoke to the British Ambassador. "Why don't you remove the travel advisory, after all, I have been visiting the country every year without being harmed." That one sentence did the magic. We do not have any one like him now. ■



Binod P. Bista

Contrary to assertions made in public by major political parties through public forums and media on the

secret pact between government of India and King Gyanendra, Maoists and King Gyanendra, GP Koirala and the king, the latest event of turning Nepal into a 'federal democratic republic,' by Nepal's sitting parliament proves beyond a doubt that the pact, if there was any, was between the Maoist and the seven political parties.

It does further confirm that the Jana Andolan II was not merely a movement but clearly a modern revolution staged by the Maoists with highest degree of sophistication and finesse. Maoists must be given due credit for their skills and ability as well as intelligence in steering the country toward a federal democratic republic in less than two years after the April revolution. Though the Maoist insurgency continued for ten full years with heavy casualty on both sides in pursuit of making Nepal a secular federal republic, the achievement of the past 20 months towards this end is monumental.

Moreover, this period has remained quiet except for a few bursts of violence due to Terai revolt. Although the period, under a comprehensive peace treaty between the coalition government of seven political parties and the Maoists, saw a freefall in law and order situation, the number is yet low compared to the earlier period. After the promulgation of the

JANANDOLAN II - staged by MAOISTS

It proves beyond a doubt that the pact, if there was any, was between the Maoists and the seven political parties.



interim constitution, basically engineered by the Maoists with helping hand coming from unexpected agencies and nations, Nepal's statecraft gained a good momentum. The coalition government of Nepal,

with or without the Maoists in it but having full representation in the parliament, has remained a little short of dictatorial and sometimes even more in nature. By bringing the judiciary within the ambit of execu-

tive, and the unelected parliament backing every act of the government, this has been an unprecedented moment for the present leaders in power if they had chosen to transform Nepal into an enlightened nation.

Since the only argument that gives some credence to one party system lies in its swiftness in decision making compared to useful but lengthy process of majority participation, resolving differences between political parties and other such processes that, sometimes in nascent democracies, lose the very purpose of discussion, Nepal should have enjoyed the best of both. Unfortunately, most of the time of the government and the leaders was spent on matters either assigned to an agreed national commitment such as the constituent assembly elections or securing continuity of the present members of the government represented from major political parties.

In fact, the present government can be termed as a three party government with the communist parties having an upper hand over the Nepali Congress party, formed as a socialist democratic party by its prominent founder members, BP Koirala, KP Bhattarai and GM Singh. As it stands, the upcoming elections of the constituent assembly in April will be a face saving event for many domestic as well as foreign actors. The law and order situation that hardly improved, despite the repeated promises and commitment of the government, particularly the prime minister and the home minister, remains the main cause of a likely failure of the elections.

With the present mind set of the people, it would be unreasonable to assume that people will take even a slightest risk as long as they are not convinced of their government's ability to ensure their physical safety and security. Closely linked to personal security is the matter of fairness of the present government in the conduct of elections.

The minority parties represented in the coalition government as well as in the parliament appear to be highly skeptical on the conduct and outcome of elections. Since the political parties excepting the Maoists have done very little to fulfill their pledge to the people in matters yet unresolved such as the issue of inclusiveness, peace and reconciliation commission, it would be now up to the Maoists to lead.

At this stage, Maoists are not only the best choice because the people have yet to experience their legitimate form of governance but they have also extracted almost all their demands from the political parties of Nepal. In order to steer, they have to prove their worth by reforming themselves.

Some of the critical areas are: full observance of law and order, facing the peace and reconciliation commission for the criminal acts perpetrated by their militias, full adherence to the democratic norms of which they have become a part. They should also avoid deliberately irritating the friendly countries and risking great tragedy to the nation simply to prove their point, and so on. They must now learn to behave as a legitimate civil political party which is also in power. ■

देशको तात्कालीन कार्यदिशाका बारेमा तपाईं के सोच्दै हुनुहुन्छ ?

अनि राजनेताहरु के सोच्दै होलान् ?

शुभशंकर कँडेलको साथमा विशिष्ट व्यक्तित्वको दृष्टिकोण कार्यक्रम

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हरेक शनिवार साँझ ८:१५ बजे मात्र सगरमाथा टेलिभिजनमा

सगरमाथा समाचारको शिखर नेपालको गौरव

Musharraf: Exhume Bhutto's body

Pakistan's president has called for the body of Benazir Bhutto to be exhumed to confirm exactly how she died. Pervez Musharraf's comments come amid growing accusations that the government was complicit in her assassination on December 27; but while he rejected the charges, he stopped short of ordering the exhumation.

Her supporters insist she was shot before a suicide bomber blew himself up, but the government says she died when she hit her head on her car's sun-roof as she waved to supporters after a campaign rally. "Exhume it, 100 per cent," Musharraf told Newsweek magazine, "I would like it to be exhumed."

However he ruled out using his executive power to order a post-mortem examination without the agreement of Bhutto's family. "Everything is not black and white here," he said. "It would have very big political ramifications."

"If I just ordered the body exhumed, it would be careless, unless [Bhutto's] people agreed; but they will not ... because they know it's a fact there is nothing wrong." However Bhutto's family said it would only agree to an exhumation if Musharraf allows the UN to lead the inquiry into



Bilawal Bhutto Zardari

her murder, something he has ruled out. No autopsy was ever carried out. "There cannot be a UN investigation," Musharraf said. "There are not two or three countries involved. Why should there be a UN investigation? This is ridiculous."

No trust

Benazir Bhutto's son backed the UN investigation, saying he does not trust officials in Pakistan. "We do not believe that an investigation under the authority of the Pakistani government has the necessary transparency," Bilawal Bhutto Zardari told reporters in London. "Already so much forensic

evidence has been destroyed."

The Oxford University student was chosen to succeed his mother as leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), but day-to-day leadership is currently in the hands of his father, Asif Ali Zardari. The party wants an international investigation similar to the probe into the killing of former Lebanese prime minister Rafik Hariri.

Bilawal criticised the US administration's support of Musharraf as a key ally in its "war on terror".

He said: "I believe that the problem is that dictatorships feed extremism, and once the United States stops supporting dictators we can success-

fully tackle the extremist problem as well." Bilawal pleaded for privacy as he pursued his studies at Oxford, where he is in his first year.

Musharraf's pledge

Meanwhile, Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's president, has said his government is committed to finding the truth behind the assassination of Bhutto and vowed to punish her killers. At the beginning of January, Musharraf asked the UK to assist in the investigation of the murder and a team of British police officers was sent to Islamabad.

Musharraf met the Scotland Yard detectives and said the Pakistan government was committed to "unearthing the evidence, finding out the truth and bringing those responsible for this heinous crime to justice". The British police said they were thoroughly sifting the evidence to ascertain the facts.

At the same time it was announced that the Pakistani detective who solved the 2002 murder of Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal reporter, had joined the Bhutto killing inquiry. A senior Pakistan government official said: "He has joined the investigation and will co-ordinate with the Scotland Yard team."

(Aljazeera)

Fukuda gets anti-terror law approved

Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda's government Friday won approval for an anti-terrorism refueling law through a special legislative procedure.

Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force will now be able to resume its refueling mission in the Indian Ocean in support of the U.S.-led anti-terrorism operations in and near Afghanistan, Kyodo news service reported.

Fukuda's coalition government, which had made the issue a high priority to strengthen ties with the United States, planned to resume the operation in a few weeks, the report said.

The measure was defeated Thursday in Japan's opposition-controlled upper house. It passed Friday with a two-third majority in the lower house which the coalition government controls. Under a special legislative provision that victory allowed the bill to become law despite its defeat in the upper house.

"Terrorism is the bane of our time. By passing this legislation, Japan has demonstrated its willingness to stand with those who are trying to create a safer, more tolerant world," U.S. Ambassador to Japan Thomas Schieffer was quoted as saying.

(earthtimes)



Sri Lankan policemen check the mobile phone and wallet of an unidentified man during search operations in Colombo. Heavy fighting raged in northern Sri Lanka where Tamil Tiger rebels said they lost a key leader, as Norwegian-led monitors began pulling out before the formal end of a tattered truce.

Fighting kills 67 ahead of peace envoy

Thirty-Six hours of intense fighting across Sri Lanka's north left at least 66 rebels and one soldier dead, a day ahead of a visit by a Japanese special peace envoy.

Japan, Sri Lanka's top aid donor, has voiced deep concern over Colombo's recent decision to formally scrap its 2002 truce with Tamil rebels, saying it feared the move would further stall peace efforts and worsen the conflict.

Yasushi Akashi was to arrive in Colombo on Sunday for talks with

President Mahinda Rajapakse and government officials on "the current situation of the peace process and its future," Japan's embassy said.

Analysts said Mr Akashi's three-day mission might prove fruitless.

"The government is hell-bent on pursuing its military plans" to crush the rebels before entering into any peace talks, said Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, head of the Centre for Policy Alternatives, a Colombo think-tank.

"Japan has serious economic clout in Sri Lanka and it will be interesting

to see what his message to the government is," said Mr Saravanamuttu.

The envoy's trip follows an escalation by security forces of attacks along rebel-held areas in Jaffna and the slaying of a cabinet minister in a suspected guerrilla bomb attack on Tuesday.

Some 231 rebels have been killed so far this month while nine troops have been killed in the same period, the military said.

(news.com.au)

Big win for Taiwan opposition

Taiwan's main opposition Nationalist Party has won a landslide victory in legislative elections. The Kuomintang (KMT) handed the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) its worst ever election defeat on Saturday by gaining 72 per cent of the vote.

The convincing victory will boost the KMT's hopes of regaining the country's presidency in March and could signal improved relations between the island and China. According to final results from the Central Election Commission the KMT won 81 of the 113 seats in the national assembly.

The DPP picked up just 27, or 24 per cent, with the remaining seats going to other parties.

Chen Shui-bian, Taiwan's president since 2000, immediately resigned as chairman of the DPP, saying he should take responsibility for the heavy defeat. Many voters blame the DPP for allowing Taiwan's economy to languish under Chen.

Chen's family members and closest aides have also been involved in a series of scandals over the past year, plunging the party into its worst crisis since it was founded in 1986.

The results come as China chose 13 people of its own to represent Taiwan, over which Beijing claims sovereignty, state media said on Saturday.

The 13 were chosen "via a secret ballot", the official Xinhua news agency said, and will sit in China's largely rubber stamp National People's Congress.

The KMT has promised that closer ties with China will revive Taiwan's economy and open the door to new jobs. The DPP however says that Taiwan's sovereign identity is vital to its democracy.

Voters were choosing from more than 400 candidates vying for 113 the parliamentary seats that was cut from 225 in the previous legislature.

(Aljazeera)



No beginning, no end

There are endless such Lokadhatus beginning and ending at any one time.

Marshland Flowers

Acharya Mahayogi Sridhar Rana Rinpoche

No forms of Buddhism believe that this universe, was created at a certain time but rather samsara is beginning less and endless. Actually this is intimately related to the principle that there is no creator – god.

Whatever differences there are, are in the finer interpretation of these things and not in the basic tenets themselves. No forms of Buddhism believe in a god who created the universe, no forms of Buddhism believe in an eternal soul or Atma. No forms of Buddhism believe in an unchanging entity that transmigrates from one life to another. No forms of Buddhism believe that karma is given to one by some super power/energy/ deity and can be changed by the grace of such a power.

No forms of Buddhism believe that this universe, was created at a certain time but rather samsara is beginning less and endless. Actually this is intimately related to the principle that there is no creator – god. I use the word creator – god because nowadays many theistic systems have also been re-interpreted in a more mystical, experiential way by some of their supporters – especially those who practice meditation in one form or the other. But it must be said that such interpretation of god is not accepted by the mainstream theistic religious systems.

While it could be said a stray few in all religious system had always interpreted god in a more mystical



sense, it must also be said that those who interpret god in this way were either considered heretics or in some cases even put to the sword. Although such an interpretation of god is a step towards the Buddhist concept of enlightenment, it must still be said all such mystical interpretation

of god still falls short of the Buddhist enlightenment.

Even if god was considered more a mystical – experiential experience, this god would still be an eternally existing entity which is very far from the Buddhist enlightenment which is

the experience of the emptiness of all entities/dharmas. It must be said clearly that this emptiness is not the same as the emptiness found in many Hindu texts like the Vigyana Bhairaba Tantra etc.

Within Buddhism there are infinite and beginning-less cycles of beginning and ending. We can only talk of a cycle beginning (created) but that is not the beginning of samsara/ universe itself but the beginning of one small unit of samsara. One unit of samsara (may be a galaxy in modern term) called Lokadhatu begins and ends but there are endless such Lokadhatus beginning and ending at any one time.

And even these Lokadhatus are not created by any creator of a sort but appear and disappear based on various principles/laws called 'Niyama' which includes karma – niyaams. When the power of the pull of the karmas of sentient beings and the other niyaams synchronise then a world – system (Lokadhatu) appears (rather than created) etc. These niyaamas are more like the principles of gravity etc. which no one created.

(To be continued)
(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)

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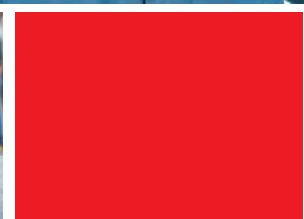
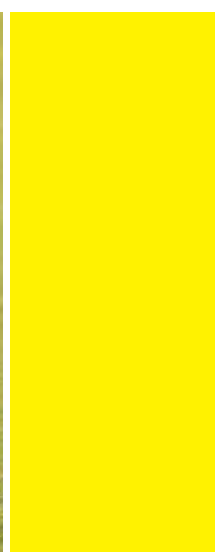
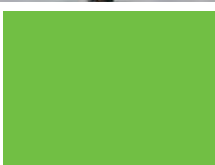
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FIREFRONT

The Poet and the vision

Surdas as a poet is an enduring metaphor here.

■ Yuyutsu RD Sharma



A poet's vision turned out to be the focus of the first Irish Literary Festival of the

subcontinent opening this week in New Delhi. The festival began with a performance by internationally acclaimed soprano Judith Mok, and with a lecture on early Irish mythology and Hindu mythology by distinguished folklorist and writer Daithi O' Hogain.

Mok's dramatic recital, Molly says No! was awe-inspiring. Written by Irish Poet Michael O Laughlin, now writer-in-residence in Galway, the performance was originally commissioned for the Joyce Centenary celebrations in 2004. The performance aims to show a different side of Molly Bloom. Only a Nepali shaman's performance could be a match for Mok's vibrant show as she sang songs from the era of James Joyce, electrifying her audience.

The event also displayed the affinity that fiction has with poetry. In South Asia today, poetry and fiction seem to be two different things and the sacred link seem to have been severed. As Irish Ambassador Kieran Dowling pointed out, "Music was very important for Joyce, both personally - he had a good tenor voice - and in his works." He quotes Richard Ellmann to whom 'Finnegans Wake,' is "an Arabesque on the Irish ballad of that title."

Hogain's profound note touched several crucial issues central to the makeup of Irish nation and the composition of the subcontinent. Professor of Irish Folklore at University College, Dublin, Hogan discussed the role of a poet in a traditional society and explored similarities of the

Celtic traditions with the Hindu Mythology.

Especially significant remained his discourse on poet's vision, how in the Irish traditions a blind person was considered a better candidate for the vocation. As poetry opens the inner eye, the notion of a blind man as awakened identity, a seer seems relevant. The one who sees the inner reality remains the one who can't see. Paradox of a seer as blind person is a striking similarity that Irish tradition shares with our continent. Surdas as a poet is an enduring metaphor here.

Hogain also discussed the tradition of poets using poetry to make things literally happen. The poets have been known to have sent signals to benefit or harm the people around them. Like shamans in Nepal, they can cause havoc on the enemy by sending an evil agent or help a friend by sending good omens. Like their Asian counterparts, they can cause rain, raise alarm, light fire or send rats to the enemy's house.

This coincides with the view Islam has about the poets. In the holy Koran a poet is not considered worth an attention at all. The poets tell lies and present what's not there. In early times they were considered to be the people with a devil or a sinister spirit as a pet. This led to the negation of the poets as dangerous people in Islam. Like Plato's view, the poets should be banished from the polis for they tell lies and are twice removed from reality.

In the Irish and Hindu mythology, the poet/prophet image serves to dignify poet as a visionary, 'an unacknowledged legislator' of the world. (writer@yuyutsu.de)



Quaint villages in Kathmandu

■ Pramesh Pradhan



The ancient village of Bungamati probably came into existence in the seventh century AD in

the name of Bugayumi. It lies ten kilometres on the southern rim of Kathmandu valley. An agricultural outpost of the valley in the Malla period, it stretches to the banks of Bagmati River. It has a population of around 4,000 inhabitants, predominantly Newars - who are master wood carvers, stone sculpture producers and farmers.

The houses in Bungamati are simple and quintessentially Newari. They are decorated with red chilli garlands or dried corns hanging from the top floor to the ground floor. This

is Bungamati where one can find some of the best woodcrafts in the valley. Around 300 individual workshops in the small village speak of its wood carving excellence.

Most of the villagers are farmers and make use of their spare time with masonry, carpentry and other manual works. The women are even more diligent and apart from their heavy daily household schedule, they engage themselves in weaving, knitting, and tailoring to support their families.

The main sanctuary in Bungamati is the Shikhara temple of Rato Machhindranath in the centre of the village. It is the birthplace of Rato Machhindranath. In Kathmandu, he is regarded as the patron guardian of the valley. A unique tradition has it that the god spends half a year in

Bungamati marks the spot where Machhindranath, having arrived in the valley in the form of a bee to save the valley from drought, was born as the valley's protector-rain maker deity.

Bungamati and the other half in the Rato Machhindranath temple in Patan. The tradition and process of moving the god back and forth to Bungamati is celebrated with much enthusiasm. The courtyard around the temple has a large prayer wheel and many stupas.

Bunga-dyo is the Newari name for Rato Machhindranath or Aryavalokiteshwar. According to the legends, Bungamati marks the spot where Machhindranath, having arrived

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in the valley in the form of a bee, to save the valley from drought, was born as the valley's protector-rain maker deity. The deity is taken around the city of Patan and it is one of the most celebrated festivals. The deity is then taken in a tall wooden chariot decorated with green leaves. Once in every twelve years, the chariot with the deity is pulled from Bungamati and taken back.

An imposing temple of Hyagriva Bhairav, a Shiva manifestation is within the main square. A gigantic face of Bhairav is worshipped by the Buddhists as well. There are a few nice but unfortunately dirty ponds in the village with religious importance including Dyo Pukhu (pond of god) in the centre of the village where Bunga-dyo takes bath during religious festivals. In a walking distance lies yet another important temple of Karya Vinayaka (Ganesh - the god of luck and accomplishment).

Yet another important village nearby Bungamati is the Khokana village. Most of the farmers in these villages are either involved in spinning or oil pressing business. The mustard oil of Khokana is one of the best trade marks of a Nepali kitchen. Shekali Mai temple - a massive three storied pagoda temple of nature goddess is the main attraction of the village. Agrarian in character, Khokana is smaller than Bungamati. Some of the best one day hiking places in Kathmandu valley would be around Bungamati and Khokana for its unmodernised setting replete with culture and faith. ■

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His voice and musical talent will be listened to by millions, both inside the country and outside.

Art imitating life

■ Keshav Sharan Lamichhane

Prakash Gandarva has passed through the kind of tragedies and disappointments normally seen in theatres or movies. He is the main actor in the life-like radio drama, *Katha Mitho Sarangiko*, which is being produced by the BBC World Service Trust.

Prakash still does not know who his father is. His mother eloped with another man when he was only one and a half years old, leaving him with his maternal grandparents. All he knows about his father is that he was in the Indian army and of a higher caste. Not wanting to marry a woman from a Gandharba family, he paid his mother off with 1,000 rupees, abandoning her when she was eight months pregnant.

Prakash picked up the art of playing the Sarangi from his mother's brother, himself a Gandharba, and subsequently took the surname of Gandharba. He was brought up by his loving maternal grandmother, but didn't go to school until he was ten years old.

"When I moved up from grade four to five, I was second in the class. I started grade five but had to leave after five days. The singing I did on Saturdays didn't pay enough for me to stay on at school." From an early age he wanted to join the army, but because he didn't have citizenship - and still doesn't - he had no chance of being even considered. "You need parents to get a citizenship. I had none. I knew who my mother was, but she couldn't be bothered to provide the documentary proof needed for my citizenship; as for my father, I didn't know where to begin to look for him."

Prakash is now 21 and after leaving school, he has been wandering around the mountains in the regions of Dhaulagiri and Gandaki, singing for his living. But now his situation has changed radically. His voice and musical talent will be listened to by millions, both inside the country and outside. Two months ago, Prakash Gandharba was chosen to be the narrator and leading actor in a brand new BBC World Service Trust drama, *Katha Mitho Sarangiko*, which is part of the peace-building process in Nepal. The character he plays is Dilu - a nomadic figure who travels all over the country experiencing the good and the bad. On the one hand, he comes across a culture of impunity with Bandhs, crime, prejudice; and on the other hand, he makes great friendships, both musical and personal, using his Sarangi as a medium of communication and collaboration with people from very different backgrounds.

"We searched for the right actor, high and low," said director/producer Deepak Rauniyar, "auditioning over 14 Gandharbas in the villages of Kaski and surrounding areas. Just as we were about to return to Kathmandu, we got a call from Prakash. Returning from his travels, he had just then picked up the message we left with his wife some days back. He said he would like

to try for the part. His singing and musicianship proved extremely good - not that surprising, since he was a professional Gandharba - but what we found amazing was what an outstanding actor he was, with phenomenal improvisation skills."

Before he met the BBC team, Prakash was struggling to support his wife and daughter with his musical skills. A few years ago he married Thuli, a widow and mother of a young girl, whom Prakash treats as his own. As the star of a BBC drama, Prakash can now confidently provide for his family. He is earning a regular income, learning the art of radio, and working with a supportive and dedicated creative team. His job has given him a chance to get to know Kathmandu, a city he had only dreamt of before. It's the kind of life-change, which you usually only read about in fairy tales.

Prakash has always tried to turn round the misfortunes in his life, and this reflects one of the central themes of the drama which explores the idea that conflict can be transformed into harmony, confrontation into collaboration. The drama is funded by the UNDP and it will be aired by the BBC Nepali Service and FM stations all round the country. The drama team consists of editor- Fiona Ledger, editorial consultant - Kedar Sharma, and three director/producers: Deepak Rauniyar, Khagendra Lamichhane and Sushma Pandey.

Music is woven throughout the drama. Stories and relationships will be explored through the musical medium of Prakash's Sarangi. Prakash adapts traditional Sarangi rhythms to Maithili songs performed by Smriti Mishra who plays 17 year old Manju, a lively girl who decides to leave her traditional life in the Terai to pursue a musical career in Kathmandu. Her brother Ujjwal Mishra joins Prakash with his Dholak. Mile Gurung' brings his guitar to the mix and Suresh Chand adds his Deuda singing.

Katha Mitho Sarangiko brings some landmark changes to radio drama production in Nepal: the recording of the drama takes place, not in the confines of a radio drama studio, but on location with three different casts of actors, many of them non-professionals. All dialogue is improvised. This is a new thing in Nepal, introduced by Fiona.

"Reading a radio script is as a highly skilled business, generally the gift of very educated, Kathmandu based actors," says Fiona. "Improvisation enables a whole range of people from very different educational and ethnic backgrounds to take part in our drama. In this way we hope to be giving a voice to a whole range of people who are not usually heard on the radio." In line with this very colloquial, regionally sensitive approach, the drama avoids development jargon along with characters making speeches about peace, harmony and development. It is a whole new approach to radio drama combining international expertise with Nepali sensibility and aesthetics, to create a great effect. ■



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