



Courage & Conviction

# newsfront

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Bhaskar Chha

Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg who was in Nepal for a day to study climate change, pledged his support to Nepal's development.

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Discover  
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# A deal?

## Kidney doctor's passage to India.

■ nf correspondent

In a 'deal' at the highest political level, the government of Nepal dispensed with even the minimal legal and official formality, and quietly handed over Dr. Amit Kumar, wanted in a clandestine kidney racket to Indian authorities.

Kumar was handed over to three CBI officials waiting in the Indian airlines aircraft in the evening on Feb 9, a senior officer of the Nepal Police said. AIG Hem Gurung was instructed by Inspector General of Police to 'do the job quietly'. He took Kumar straight to the awaiting IC flight from the domestic airport.

"The decision to handover Kumar was done at the instruction of Prime Minister GP Koirala. My understanding is that India's foreign affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee had a talk with Koirala asking for urgent deportation," a cabinet minister said, admitting – "This will have serious implication in Nepal."

The 'deal' has also demoralised the Nepal police which was all set to file a case in the district court on Feb 10 for the doctor being in possession of fake passport and foreign currencies in excess of the legal limit. Everything that was seized from Dr Kumar when he was arrested from a hotel room in Chitwan has been handed over to the Indian authorities, a police official said.

Dr. Kumar's hand-over to the Indian authorities is different in the sense that in most

such cases, the people wanted would be shown as having been arrested in India. The government had handed over Yakub Menon, wanted in the serial explosion in Bombay in 1993, to the Indian authorities in Gorakhpur after he was arrested at Tribhuvan International Airport a few months after the explosion.

But given the high publicity that Dr. Kumar's case got in Nepal and the world over, there was noticeable degree of hesitation on the part of Nepali police to follow the precedence. They had suggested that he be handed over, after the minimal formalities like producing him in the court on other relatively minor cases, are done.

What Kumar said in the course of investigation here will remain only in the 'police diary' now. Police found him cooperative enough and appeared frank and forthright in sharing information. He told the officials that he was out of the kidney business for nearly two years, but got back into it as patients made a bee line with requests at his Gurgaon hospital. Apparently there was a dispute over a kidney donor and recipient over money, and one of them took the matter to the police. He is also reported to have admitted that he was once arrested, but was let off by the authorities in India. His regret was not to have moved to Turkey where a large number of his patients wanted him to set up a hospital and head it.

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# Unmasked

PM ordered raids on YCL offices.

■ nf correspondent

The mask of unity and togetherness of the Nepali Congress and the Maoists was blown off following a series of police raids in about half a dozen private houses forcibly occupied by the Young Communist League activists in and around the capital.

The raids were jointly carried out by the Armed Police Force (APF) and the civil police on the express order of Prime Minister GP Koirala. This sent a message to the Maoists that they have to honour the 23-point agreement signed on December 23 failing which they have to face government action. Under the agreement, the Maoists are obliged to return all the property under their illegal occupation within a few days now.

As the raids continued simultaneously in six places on February 4, Home Minister KP Sitaula told Maoist

leaders, Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai that he had no hands in the whole episode. "This is done at the instance of the Minister without a portfolio," ranted Prachanda the next day based on the briefing he had with Sitaula.

Baluwatar sources however told newsfront that the raids were ordered by the PM following complaints from the security chiefs that Sitaula had warned the APF and the police not to take any action against the YCL even if they were found committing any crime.

The only people who came to Sitaula's rescue were the Maoists as almost all other parties including the UML, supported the raids in sequel to attack on Congress parliamentarian, Dilendra Badu in the west and abduction of three college students from Nobel academy in the capital by the YCL the same day.

In yet another major political step, the Maoists revived the People's

Revolutionary Council (PRC), literally a parallel government, which had been dissolved after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement had been signed in November 2005. "This is in clear violation of the CPA and goes against the spirit of election," Arjun Narsingh KC, spokesperson of the Nepali Congress said.

Maoist ministers, Hishila Yami and Matrika Yadav joined furious YCL activists in raising slogans against the government outside the house they had captured in Bhaisepati and established their illegal possession once again. "If they do not return all such houses within a month, they should be evicted by force," said Congress working president Sushil Koirala.

Despite Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai trying to play down PRC's revival as a step to facilitate polls to the constituent assembly in April, 'their sincerity for poll' is being doubted from all sides.



Dr Amit Kumar, the kidney racket kingpin in custody of police on Friday in Kathmandu. He was arrested from a resort in Chitwan on Thursday.

## Sitaula challenged

■ nf correspondent

Life is no longer pleasant for Home Minister KP Sitaula as he has been facing open challenges from his newly appointed Deputy Minister of State for Home, Ram Kumar Chaudhary, who has of late taken the reigns of the department in his hands, and asked the police and Home Ministry bureaucracy to stop all illegal activities of the Maoists, if necessary, with force.

Chaudhary is believed to have told Prime Minister Koirala that the morale

of the security agencies needs to be boosted. The PM was seeking some clarification from the Minister of State after the Home Minister made complaints simultaneously to the top Maoist leaders and the PM that the raids on the YCL office was 'uncalled for' and that he had no role in it.

"He should quit if he could not act as a Home Minister," Chaudhary is believed to have told the PM on Feb 8. In fact, the raid on the YCL offices has triggered a polarisation in the Home Ministry and top bureaucracy.

Home Secretary Umesh Mainali who loyally carried out 'His Master's voice' when Sitaula enjoyed uncontested freedom and power to run his ministry, is now lying low. Chaudhary even told his officials on their face that they should seek transfer elsewhere if they cannot improve the law and order situation and instill a sense of security in the country.

Sources in the PM's office said that while Koirala supported Chaudhary's argument that law and order has to be maintained, he asked the new Minister

of State not to be seen as acting 'independently.' While Mainali and the Chiefs of the APF and the civil police have not made any complaints against Sitaula, a number of other top ranking officials are believed to have expressed their resentments known to the new minister.

"Most of the police officials have been asked to report to the YCL in their respective areas," a police official quoted a Deputy Inspector General as complaining to the Minister of State.



## Who dun it?

The visit of a high level team of the Indian National Congress (INC) is being taken as India's realisation that something somewhere has gone wrong in India's policy on Nepal, and failure to address them on time will have serious consequences.

A seven member high level team headed by All India Congress Committee (AICC) General Secretary, Digvijay Singh, takes place at a time when no less than India's main opposition party - the Bharatiya Janata Party has charged that India's Nepal policy is outsourced to the CPI-M; and that the government of India, through its silence is endorsing 'unconstitutional and undemocratic' decisions taken by Nepal's interim parliament 'under diktat' from the Maoists.

India, which was at the peak of its popularity in Nepal during the past two years following its mediation in bringing seven pro-democracy parties and the Maoists together through the 12-point agreement in Delhi, is now being seen almost as a failure, as it totally sided with the

ruling alliance in every right and wrong. With law and order in shambles, and service delivery poor, the seven party alliance is only concentrating on bashing the monarchy to protect and preserve their radical and progressive image.

It is not yet known the extent of involvement of the Congress and the BJP in reformulating India's post 2006 policy on Nepal. CPI-M which has represented the government of India in Nepal during the period many times, has given clear message that India's long pursued twin pillar theory is over. And no one during the past visits from the South have interacted with pro-monarchists to the extent that even the Indian embassy in Kathmandu has removed from its guest lists, senior palace functionaries and officials from its official functions.

During all these turbulence and change, the Congress party has only shown a limited involvement by being part of some delegations, but has never in the past sent any group or delegation of its own. The visit of the team led by Singh therefore,

assumes more significance.

Interestingly, a mid-level functionary as well as an academic paid a quiet visit to Kathmandu to make a pre-visit assessment. He met people from all sides including founder member of the Nepali Congress and former Prime Minister KP Bhattarai besides senior leaders like KB Gurung, Govinda Raj Joshi, Khum Bahadur Khadka, Bijay Gachedar, Sharad Singh Bhandari, Shyam Lal and Chiranjivi Wagle who have been opposing GP Koirala's - 'surrender to the Maoists and callousness towards Terai' policy.

KP Bhattarai, on other hand, has been advocating that the party must not give up the policy of national reconciliation initiated by BP Koirala and Ganesh Man Singh that favoured the constitutional monarchy and the democratic forces together. "I said that when the Indian Congress functionary called on me," Bhattarai told newsfront, adding, "If India wants stability, peace and democracy in Nepal. It must encourage that line."

## A tale of two hijacking

It may be mere coincidence that two Nepalis, one little known and another arguably the best known, are guilty of hijacking two aircrafts in a span of 26 years. Yusuf alias Gopal Man Damai, the little known Nepali has now been awarded life imprisonment by the Delhi based Patiala court and is in jail. While GP Koirala, a self-confessed hijacker, is the country's Prime Minister.

Yusuf was involved in arranging fake passports for Pakistani hijackers, air-tickets and accommodation in Kathmandu besides supplying them with arms in the Tribhuvan International Airport premises. The Indian Airlines plane IC-814 was hijacked in December 1999. India has quite often reiterated that the ISI, Pakistan's intelligence outfit was allegedly behind the plot.

The previous hijacking in which Koirala himself was involved, was carried out after then Chief of RAW, Chief of India's external intelligence outfit assured Koirala that he would not be arrested, if the Prime Minister's revelation is to be trusted. Koirala's group that hijacked the 'Royal Nepal Airlines' aircraft on flight from Biratnagar to

Kathmandu, diverted the flight to Bihar's Forbesganj and decamped with Rs 40 lakhs.

The case that was filed in Araria district court in Bihar was lifted by the government of India after Koirala became the Prime Minister in 1991. It was yet another coincidence that Yusuf and two others, Abdul Latif and Dilip Kumar, both Indian nationals, were given life term by the CBI court in Delhi when Koirala is the PM in Nepal. Yusuf was nabbed in Kathmandu soon after the hijacking while his two accomplices were arrested in Bombay.

The IC 814 which had taken off from Kathmandu for Delhi on the Christmas Eve in 1999 was hijacked by a group of Pakistanis, and then diverted to Kandahar in Afghanistan after refueling in India. Then Foreign Affairs Minister of India, Jaswant Singh, had personally led the negotiation with militant groups, and agreed to free Pak 'terrorists' lodged in Indian jail as a barter for release of all the passengers and the crew in the aircraft. Rupen Katyal on his way back home after a honeymoon trip to Nepal with his wife had been shot dead by the hijackers in the aircraft.









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Point to Ponder

When men are most sure and arrogant, they are commonly most mistaken, giving views to passion without that proper deliberation which alone can secure them from the grossest absurdities.

- David Hume

Stalling election

It was not entirely unexpected. The police raided half a dozen 'office-cum-residence' and the suspected torture chamber of the Young Communist League in the capital recently. Maoist Chief Prachanda has accused Minister Sujata Koirala of having ordered the raids.

Many crucial political developments preceded the raids. YCL made an unsuccessful attempt on the life of senior Congress leader and former Minister Dilendra Prasad Badu in western Nepal. The Maoist party reactivated the people's revolutionary council, a parallel government, ostensibly to address people's problems at the local level during elections.

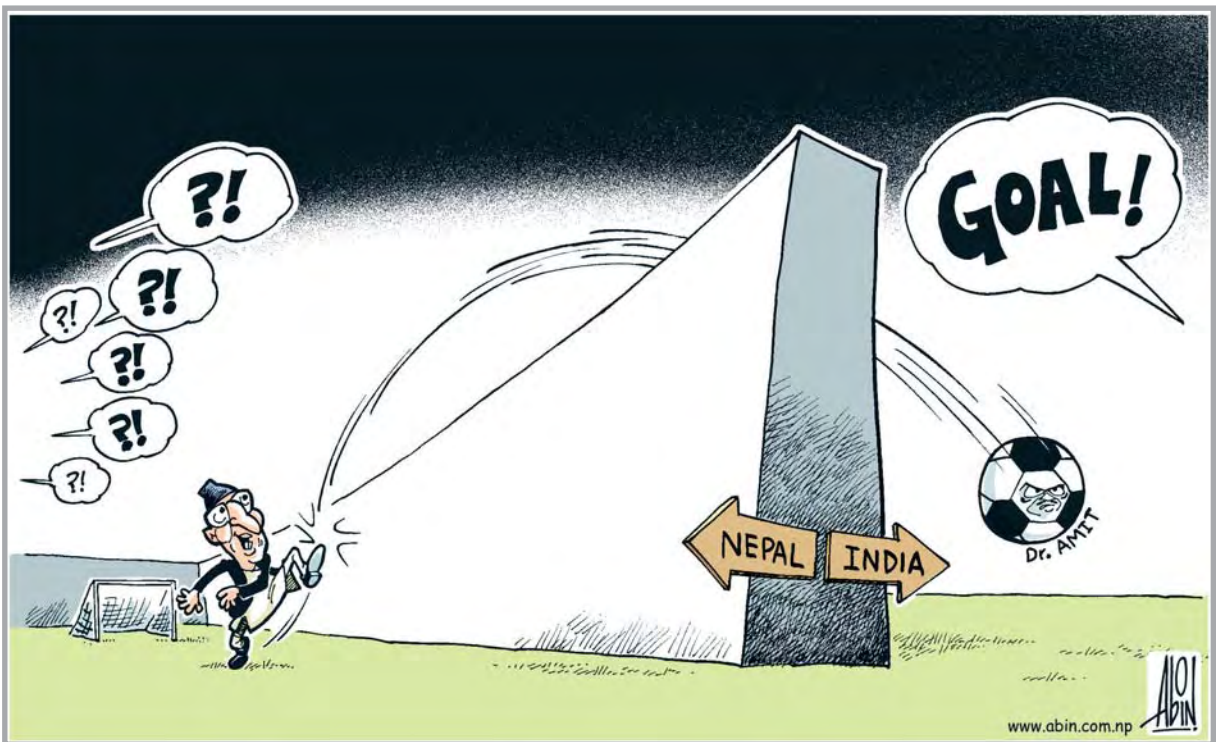
Despite several assurances and public pledge by Prachanda that YCL will be transformed into a civilised force, their brutality was always on the increase. Worse, a senior leader of the party went to the extent of describing the attack on Badu as a 'minor' jolt to the peace process.

The fact that UML leader Bamdev Gautam, who never tried to conceal his proximity with the Maoists, has started criticising the YCL while his party General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal went to the extent of praising the government for the raids, only proves that Maoists have crossed all the limit of political decency.

Most of the houses where police conducted raids, are forcibly captured and occupied by the YCL. Under both the comprehensive peace agreement and the 23-point agreement, the Maoists were obliged return those to the rightful owners.

Prachanda may have tactical reasons to defend Sitaula and to put the blame on Sujata for the raids. That only proves that Sitaula is hand-in-glove with the Maoists or the YCL in their activities which clearly violate the provisions of the CPA, the very basis of their entry into the peace process.

Maoists do not want to be seen as sabotaging the election this time as they did in November. But from the revival of PRC to the attack on Badu by YCL, Maoists have proved that they have not changed a bit. No election can take place, or should take place as long as Maoists continue to behave the way they have been behaving.



Letters

Sitaula's trick

Yet again, Home Minister Sitaula has come to Maoists' rescue after their atrocities in Darchula. This ill-planned idea to raid YCL headquarters has diverted the attention from Darchula. Now instead of an unconditional apology, Maoists are better positioned to criticise the government.

PB Rana
Kathmandu

Leaders, pay attention

I completely agree with your editorial on Jan 28. It is true that people want peaceful, secured, free, impartial and fair polls. But it does not appear that leaders are serious about it.

I would like to warn the political leaders to concentrate on what people want, rather than clinging to power and

post. The polls are being awaited keenly by the people of the country. So leaders, be serious!

Pooja Dahal
Tinkune, Kathmandu

Incompetent information sector

Most urban people all over the world are enjoying enormous facilities of information technology. Most government agency or

companies in this sector are trying their best to provide the latest and optimum technology for their people. However, the agency and the company in Nepal are still not aware with this fact. As the result, we the people of Nepal are facing inadequate information facility.

Even people in Kathmandu are waiting when the NTC will full filling its three year old promise to provide internet facility through GPRS for its mobile users. Similar companies in neighbouring countries like India, Bangladesh and etc., have been providing quality internet facility for unlimited users at very competitive rates.

Binod Timilsina
Kathmandu

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



Spiritual Corner

Complete attention

Jiddu Krishnamurti (May 12, 1895 – Feb 17, 1986) was a well-known writer and speaker on fundamental philosophical and spiritual subjects. His subject matter included but was not limited to: the purpose of meditation, human relationships, and how to enact positive changes in global society.

Krishnamurti constantly emphasised the right place of thought in daily life. But he also pointed out the dangers of thought as knowledge and mental images when it operates in relationships. Some excerpts:

"How is the mind which functions on knowledge – how is the brain which is recording all the time – to end, to see the importance of recording and not let it move in any other direction? Very simply: you insult me, you hurt me, by word, gesture, by an actual act; that leaves a mark on the brain which is

memory. That memory is knowledge, that knowledge is going to interfere in my meeting you next time – obviously. ... Knowledge is necessary to act in the sense of my going home from here to the place I live; I must have knowledge for this; I must have knowledge to speak English; I must have knowledge to write a letter and so on.

Knowledge as function, mechanical function, is necessary. Now if I use that knowledge in my relationship with you, another human being, I am bringing about a barrier, a division between you and me, namely the observer.

Jiddu Krishnamurti



That is, knowledge, in relationship, in human relationship, is destructive. That is knowledge which is the tradition, the memory, the image, which the mind has built about you, that knowledge is separative and therefore creates conflict in our relationship."

"The brain has been trained to record for in that recording there is safety, security, a sense of vitality; in that recording the mind

creates the image about oneself. And that image will constantly get hurt. Is it possible to live without a single image about yourself, or about your husband, wife, children, or about the politicians, the priests, or about the

ideal? It is possible, and if it is not found you will always be getting hurt, always living in a pattern in which there is no freedom. When you give complete attention there is no recording. It is only when there is inattention that you record. That is: you flatter me; I like it; the liking at that moment is inattention therefore recording takes place. But if when you flatter me I listen to it completely without any reaction, then there is no center which records."

"The brain is the source of thought. The brain is matter and thought is matter. Can the brain – with all its reactions and its immediate responses to every challenge and demand – can the brain be very still? It is not a question of ending thought, but of whether the brain can be completely still? This stillness is not physical death. See what happens when the brain is completely still."





# Identity crisis

With 103 ethnic groups and 93 languages, a republican Nepal does not exist.

Every morning I walk by a machine workshop spilling out on to the local pavement. This morning, as I walked by, the tired eyes of one of the mechanics caught my eye. Those eyes and face were very familiar. This was my father's favourite workshop and the mechanic I saw this morning started working there as a young boy over three decades ago. He's a good mechanic, usually full of humour, but this morning his eyes looked tired and listless.

Like so many of us perhaps; he is beginning to wonder who he is and if this land is his or just the personal property of the seven party alliance, the Maoists, and the Koirala coterie. Or perhaps it belongs to another set of people, another nation or organisation entirely, and all the anguish and despair we feel is providing a great deal of entertainment for some unseen devil with whom the SPAM (Seven Party Alliance and Maoists) have made a Faustian bargain - heedless as they always appear to be that: "Those who sup with the devil should have a long spoon."

Perhaps the angst is greatest among those of us who supported the changes of 1990. It seemed time then for Nepal to move on to a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy. Those who weren't around in 1990 might appreciate that, in fact, no matter the exaggerations of hindsight, it was not particularly violent. People were well

disciplined for the most part and relied on the power of the pen, silent protest, and peaceful dissent. The latter days were heady and rough, but the optimism of change wiped away any regrets, for a while.

In retrospect it seems that Pandora's Box was opened then. The way had been paved for certain individuals, with very little qualification and no real understanding of democratic norms, to govern and play havoc with the mandate they had been given. In parliament very little opposition took place by debate: it took the form of walking out when the house was in session, banging the speaker's rostrum, or hiring unemployed youths or perpetual students to burn tyres and create mayhem on the streets.

There have been glimmers of hope. The first year was by and large successful under the stewardship of K.P. Bhattarai and a constitution was drafted which was accepted, the best in the world we were told. The premiership of Man Mohan Adhikari was a particular favourite of mine because he had good ideas and he was, at the end of the day, leading the UML in the right direction.

Now we're told that the 1990 constitution is rubbish and that a monarch, who by and large didn't come on the scene as such until 2001 and the dreadful massacre, had been plotting against the people all along. Considering the airlines' scandal,

Enron, and a host of other scams, a critical number of our elected politicians were not only heir to, but also generators of; one wonders how they can be brass-faced enough to make such ridiculous statements.

Those who fail look for scapegoats for their failures and this time around it's the monarchy that has been chosen to be the whipping boy. Forget now the thousands killed by insurgents, property seized, and journalists 'executed'; forget the wholesale selling off of public property in the privatisation endeavours of a socialist democratic government; and please forget the payoffs for choosing one dam site over another, the Pajero gas guzzlers; and the laissez faire manner in which foreign NGOs have supped with their own devils, our politicians have decided in their wisdom who is to blame.

At this point I must insist that the search for personal blamelessness is a particular trait of those in power. It's not new to Nepal and it does exist elsewhere, only here it is nurtured by political sycophancy and cowardice. Where does that leave us, the people; not the imaginary people who agree with everything the dictatorship of SPAM decides, but we the real people who believed we had a country until SPAM sold it out for cheap power?

With 103 ethnic groups and 93 languages, a republican Nepal does

not exist. It is a lozenge of mainly mountainous land that completes the subcontinent of South Asia and forms a bridge between it and the South-eastern lands of China and Indo China. It didn't exist at the time of Buddha either and hence the mistaken assumption of the people to the south that the Lord of Peace was 'an Indian prince.'

Nepal owes its existence to the armies and people who came together in the late 1700s and formed a nation state. It was fortunate that the British invention of India followed it rather than preceded it and kept it out of the mischievous inclination of the Raj to divide and rule. An inclination, it seems, that has been inherited by the scions of Delhi's South Block.

Looking back, it seems that most people found this area, currently still called Nepal because even our politicians don't have enough whitewash to wipe it out completely, a place of refuge: the Sherpas for example came away from the stringencies of monastic rule in Tibet and, oddly, the customs and even the language of the Newars of Dolkha are very similar to those of the Lao and Khmer in Indo China.

Eventually the idea 'Nepal' was to give them all a focus and, certainly a couple of decades ago a sense of pride'. Unfortunately politicians do find the ethnic card easy to exploit, not just here: Rwanda is an obvious

country that comes to mind, and we need go no further into the burning and violence that takes place on the 'dark' continent almost without cease.

Now we are presented with a dictatorship. Whether it is the dictatorship of Koirala, the Maoists, or SPAM doesn't really matter, they have shoved their diktats down our throats and, hence, now we are a slave nation. We are slaves of the dictatorship and, with UNMIN playing the role it does, not to mention a number of embassies, we are the slaves of the western bourgeoisie who feel ever so guilty that they are not born poor, have enough petrol, and are earning enough money as individuals to put the whole of Salyan on its feet.

I am sure our neighbourhood mechanic doesn't see it exactly like this, but he is definitely a worried man. The petrol crisis alone may result in him losing his livelihood. Meanwhile our 'leaders', those who are leading or pulling us along this road to extinction, can content themselves that they can blame others, in fact they've got lots of people to choose to blame from a 300-year old cast; and they do! One day, however, our descendants will, in a more enlightened age than this, blame them and denigrate them for our loss of identity and for our enslavement to those who are unworthy to represent us, 'We the People'.

■ The wanderer

Nepal owes its existence to the armies and people who came together in the late 1700s and formed a nation state. It was fortunate that the British invention of India followed it rather than preceded it and kept it out of the mischievous inclination of the Raj to divide and rule.



Ellen Coon



*Development experts often agree that real change in Nepal starts at the local level. But how? Very often, change is driven by the persistent efforts of one or two courageous, stubborn individuals. Wondering what makes people become activists, and what sustains their efforts, Ellen Coon recently spent a morning talking with Krishna Bista, an elegant and weathered lady, and a grass roots activist in her sixties from Baitadi, in far-west Nepal. Her story is part of the larger story of Nepal that proves once again that truly, there is 'no ordinary person.' Excerpts from the interview Ellen took for newsfront:*

#### How did you come to live in Baitadi?

I was born in Darjeeling during the Second World War. My mother was a Rai from Burma who ran away from the war and took refuge in Darjeeling. My father was a Chhetri army officer whose job was to distribute rations in the refugee camps. I was seven when my father died. It was hard for my mother, but she made sure we were educated.

When I was sixteen, I was forced to marry a Major in the army who was 22 years older than I was, and who already had a wife and children as old as I was. My husband was terribly jealous and beat me regularly for no reason. He took me to Hong Kong to live for two or three years and then to Singapore for two years. I went first on a ship, and later I flew on a plane. In Singapore, I worked as an assistant at a primary school.

My husband was fighting for the Sultan of Brunei. After he retired, we moved to Dharan. By then, I had two small sons and a baby daughter. We were living on my husband's pension. Gradually, my husband's fits of rage became more and more terrible. I got this big scar you see on my forehead, when he beat me with a bamboo pole. I was still then a young woman, but I began to feel bitter. What had I done? Nothing. Didn't I deserve to live? My desire to leave my husband was strengthened by a book which said that children are damaged if there is endless fighting between their parents.

But when I asked my husband for my share so the children and I could live separately, he refused to give me a single paisa. There was nothing I could do. My brother was still young and my mother was weak, there was nobody to stand up for me. I thought about it. My husband had never mistreated our children, and I knew there were many servants to bring them up. But leaving them was the hardest thing I have ever done. I came here to Kathmandu, to my brother's rented room. My brother was angry and kept telling me to go back. But how could I? I had no money and nowhere to go.

I had read about SaiBaba and was determined that I would go to where he was. Selling the gold necklace I wore, I took a bus to South India. But I didn't like that place. People kept asking me pointed questions. So I went to Delhi with an Indian lady I met. In Delhi, I had no money and no place to stay. I went to our embassy there and asked for help, but they laughed at me.

So I began to work for a Punjabi family as a

servant. They were very kind to me. One day, the lady of the house said, "Krishna, you don't look like you come from a family of dishwashers. In our Mahabharat epic, when they were exiled, the Pandavas disguised themselves as servants, but still, they couldn't conceal their princely qualities. You, too, can't conceal who you truly are."

I wrote to my mother, begging to be allowed to come home and live with her. But she was afraid of how we would be treated by the society. "Don't come home," she wrote back. "If you find a nice man, just go ahead and marry him." That still hurts. My mother should have cared for me and fought for my rights. But she couldn't.

At that time, I met my second husband, who was from Baitadi. He was a simple person with an ordinary job in Delhi. By then, I was 27 years old. I married him, thinking it was better than being alone. He used to say that we should stay in India since I would suffer too much in the mountains of Baitadi. But I told him, "Your mother must be waiting for your return, and if I keep you here, I'll have her tears on my conscience." So we came back to Baitadi. And he was right. I suffered much worse.

#### What were conditions like in Baitadi when you got there?

The basic living conditions were very hard. We had to walk a great distance to get water, firewood was scarce, and there was gruelling work to do all the time. Food was poor – there weren't many vegetables besides onions. Things were terrible for women. There were almost no girls in schools. Even today, there are very few girls who have passed the SLC.

When I first went to Baitadi, brides were bought. My sister in law says, I was bought for 80 rupees. Mothers in law considered their daughters in law to be bought slaves, forgetting they too were paid for. Now women see it differently, realising that their fathers sold them like buffaloes. Girls were married very young. It was considered ideal to have them married before their first menstruation; and many died from giving birth too early, at the age of 13 or 14.

The practice of Chaupadi, strictly enforced, meant that women had to stay in the cowshed, in the cold, on straw fouled with dung, when they were menstruating or giving birth. This tradition continues. Women usually gave birth alone and cut the umbilical cord themselves with

**"Sometimes we need some**

# Krishna's cou



a sickle, and they didn't get much to eat. Many died. Even now new mothers in Baitadi aren't fed any meat.

#### How did you become an activist?

After I gave birth to my son, I was so hungry, I had to work. I walked to a school nearby and worked as a volunteer. I didn't know how to cut grass and carry heavy loads. Then the villagers started to criticise me. They said, she's not really educated but is just pretending. If she were educated, why would she ever have come to Baitadi? I then went to the education office and met Lokendra Bahadur Chand, who was the district representative. He heard the way I spoke Nepali, and maybe he saw that I was different from other people there. He said, "You go teach in the school nearest to your home, and I will send your appointment letter." That's how I became a teacher.

The school was two hours walk from my home. It really was hard. I used to wash my children's clothes during lunch break in a nearby stream and spread them out to dry. Sometimes cows ate the clothes while I was back inside teaching, and I would burst into tears. My in-laws still expected me to collect my share of firewood. I didn't know how, so I would buy some of my students a copy or a bar of soap in exchange for their help. Gradually, people started to trust me.

My students would come to school in winter wearing just a shirt with all the buttons gone. To try to keep their chests warm, I would have them put on their shirts backwards and then sew up the back with needle and thread. I had

to walk two days to the district office to collect my pay, and while I was there I would go to the health post and get simple medicines like Gentian Violet and Cetamol. When the villagers were sick I would treat them with the medicines.

At one point, an education officer, Sushil Pandey, urged me to participate in all local groups like girl scouts and the forest groups and he made me a member of the District Educational Board.

In the beginning I was shocked by how hard my life was. But then I thought about it. When I had to toil at all the hard work, I remembered that in Hong Kong and in Singapore, a Chinese woman had done all my household chores for just 40 local dollars per month. When I was living that luxurious life, I was suffering in a different way. So, there must be a reason why I was here. I had seen a more advanced society, and I could see what was making people suffer in Baitadi, all its weak points.

I became an activist automatically. I knew it was not right to sell one's daughter. I knew daughters should be educated. I knew sick people should go to the hospital. By saying these things, I could try to make things a little better.

#### What were some of the major turning points for you?

Attending the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women changed my life. There was a local NGO called Laliguraas which had established a library two hours walk from my home. Another



one to help us realise who we really are.”

# Courage and resilience

NGO called READ had provided them with books. I had joined in order to be able to borrow books. I went to look for a new book to read, and when I got there, they said, jokingly, “A letter has arrived, will you go to Beijing?”

I told them that I would go, and everybody laughed at me. They said, “You are already old, it’s time for you to die, and you say you’ll go?” But they didn’t find anyone else who was willing to go. I came to Kathmandu. Where we were staying there were 300 women from all 75 districts of Nepal. Everybody was different, and at night, we all started to sing and dance together.

There I met Anjana Shakya to whom I told my story. In those days, I always sat with my head bent down and my hands wrapped together, thinking I am such a bad person, I am a mother who left her children. But Anjana said, “You left the house of a rich man and went to Baitadi where there was nothing to eat, and you stuck it out. Before, you were recognised as the wife of a Major Colonel. But now, you have recognised as yourself – as Krishna. You have become Krishna Bista.” After that, I felt transformed. I felt so good! Sometimes we need someone to help us realise who we really are, isn’t that so?

I will never forget the women who had AIDS at the Beijing Conference. They were singing and dancing with so much joy. They were singing, “Are we the only ones who are going to die? Doesn’t anyone else die?”

## What did you do after that?

After returning from Beijing, I felt that I could tackle any sort of problem. Anjana kept inviting me to Kathmandu for different workshops. Each time I attend a workshop; I learn new things and am exposed to new ideas. Then I go back to my village and share it with the people and try to put it into practice.

One of the obstacles to education in my village is that schools are too far away for many children. There are landslides and rivers to cross, so parents don’t send their children until they are much older. Then the children feel inferior to the younger kids in their class who are lucky enough to live close to the school.

Anjana helped me raise funds to build two pre-primary schools. Global Fund for Women and DFID gave me funds to build more. We have over ten schools now. The idea behind it is that mothers can leave their kids at school when they are working. When children get into the habit of going to school very young, they don’t drop out later. It is working. Girls are going to school. We built the schools and the government is paying the teachers’ salaries.

Another hindrance to education has been water. Girl students were coming to school late because they had to walk far to fetch water. After they got home, they have to fetch water again so they get too tired to do their homework. So I submitted a proposal to the Australian Embassy and they paid for six drinking water taps. This has made a great difference. They are even growing fresh greens to eat now.

An NGO called TEWA gave me money to help poor women who were trying to educate their daughters. We bought 18 goats with the money and divided them between eight groups of women. The idea was that as the goats had

offspring, we would give one to each woman who was educating a daughter.

Through Anjana I have met many other people who have helped me. I met the Director of the Mountain Institute, Brian Peniston, who helped me submit a peace-building proposal to the Asia Foundation. We have gathered people from different villages to make a plan for sharing water, and for building a road without causing erosion. Now we are going to try to raise awareness to stop the practice of Chaupadi, with help from CORE, an NGO started by Frances Klatzel.

## What are some of the difficulties?

People here in Kathmandu haven’t seen how it is over there. I’ve to try to explain it. I don’t know the techniques for writing proposals. I just write what I know in Nepali. Raising funds is terribly hard. I feel like a beggar walking around holding out a begging bowl. Sometimes I think I can’t stand it anymore and I am just going to quit.

Then I realise I am the only one going back and forth between here and the village, so at least let me try to do one or two things. It takes me two full days to get here on the bus, 1500 rupees each way. When I get here, I move from house to house so I do not wear out my welcome anywhere, but it is so tiring!

Then when I get back to the village, everyone has their hand out, “Here is Krishna, what has she brought for us!” My desk is piled a foot high with requests for new schools. What can I do? At one of our peace-building gatherings I scolded people saying that this money is precious. The money that was donated by the Australians was collected from individuals and even small children who earned it by polishing shoes. So can’t we even share water with each other?

Not everything works. Only a few of the goats that TEWA provided are left because of the Maoist conflict. Some of the goats were eaten. Some killed by tigers. So many people have fled to India or to the Tarai, leaving

everything behind, because of the conflict.

## Does development mix with politics?

No! They are best kept separate. During the peak of the Maoist conflict, DFID informed me that they would provide funds for eight schools. I went directly to the area commander of the Maoists and informed him of my plans. I said “What should I do? If you are going to bother me then I’m not going to build these schools. I’m only going to build them if you give me permission.” He gave me permission, but not in writing.

The Maoists were constantly transferred from place to place. Once we started construction, the Maoist cadres started harassing us. They kept demanding to see all the documents but actually, they wanted some of the money. I told them, “If I were afraid of you, I would be building right next to the army, at the district headquarters, but the people right here need these schools.” Eventually they gave up.

The Panchayat times cannot be compared with today’s politics. Back then, it was “Aafno Manche.” But today, murder goes unpunished. If a member of a political party commits a crime then he will be saved from consequences by a minister of that same party. Our villagers are not much into politics. I would say that in previous elections, and now, votes can be bought in large blocks. We should not mix development with this.

## What are the gifts of age?

I may be old but my courage is not. I still have the desire to do something for my village. Look, because I’m old, I’m not afraid of men anymore. I can sleep on the bus; I can go anywhere I want. And because I’m retired, I can say whatever I want to, I’m not afraid of being fired. I’m the first and the only lady teacher from Baitadi living on a pension. Whatever happens is for the best, isn’t it? Every life contains suffering and happiness – for rich as well as the poor. After all I’ve gone through, I’ve finally found satisfaction. I have found myself. ■

One of the obstacles to education in my village is that schools are too far away for many children. There are landslides and rivers to cross, so parents don’t send their children until they are much older.





# The street or the parliament?



■ Chandrakishore Jha

Since January 2007, the political landscape of Terai had undergone a change. The Madhesi movement has altered not only the political equation in the Terai, but also brought a changed mindset within Terai as well as in the country as a whole. Many among the Madhesis (democratic forces as well as radical armed groups) still believe that in the post-Madhesis movement period, the state has not adequately responded to the grievances of the Madhesi people. Although there definitely is certain grain of truth in what they say, the contention is not entirely correct.

Needless to elaborate, but much of the present situation arose mainly due to unnecessary delay in talking to the Madhesis by the government, reportedly at the instance of the Maoists. But the lingering issue does not necessarily mean that nothing positive happened since January 2007. Some of the notable encouraging signals are: the in-principle acceptance for a federal structure, the government's acceptance for

representation proportionate to the population, increase in the number of constituencies in the Terai, decision to deploy Madhesis officers as CDOs, and most importantly, the issue is being addressed at the level of the Prime Minister. In addition to these political concessions, the problem in the Terai has attracted lots of national and international attention as never before.

Prior to the Madhesi movement, there has never been an instance where the head of the state (PM in this case) had addressed the nation on issues concerning a particular community. In fact, as of today, the Madhesis as a topic has been discussed so extensively within the country, the region and the world. From Madhes Ghoor (gossip around bonfire), Pahar Chautari (gossip under the tree), tea-shops, radio talks, news papers, magazines, TV Channels to national/international seminars and so on, the issue has been discussed and debated ceaselessly.

Never mind whether these interactions are for or against the Madhesis people. But the fact that it is being discussed itself is a positive sign. It is an acknowledgement that the problem does exist, and that a solution needs to be found. There-



Indian criminals Dhirendra Yadav and his gang nabbed by Nepal police.

fore, the agitating parties must not take a rigid posturing that nothing has happened in their favour during the last one year. Instead they must try and find ways and means of carrying these debates through so that it leads to a meaningful conclusion. They must decide whether the fight must continue from the street, or take it to the parliament by participating in the CA election. The faster they do this, the better would it be for the country and the Madhesi people.

The Madhesi political parties must not forget to keep abreast with the fast changing political scenario. They

must take into account that, in the first week of January, election seemed impossible. But by the first week of February, election appears very much a possibility. Those elected would be legitimately recognised as representatives of the people, and hence all decision they take would be considered valid. Are the Madhesi politicians prepared to really miss out the election bus, and continue fighting from the streets?

The general perception among Madhesis is that the problem of this community is not getting the right kind of attention from national and

international media, which again is not entirely correct. However, even with the presumption that such is the case, it would not be the case anymore when Madhesi representatives speak from the floor of the parliament. They would not only be heard, but would be reported, debated and analysed. And most importantly, such speeches would be would remain as valuable documents of history on Madhesis' fight for their rights. The parliament therefore, would always be a better bet than the streets for the Madhesis.

Despite the ugly incidents of Janakpur and Birgunj Seven Party Alliance meetings, the Nepali Congress's effort to create an election atmosphere in the Terai needs to be complimented. Sher Bahadur Deuba did not get deterred by bomb blasts becoming the feature of every meeting he attended. This too deserves greater appreciation. However, his utterances in the meeting were flawed by an ill-timed statement: "All the demands of the Madhesis have been met." A passionate appeal to the Madhesi people from Deuba, would perhaps have had a better effect and impact not only for his party, but for those who believe in election as the cornerstone of democracy. (Chandrakishore\_jha@yahoo.com)

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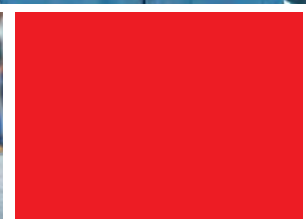
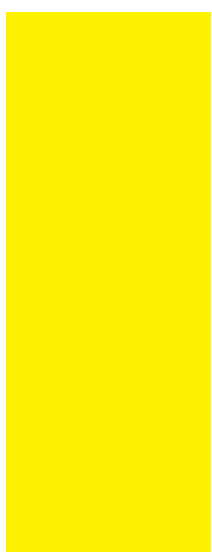
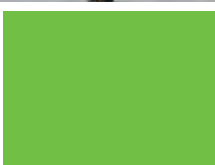
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# Burma polls in 2010

Burma said on Saturday it will hold a national election in two years. Critics said it was a public relations move, and noted that no mention was made of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

"We have achieved success in economic,

social and other sectors and in restoring peace and stability," said a junta announcement read on state TV. "Therefore multi-party, democratic elections will be held in 2010."

"The time has now come to change from military rule to democratic civilian rule." The statement was read in the name of so-called "Secretary Number One" of the ruling junta, Lt-Gen Tin Aung Myint Oo. Critics immediately jumped on the statement.

The military dictators are simply trying to deflect the criticism of last year's murderous crackdown on democratic protesters, said Burma Campaign UK, a pro-democracy group. "It has nothing to do with democracy."

There was no mention of Mrs Suu



picked most delegates and Suu Kyi could not attend.

Mrs Suu Kyi's party reacted cautiously, noting the lack of detail on how the referendum would be carried out.

"The announcement is vague, incomplete and strange," said

spokesman Nyan Win.

"Even before knowing the results of the referendum, the government has already announced that elections will be held in 2010," he noted. This means the generals already know the result of the referendum.

Britain, one of the military's regime's harshest critics, noted that Suu Kyi and other independent political leaders had not been consulted about the constitution or the election process.

"A genuine and inclusive process of national reconciliation" is necessary for (Burma's) transition to democracy, Britain's Foreign Office said, calling for the release of Suu Kyi and other political prisoners.

(Bangkok Post)

Kyi, or of her National League for Democracy, which won the last "election" in 1990.

The Burmese constitution, being written in a 14-year exercise by a military-supervised national congress, specifically bars Mrs Suu Kyi from running in any election because she was married to a foreigner. Her husband, British academic Michael Aris, died in 1999, but that does not matter.

The 2010 election is to be preceded, in May of this year, by a national referendum to rubber-stamp the regime's constitution. This is what the generals call their "road map to democracy." Critics have denounced the constitutional convention process as a farce because the military hand-

## Pakistan

Asif Ali Zardari, husband of slain opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, addresses an election rally in Thatta February 9, 2008.



## A new deal?

The indications that the government has opted for another peace agreement with militants are disturbing – particularly given the failure of two previous attempts to strike a deal with Baitullah Mehsud and his forces in South Waziristan. The unexpected unilateral ceasefire declared by Mehsud, followed within hours by the announcement of a 'grand jirga' which the interior minister says the government has decided to convene, seem to be too much of a coincidence to be entirely unrelated to each other. It is quite extraordinary that the authorities

should see it fit to enter into any accord with militants headed by a man who they themselves say is behind the death of a major national leader, and of many others. Baitullah Mehsud is the amir of the Taliban in Pakistan, and an instrumental figure behind the setting up in December of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TIP), a group that aims to unite various militant units operating in Pakistan. Since the end of last year, the government has consistently stated he is the man behind the murder of Benazir Bhutto and the staging of many of the recent suicide attacks that have ripped through Pakistan. The fact that it is now attempting

what seems like yet another deal with a man who not only has a long criminal past but, quite evidently, suffers from some level of derangement. After all, no sane person could kill so many people, almost all of them fellow Muslims, and yet maintain that such policies are just.

Whereas the government has held that it is in a position of strength, has "cornered" militant forces and is now confident it can use a 'jirga' comprising tribal leaders and political representatives to bring peace, these claims cannot be accepted at face value. The fact is that in the past too authorities have stated deals entered into with militants would bring calm. This has not happened, with the lulls in fighting apparently providing an opportunity for the militants to re-group and develop new strategies for operations against state forces. There has also been little display of trustworthiness, with militants apparently showing no hesitation in violating the terms of peace accords. Perhaps for men so strong in their conviction of the justice of their cause – to enforce their distorted brand of Islam in the country – promises made to those whom they regard as their enemy mean little.

(The news)

## Obituary



## Baba Amte, a fearless Gandhian

Social activist and Gandhian Baba Amte, whose chance encounter with a finger-less leprosy patient dying in the rain changed his life forever, died at his ashram in Maharashtra early on Saturday.

He was 93 and had been suffering from blood cancer.

The man, whom the Father of the Nation had called *abhay sadhak* (fearless), passed away at 4.15 in the morning, leaving behind his two sons and thousands of leprosy-afflicted people who revered him as a saint.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who described Baba Amte as a "legend" and a "true Gandhian", cut short a trip to Pune as a mark of respect and returned to Delhi.

The Maharashtra government has "decided to give Baba Amte a state funeral" tomorrow, minister Anees Ahmed told PTI.

Ahmed, who looks after Chandrapur district where the Magsaysay award winner's ashram Anandwan is situated, said the social activist would be laid to rest, not cremated, as he had wished.

Born on December 26, 1914, in Maharashtra's Wardha district, Baba Amte, whose real name was Murlidhar Devidas, trained as a lawyer and took part in the freedom struggle.

"I have never been frightened of anything. Because I fought British Tommies to save the honour of an Indian lady, Gandhiji called me '*abhay sadhak*', a fearless seeker of truth.... But the same person...

quivered in fright when he saw the living corpse of Tulshiram, no fingers, no clothes, with maggots all over," Baba Amte had said, recalling his encounter with the dying man.

Terrified, the young Devidas had run away, but forced himself to return and feed the man. He also put up a bamboo shed to protect him from the rain. Tulshiram died under his care and the incident changed the young man's life.

In 1949, Baba Amte went to the Calcutta School of Tropical Medicine to learn more about leprosy. Armed with a wonder drug, he started Anandwan, which soon became the centre of his crusade — helping leprosy patients become self-confident and "productive".

He also once allowed bacilli from a leprosy patient to be injected into him for tests.

In 1983, he was awarded the Damien-Dutton award, considered the highest in the field of leprosy.

He also spoke out against caste and religious violence and, in December 1985, went on a Bharat Jodo (unite India) march from Kanyakumari to Jammu.

Asked whether he saw himself as a messiah or a social worker, Baba Amte had said he couldn't carry the "heavy load of that cross" carried by Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Father Damien, a 19th-century Belgian priest who worked among leprosy patients and died of the disease. "But can't I walk in the shadow, in the purview of that cross?"

(News & Analysis)



MARSHLAND FLOWERS

The capacity of the Buddhas is unlimited.  
**Endless recollections**

■ Acharya Mahayogi Sridhar Rana Rinpoche



...v) Pratyeka buddhas are more advanced than the Sravakas. They appear only when the teaching of the Buddha has been completely

lost. But they are below the levels of a Samyak Sambuddha (the fully enlightened Buddha). As Sakyamuni's dispensation still exists strongly, there are no Pratyekabuddhas. vi) The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

ago – one asankhya kalpa has 60 zeroes), he was already a powerful Rishi called Bhikchhu Sumedha who had all the siddhis – riddhis already. These siddhis – riddhis became refined through the kalpas of practice. So how can we now expect ordinary yogis to have the same power as the Buddha. Not even the Devas in any realm of existence can come anywhere near the Buddha.

There are special exercises in various texts to develop the power of purvanivas anusmriti, if the yogi is a fit vessel. It must be said that some of the Abhigyas can be achieved through drugs (ausadhi) and mantras too but the strength of such remembrance and the distance in past time will be far below those who have attained it through samadhis and also they will be less permanent in the case of drugs.

This is the proof of rebirth within Buddhism. The Buddha's past life has given by the Buddha himself is recorded in the Jatakas. The stories of the Jatakas seem to have influenced the making of similar genre of literature in almost all religious systems of the Indian subcontinents and further on. (To be continued)

(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)

The capacity to see far becomes more as we climb up from the Tirthikas to the Buddha. The Hindu and Jain yogis may be able to remember thousands of Kalpas but they have their limits as the mind is not completely free from emotional defilements. The Sravakas may be able to remember up to 80 thousand Kalpas, Agrasravakas etc. even more than that and even more for the Bodhisattvas but there are no limit to the capacity of the Buddhas.

We must remember that when the Buddha began his long journey to become a Buddha (three to four asankhya kalpas

Financial facet is not the only limiting factor  
**For full immunisation coverage**

■ Michael Huether

From mid-January on, the health services in health posts and sub-health posts will be free of cost. The intention of this policy probably is to enable the people to engage in health services more easily than before. But the financial facet is not the only limiting factor, which controls the access to health services in Nepal, there are more, as the example of immunisation shows.

Immunisation, which is the most cost-effective way of reducing child mortality in developing countries, is one way to reduce the under-five mortality rate by two third until 2015 and to meet the Millennium Development Goals. In general, immunisation is considered as a task for the government, therefore it should be free of cost. In fact the provision of the basic vaccines for childhood diseases in Nepal is free of cost in the Childhood Immunisation Programme.

Despite this, there are groups in Nepal, which are not likely to receive full childhood



immunisation - especially children from low income households, orphans, children with uneducated parents as well as children from ethnical minorities and children living in remote areas, mainly in the western region. Socio-cultural and socio-economic background, place of residence and parental education are not the only determinants of low immunisation prevalence; gender too matters.

Immunisation as a task for a government is driven by policies and rules made by various interest groups who are influenced by the political, economic, social and cultural determinants of the particular country. Not only do the national policy making determines the provision of basic vaccines for childhood diseases; but the global

policy environment as well as contact with international agencies, like UNICEF, WHO and GAVI, also affects the efforts. Therefore it is very important to boost the communication between the international agencies as well as the local NGOs.

On the other hand it is up to the authorities in Nepal to focus on ethnic minorities, on girls, on the western part of Nepal, on parental education and on access to services in order to enable everybody to engage in health services. All the determinants which influence the coverage are also true for the access to health services in Nepal, especially for essential health care services which are provided at district hospitals, health posts and sub health posts. ■

देशको तात्कालीन कार्यदिशाका बारेमा तपाईं के सोच्दै हुनुहुन्छ ?

शुभशंकर कँडेलको साथमा विशिष्ट व्यक्तित्वको दृष्टिकोण कार्यक्रम

**OUTLOOK**

हरेक शनिवार साँझ ८:१५ बजे

...मात्र सगरमाथा टेलिभिजनमा

अनि राजनेताहरू के सोच्दै होलान् ?

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**सगरमाथा**

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सूचना र मनोरंजनका लागि

**फरक विश्व**

... मात्र सगरमाथा टेलिभिजनमा

हरेक शनिवार राति १०:३० बजे  
दुधवार विहान ८:३० बजे  
बिहीवार दिउँसा २:३० बजे  
र शनिवार साँझ ६:३० बजे

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समाचारको शिखर नेपालको गौरव



## FIREFRONT

# Books and nostalgia

**“Does the huge bell still ring to wake people out of their dreams?”**

■ Yuyutsu RD Sharma



The World Book Fair at New Delhi opened with ominous speeches from dignitaries and

writers. Most of the speakers including Professor Vipin Chandra unleashed their fears of communal strife taking hold of the country, and books as the only weapon left to save the state from the situation. Soon after, an overcast sky over Pragati Maidan where the fair was held succeeded in keeping the book lovers away from the world's largest book bustle.

Russia remained the guest of honor this year and the over 23 countries are participating in the fair. There was also an international rights exhibition featuring works on and by Mahatma Gandhi, in the 60th year of his martyrdom. Titled “In Words and In Deeds,” the exhibition displayed 1,000 titles in Indian languages. There were also some published in French, German, Finnish, Spanish and Brazilian.

But as the week moved on, one saw a strange indifference coming from the general public. Was it from the onslaught of electronic media or simply the transition that the subcontinent seems to be passing through?

As a regular visitor over the last two decades, I noticed a change in the behavior of audiences that flocked in great numbers to the fair. Have the organisers not really sensed the mood of the public or have books become obsolete? The school exams in India and Nepal are forthcoming, that could be another reason of not

many families coming to the fair grounds. There is so much in the Internet and other new mediums of cyber space keeping the needs of average readers fulfilled.

Although in the West it has not been the case. The book industry seems to be growing and during Christmas time you see people lining up before bookshops the same way we here line up at petrol stations.

At the White Lotus book shop stall, I saw a change in people's interest in searching books from Nepal. Over the past decades, Nepal has remained a great mystery kingdom, a hidden Hindu Shangri-la for the Indian readers.

But this time most of the inquiries were centered on the political turbulence of the nation in transition. There is still nostalgia in the minds of some Indian and foreign readers and they refuse to see the new avatar of a nation trying to come in grips of its destiny. The books on the Maoist insurgency also were not in great demand.

Opposite my stall, an American couple from Urantia Book Fellowship and Uversa Press, Colorado kept asking me questions about the Nepal that was. They asked me about Nepali streets and Chai shops? They had come to Nepal in the sixties and enjoyed the silence of the Himalayan capital? “Do you still have ‘Chai and Pie Shop’ in Freak Street? Does the huge bell still ring to wake people out of their dreams?”

I kept smiling sadly, hearing in my mind the sirens of the emergency vans hooting through smoke blinded streets of the Himalayan capital.

(writer@yuyutsu.de)

## DIASPORA

# All eyes on Hillary

**Immigration reform is a major issue for the Nepali immigrants in the US.**

■ Bhumika Ghimire in USA

The Democrats will decide who will be their candidate for November presidential elections during their national convention (August 25-28, Denver, Colorado). Hillary Clinton, who until recently was thought to be the front runner and ‘most likely’ to get the nomination is now forced to re-think her campaign after fast gains made by Barack Obama.

On Thursday, CNN reported that in late January Clinton campaign faced cash crunch and the candidate lent \$5 million to her campaign and that some senior members of her campaign staff have agreed to work without pay for a month. Added to the finance issue is her not so great performance at the Super Tuesday primaries. She won in eight states versus Obama's 11 and she is also closely followed by Obama on delegate count. According to The New York Times (Feb 9, 2008), Clinton has 912 delegates and Obama has 741 with primaries in more than 23 still to go.

Now Hillary is trying to add some momentum into her campaign by appealing to those who have stayed loyal to her despite the troubles- the immigrants. Clinton is actively courting the large Hispanic-Latino voting block. During the primaries in California, according to various reports, it is their votes that made all the difference for Hillary and she won the state.

Her campaign is also looking at Indian Americans for support. Right before the February 5<sup>th</sup> Super Tuesday primary elections, Clinton

wrote an op-ed for India Abroad titled “US-Indian Relations: A New Era” and pledged to work for better US-India ties-in an effort to woo the large number Indian American voters in key states like New York, California and New Jersey.

Compared to Indian Americans, Hispanics and Latinos, Nepalis are a small minority group and no major candidate including Clinton is actively courting them. Still they are keenly observing the candidates and looking into the issues.

In Hillary's home state of New York, there is support for her among the Nepali community. Immigration reform is a major issue for them. A majority of those I talked to are looking at Hillary with hopes that she will fix the system and make things easier for immigrants who are already here and those who want to come here.

Mohan Gyawali, President of Ridgewood Nepalese Society says that he supports Senator Clinton because of her immigration policy. He also said that her staff has always been open to local immigrant community and listened to their concerns. He hopes the Senator's experience of working through Washington would help her get something done about the immigration mess in the country.

New York Nepali Times has officially endorsed Senator Clinton. Bed Kharel editor of Nepalnewsusa.com said that his organization has no plans of endorsing any candidate but on a personal level he is behind Hillary. The reason: like Mr. Gyawali Mr. Kharel also supports Sen. Clinton's immigration policy and hopes that

she will continue President Bill Clinton's policy on international relations.

Luna Ranjit, a Nepali immigrant rights activist in New York holds quite different view-in her opinion none of the candidates including Hillary are committed to what immigrant rights advocates are championing.

On Clinton's approach to immigration, her campaign website says, “Hillary has consistently called for comprehensive immigration reform that respects our immigrant heritage and honors the rule of law. She believes comprehensive reform must have as essential ingredients a strengthening of our borders, greater cross-cooperation with our neighbors, strict but fair enforcement of our laws, federal assistance to our state and local governments, strict penalties for those who exploit undocumented workers, and a path to earned legal status for those who are here, working hard, paying taxes, respecting the law, and willing to meet a high bar.”

Even though her stance on immigration is attracting support from various immigrants groups including Nepalis, whether she can actually deliver on those promises is debatable. Conservatives have long rallied against the “comprehensive immigration reform” Hillary and other democrats support. They see it as a sell-out and have mounted strong opposition. President Bush tried to pass an immigration reform bill last year but had to withdraw because of pressure from conservatives.

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# Rice stalk artistry in Terai

Sanjib Chaudhary



## The Tharus believe that jhutti rice is a cure for nausea.

The month of November bears a special significance for Terai dwellers in Nepal. Usually regarded as the month of harvest, it brings with it loads of joy to all. The fields, villages and streets are all filled with the aroma of freshly cut paddy. The granaries are usually full with newly harvested rice and the aroma of new rice wafts from every kitchen in the villages.

The children await the harvest with much eagerness. After school hours or taking turns to herd the cattle and goats, they glean rice from the fields. Scouring the fields they search the rice stalks missed by the reapers. The collected rice is bartered with petty sellers offering local delicacies. The rice is often sold in shops and the money saved to spend in the village fetes and markets.

Meanwhile the farmers prepare jhuttis – artistic form of rice stalk sheaf weaving. Especially, the Tharus prepare jhuttis for each variety of rice they harvest. The jhuttis are hung high on the meh (the bamboo pole to which the oxen are tethered while threshing rice). Even the meh is erected performing traditional religious rites.

Jhuttis are of different shapes and sizes. They are inspired by the nature and things around like, kauwa tholi – the crow's beak, patiya – the

mat, kakahi – the comb, jhunjhuna – the baby's toy, bena – the fan, bakhari – the granary, maur – the turban a bridegroom wears in Terai.

The belief is that, after the rice is harvested, there remains nothing for the birds to peck on. Hence, the tradition started, of keeping a jhutti of each species of rice harvested. The jhuttis thus hung, provide food for the birds. It shows love for nature and conservation among the Tharus.

“Our ancestors loved and worshipped the nature,” says Chandra Kishore Kalyan, President of Tharu Welfare Society, Siraha. “They weaved jhuttis so that the birds didn't die of hunger after the harvest.”

The Tharus believe that jhutti rice is a cure for nausea. Nathar Tharu of Sishwani village has a collection of 20-25 years old rice. He provides the rice for free to the people suffering from nausea.

The month of November is special to Tharu women. It is the time to show their creativity. They weave the jhuttis in their leisure time and the young girls learn the trick while herding the goats and cattle. Playing with the rice sheaf they come up with the beautiful shapes and sizes, as shown in the photographs. ■

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