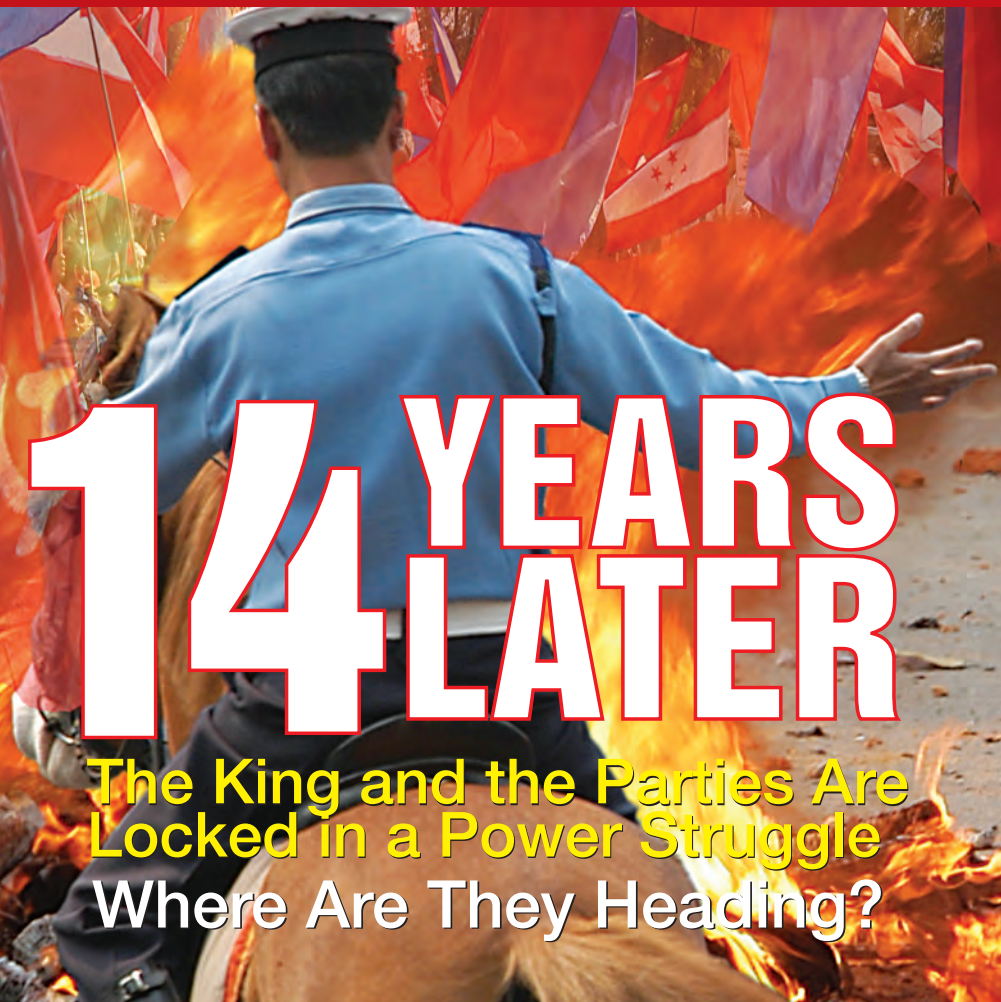


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14 YEARS LATER

The King and the Parties Are
Locked in a Power Struggle
Where Are They Heading?



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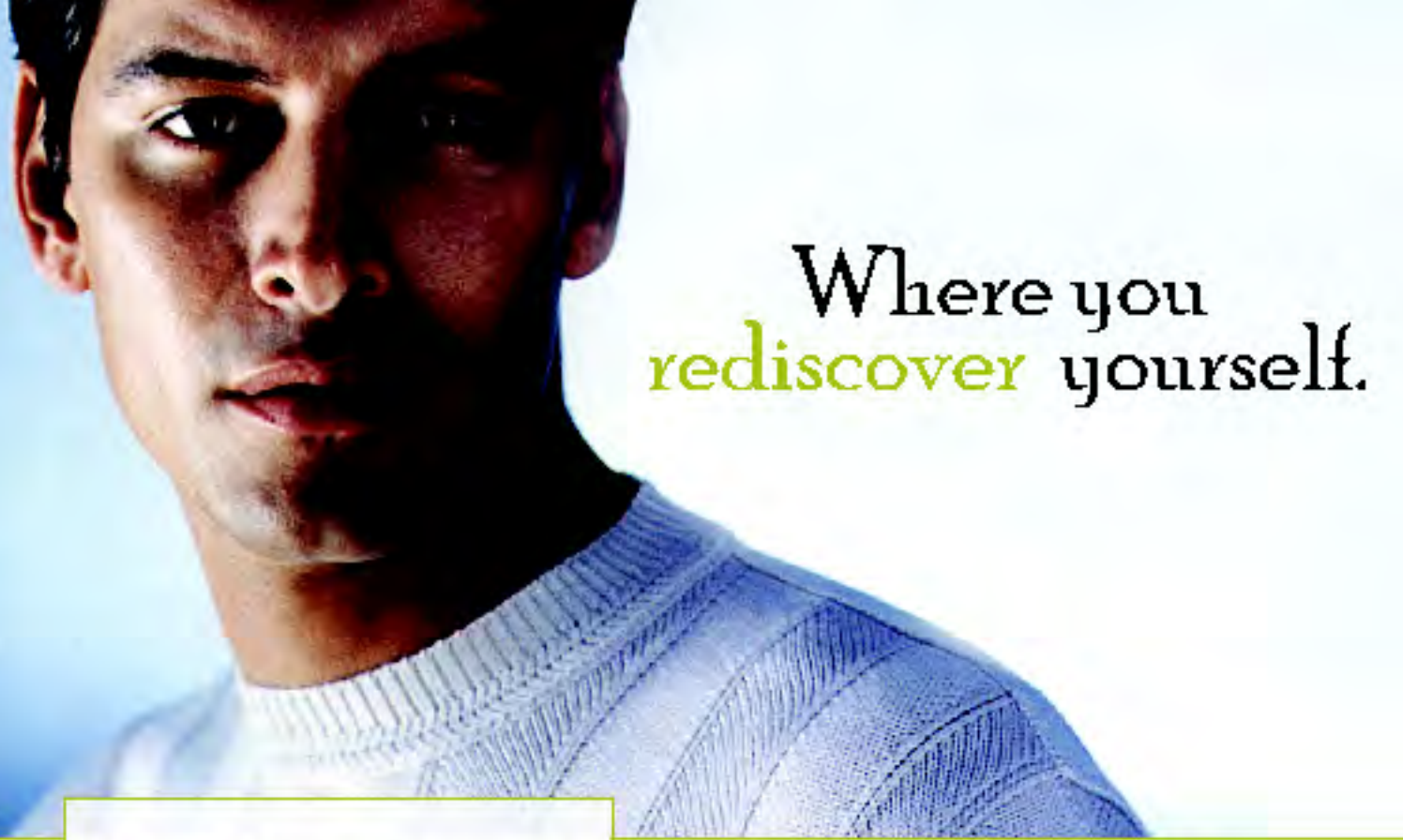


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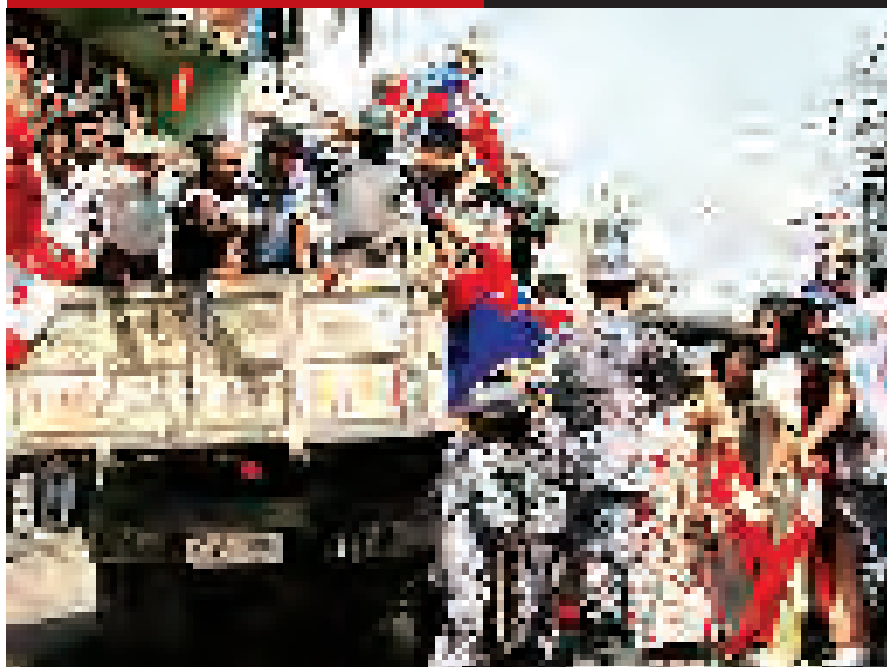
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WITH MALICE TOWARDS NONE AND CHARITY TOWARDS ALL...

After five months of planning, we are finally hitting the stands, with a certain degree of apprehension about our market prospects but a great deal of excitement about how we are going to approach our news coverage.

Perhaps the question we have been asked most is: is it the right time to start a new venture, and a newsmagazine at that? We really don't know. We have got into the business with the spirit of a venture capitalist. We are starting out with a five-member editorial team but have set high standards for ourselves. We are a small newsmagazine with an overwhelming purpose: to help our readers make sense of these extremely confusing times. We will try our best and let you decide whether our efforts have been good enough.

Nepal's media market has become very crowded in recent times. We are encouraged by the fact that scores of young people have made journalism their full time career ever since Shyam Goenka started Kantipur Publications in 1992, when just about everybody dismissed his efforts to start a private media house as a bad business move. Kantipur defied all naysayers and went on to write its own history—perhaps the greatest success story of post-1990 Corporate Nepal. In doing so it unknowingly served one huge purpose that Mr. Goenka may never have thought of: it pushed press freedom to a new height and secured the rights for generations of journalists to come. And that has only come about the hard way. To be sure, Article 13 of the 1990 Constitution guarantees press freedom, but that doesn't mean a thing unless it is established through rigorous exercise. The Constitution has guaranteed a lot more, but you only have to look at the mess around you to appreciate the remarkable development of Nepal's media.

No matter what, we are firmly convinced that press freedom is here to stay. And in similar vein to the spirit that defined the early years of Kantipur, we would like to think that good journalism is also good business. As for the crowded media market, we say: Let a thousand flowers bloom.



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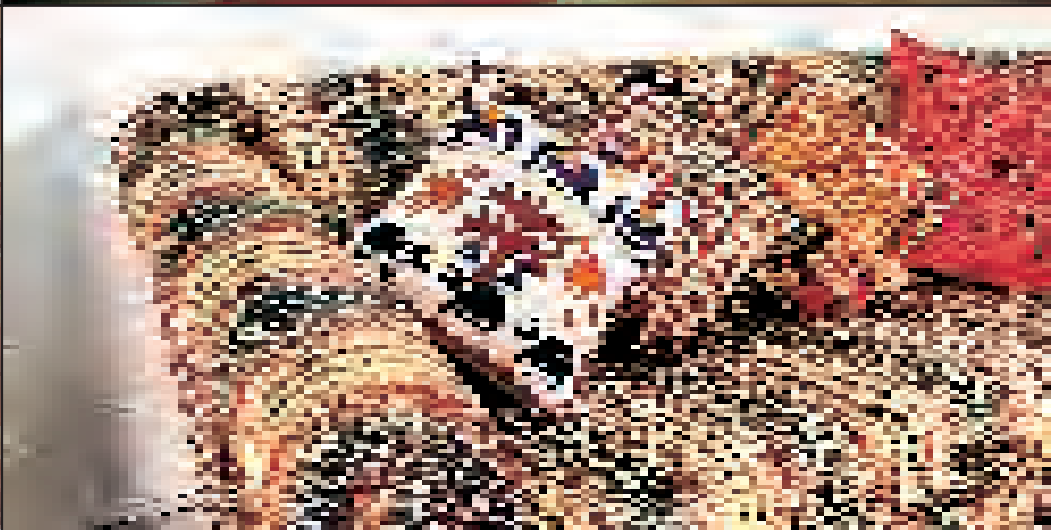
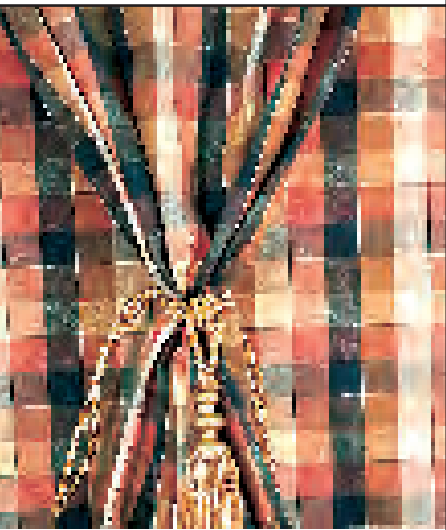
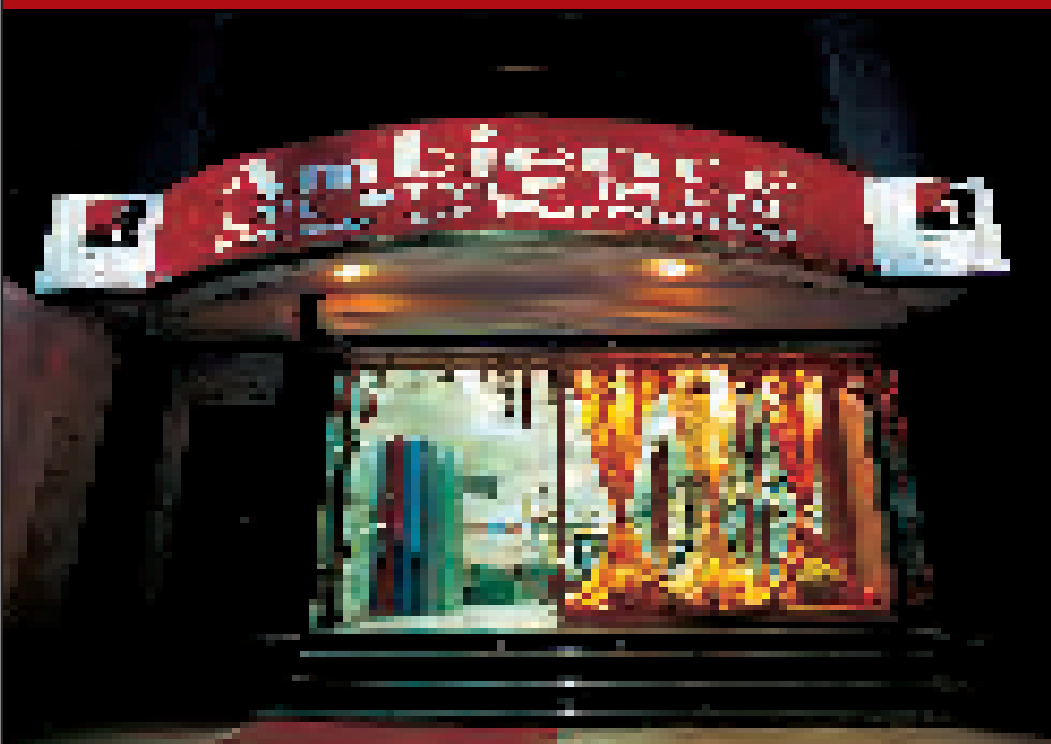
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Rebels With a Cause

What are the legitimate forms of protest in a democracy? At present this is a valid question in Nepal. The Nepali people have become familiar with techniques of public protest that

many different factions have exercised in the last 14 years. So as the students proceed in typical fashion, the public is not shocked, although they may be slightly inconvenienced. Of these different forms of protest, the one that has fascinated me of late is the vandalism that the students are engaging in as an extreme—as well as extremely efficient—tactic.

One may wonder, as I have, whose attention they are vying for. How does destroying public property further their cause? And on a more abstract level, what does this all symbolize? I am surprised to find that students don't expect to gain the current government's attention with these displays. I had it explained to me in cynical fashion by a student leader that the current government's actions are so shameless that such forms of protest don't even faze them, much less move them toward restoring democracy.

The government does not listen even if thousands come into the street; they certainly won't listen to the smashing of bricks and glass, or smell the burning of tires and effigies. But the people hear it, smell it, and reroute themselves to avoid airborne bricks and raised lathis.

What does the public think of such exhibitions of force? Well, for every vehicle destroyed, a new one must replace it, and during the replacement process, the politicians have a new opportunity to swindle the public through their corrupting, non-transparent practices. It also reemphasizes that security is a faint memory with a dubious future, both inside and outside the Valley.

The students understand this fact and they realize that they lose legitimacy in the eyes of the people by carrying on as hoodlums, yet they continue. As a student leader admitted this to me, he swiftly countered his own analysis by claiming that the students' acts are not unsolicited—the police brutality began the cycle of destruction. This state violence laid fertile ground for the environment of student vandalism. From this perspective, vandalism can be contextualized within an all too common trend in Nepal: at each display of power, the other side ups the ante.

I have also heard the justification that if the current government does not follow the law, then why should the students? They should not be held accountable to a legal system that was rendered futile by a series of unconstitutional acts. So if Nepal falls into a state of complete anar-

chy, I would like to make the claim that the root cause can at least be dated to October 4, 2002.

Acts such as vandalism cannot be analyzed within a moral sensibility.

It is neither right nor wrong but a reaction that tangibly signifies the systematic flaws of society. In Nepal, vandalism is physical evidence of what the current government ignores: the stalemated political situation and lack of justice. And it shows that people are not currently invested in the state, or at least not in state property. These sorts of self-destructive protests happen all over the world.

Thinking about this within my own national context, I am reminded of the littering and high crime rates in low-income neighborhoods in cities like New York. Many people have not been given reason to trust the state; they are jaded by a history in which their voices were suppressed. So rather than participate in a legitimate democratic process that was set up for them to air their frustrations, these frustrations manifest in counterproductive ways that reduce the quality of life in their community.

Currently in Nepal people don't even have a democratic system in which to dispute the political situation legitimately, so vandalism comes as no surprise.

At least here, it is not directed at the private citizens but rather targets the source of the frustration: the state. These state vehicles represent a history

of corruption, first by the Panchas, then by the political parties, and now, again, by the Pancha leaders.

The students are the new generation and their acts of semantic and physical destruction are more than just a testament to their rage—they are opening up a new space in which they can publicly criticize the current government, which may lead to change. Perhaps the destruction of a faulty government's vehicles today will be the destruction of those faults tomorrow. And those who are responsible for destruction today may be responsible for creation tomorrow. Unfortunately, there is no one who has enough legitimacy in Nepal to manufacture any consent in favour of or against the students, so the non-political public will continue to be passively cynical until something much larger than vandalism happens.

(Snellinger, a Ph.D. student from Cornell University, specializes in Nepali student politics.) **N**



Picture of the Week



BETWEEN ROCKS AND A HARD PLACE: Trucks ferrying rounded up protestors are routinely targeted



The ruby-bearing occurrences may be found in the northern Dhading District of central Nepal. The Chumar and Ruyil deposits are the two largest deposits and the ends of a geologic chain that includes more than a dozen smaller deposits.

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Protest politics

It has been over two weeks since the revamped and increasingly violent new round of the five-party protests started—supported by unions representing everyone from journalists, human rights activists, teachers and even the RPP and Maoist supremo Prachanda. The NC (Democratic) led by Sher Bahadur Deuba is the latest addition to the ongoing stir although the Nepali Congress does not want the splinter party to join them on the streets. Meanwhile, the Home Ministry has declared key areas off-limits to public gathering. Even King Gyanendra's return from Pokhara and his New Year's Day request to parties to commit themselves to elections haven't changed things.

Baidhya's Indian links

Mohan Baidhya, the Maoist leader arrested in India on March 29, says that the Maoists have a working relationship with the Kamatapur Liberation Organization, a rebel outfit active in Assam and West Bengal. The KLO is fighting to carve out a separate Kamtapur State comprising six districts in West Bengal and four districts in Assam. Baidhya, reportedly the second in command after Prachanda in the Maoists ranks, was arrested in Siliguri. He will be pro-

duced before the court on April 22.

Nepal on top

Nepali youngsters successfully defended their title at the recently concluded 2nd AFC Under-14 Football Festival held at Dashrath Rangashala. With a total of 183.86 points Nepal remained a comfortable 51.42 points ahead of their closest rival, India, at the tournament's end. In their last match Nepal held India to a 1-1 draw. The football festival featured six nations: Nepal, India, Pakistan, Bhutan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.



VAT lottery

To encourage consumers to demand VAT bills and businesses to register with the VAT office, the government has decided to extend their VAT lottery scheme across the country. The earlier scheme, run within the Kathmandu Valley, has been in place since January. Customers can now win up to Rs. 100,000 by submitting their VAT bills. Winners

will be picked in a lucky draw every month. There are 10 VAT collection booths in Kathmandu and others will soon be set up in Birgunj, Biratnagar and Pokhara. VAT revenue currently makes up 2.9 percent of the country's GDP.

Mission Nepal Telecom

The state owned Nepal Telecommunication Corporation has opened itself to private investments and turned into a company. It will now be called Nepal Telecom. The company plans to float shares that the general public can buy. The company will also reorganize its management, provide added incentives to its employees and upgrade its communications technology.

Army's new spokesman

The Army has brought in Brigadier General Rajendra Thapa to head its public relations department. Col. Deepak Gurung, who headed the department earlier, will now assist Brigadier Thapa. Thapa is also a renowned song writer whose compositions have been sung by such famous singers as Narayan Gopal and Aruna Lama.

RNAC's woes

Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation has cut down its international flights after the corporation's plans to lease a replacement aircraft for one of its Boeing 757's failed. Of the two big jets



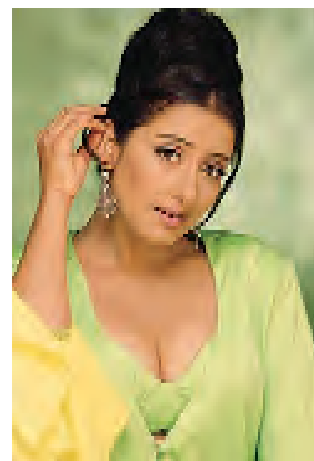
that the airline owns, one has been grounded for routine maintenance and will remain off-duty for two months at least. RNAC currently flies to 10 destinations in seven countries.

Easter crackdown

Easter revelers in Tundikhel had their celebrations cut short when Samuel Sodemba and Isu Jung Karki, both members of the Easter festival organizing committee, were arrested from Khula Manch. The police say that revelers broke the government's ordinance of disallowing gatherings in riot-prone zones while the revelers say that the police had given them the go-ahead to congregate at Tundikhel.

Manisha miffed

Actress Manisha Koirala, who was in the capital last week to participate in a walkathon organized by the Rotary Clubs of Nepal, voiced her reservations over the party protests. She said



that she supports the King's call for elections. Koirala, however, bemoaned the police's manhandling of her granduncle Girija Prasad Koirala.



Mayor mania

Kathmandu's Mayor Keshav Sthapit has made it into the first short list of the "World Mayor 2004" competition being held by the web-portal www.citymayors.com. Eleven Mayors from 60 cities around the world were selected for the short list on the basis of a web-based survey. Sthapit is ranked seventh among the 11 mayors picked so far. Sthapit, who is known as Demolition Man among his critics for razing settlements to clear space for building projects and road constructions, could certainly use the positive spin.

Army's new spokesman

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City's new dump

In the next four months garbage from Kathmandu and Lalitpur municipalities will probably get hauled all the way to Sishdole in Nuwakot. Sishdole is only a temporary site and will be in use until the slated permanent site at Okharpauwa becomes functional. Kathmandu city

authorities last week said that the blacktopping of the 20-km road that leads to Sishdole, northwest of Kathmandu, is almost complete. Kathmandu and Lalitpur together generate at least 400 tons of garbage everyday.

Malinowski's murky recall

U.S. Ambassador Michael Malinowski has been recalled by the U.S. State Department some eight months before his term



expires later this year. The Kathmandu Post, which broke the news last week, said the recall "has nothing to do with the U.S. policy



per se but the way Malinowski 'presented' the U.S. stance in the current triangular conflict (between the Maoists, parties and the King)." By the time we went to the press, it was still unclear what had led to the U.S. envoy's unceremonious recall. A diplomat told Nation Weekly, the friction between Kathmandu-based European missions, who envision a bigger role for political parties, and the U.S. Ambassador who thinks otherwise was "an open secret." He said he wasn't sure whether it was "the Ambassador's hawkish policies or his abrasive ways

with the Embassy staff" that had led to the recall.

Press attack

Police arrested dozens of journalists on Thursday before releasing most of them later in the day. Many of those arrested were senior journalists associated with Kantipur Publications and Kantipur TV. Most of them were arrested at Bhirkuti Mandap, Bhotahity and Bagbazaar where they were covering the street protests. Taranath Dahal, president of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, has called the incident "a naked assault on press freedom." **N**



BACK TO SCHOOL: With the new school session starting last week parents had their work cut out

MARKETING TEAM NEPAL

Nepal's national team finished sixth in Pakistan, their worst showing in SAF Games, but football boss Ganesh Thapa insists our younger footballers are the best in the region. Still, like any other football fan, he rues about Nepal's empty stadiums

BY SHARAN MARAHATTA

One person who never tires of talking football is Ganesh Thapa, perhaps Nepal's most prolific goal-scorer ever and now the president of All Nepal Football Association.

As the chief football overseer in the country, give the ace striker credit again for netting some golden goals. None more promising than the world governing body FIFA-funded Goal Project, which is also supported by local sponsors. If all goes well, the million-dollar pilot project will help set up football academies in 30 districts in Nepal to train 1,000 young booters—easily the most ambitious football program ever undertaken in the country to tap budding talents.

All this may suggest that the future of the country's number one spectator sport (though it seems that cricket will soon bump football out of the pedestal) is secure. But these exciting developments mask a number of ills that plague the game. And no one is more keen to discuss them than Thapa himself.

"Looking back, it is difficult not to feel a huge sense of loss," says Thapa, recalling his own glory days as a footballer. "Even a league match used to have packed galleries in the 1980s."

Barring a few games, football matches even in the capital are now watched by small crowds. The final rounds of the Khukuri Cup, with the country's 20 best teams vying for the top slot and Rs 200,000 in prize money failed



to attract the football-crazy crowd one took for granted 20 years ago. Clearly, the clubs have lost their fan base.

For the world's number one spectator sport, Nepal's near-empty stadiums are an undeserved sorry sight. There must be a way out here.

Many insist that the ANFA should be accorded a high priority to ensure quality participation. Others suggest a media-savvy approach to market the game.

"Soccer enthusiasts who are getting used to viewing top-class fares on TV in the comfort of their couch don't want to take the trouble of going to the stadium to watch low-grade matches," says Mukunda Dahal, a journalist who has been covering sport events for more than a decade. "Tournaments with big outfits not only attract spectators but the exemplary skills put in by the players also trig-

ger the imagination of the youth." Not all the national leagues around the world can match English Premier League in skills and yet many of them have a sizeable fan base.

Consistent display of quality and competitive football is the key to attract bigger crowds. Market pundits say the spectators will head back to the stadiums once Nepali footballers start excelling in the international circuit. Look at the way the Koreans and Japanese now follow their national teams.

There was so much hope in 1999 when Nepal hosted the 8th South Asian Federation (SAF) Games. Tens of thousands of Nepalis—many of them hardly regular football fans—turned up to cheer the home team. But fans will faithfully follow a losing team for only so long. Nepal's national side must admit that they have been famously inconsistent. No one expects them to beat South Korea, Oman, or Vietnam in the Olympic qualifiers, but how do you keep fans excited over a team that fails to put up a decent fight once in a while? How does one justify Nepal's pathetic performance in the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Championship just concluded in Pakistan? Nepal couldn't post a single win.

Thapa, who has quite a reputation in the sports circle for taking active (meddlesome, according to some) interest in every single thing that's associated with the country's football, almost swears that he is not sitting idle.

"We are deeply troubled ourselves over our performance in Pakistan. Overall, our football is certainly better than the rest," he says, "except maybe India's." To make his point, he offers Nepal's standing in age-group competitions. Our Under-19 team is not only ranked among the top 16 in Asia (out of 45), it's the only team from the South Asian region to qualify for the 2004 Under-20 finals. Likewise, the Under-14 boys are the best in the region as evidenced by Nepal's performance in the six-nation Football Festival that concluded in Kathmandu last week.

"Still, to arrest the decline of the senior side, we have increased the number of tournaments, including Nepal's participation in international matches," says Thapa. "We plan to qualify for the Under-17 World Cup in five to six years. That's our overarching vision."



Nepal's football team at SAF Games

Year	Event	Position
1984	1 st Games	1
1985	2 nd Games	2
1987	3 rd Games	4
1989	4 th Games	4
1991	5 th Games	4
1993	6 th Games	1
1995	7 th Games	4
1999	8 th Games	2
2004	9 th Games	6

HARIYO BIRUWA KO CHILLO PAAT. The ANFA academy catches budding talents when they are young and the grooming seems to be paying dividends.

Consistent display of quality and competitive football is the key to attract bigger crowds.

The number of tournaments *has* increased. The Martyrs Memorial Tournament (Nepal's longest running league) finally seems to be running on track. The Khukuri Cup has become a regular fixture and a number of other tournaments are being held outside Kathmandu. But many feel that numbers alone don't guarantee good football. The key is to translate ANFA's high-pitched ambitions to reality. But where does one begin?

"ANFA should come up with a double-leg football league if we are to climb up the international ladder," says a former Nepal international footballer, who has played professional league in Bangladesh and India. Such a league has already been endorsed by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and the Federation of International Football Association (FIFA).

To further bolster the league structure, there are other strategies: the ANFA could work out a system that is widely practiced in most football-playing countries—allocate a certain percentage of tickets to participating clubs in the leagues, instead of providing them with limited cash incentives. Each of the 12 premier division clubs in the Martyr's Memorial League, for example, gets Rs 50,000 from the ANFA for preparations each season.

Many find the current league a lackluster affair with a handful of clubs fighting for a title and others as mere also-rans. "It requires a complete restructuring—from regulation on players' transfer to providing incentives to smaller clubs in order to make the competition exciting for the paying public," remarks Sanjeev Mishra, president of the first di-

vision side Kathmandu Club which routinely loses its promising players to richer clubs like Three Star, RCT and MMC.

The key here is giving the game a higher profile and corporate houses could play a vital role towards that end. Any market analysts will tell you football's future in Nepal hinges as much on good marketing off the field as it does on the team's on-field performance. It's not just his skills that have made Sachin Tendulkar an icon in India. An extremely well-oiled corporate machine has gone behind the branding of Team India.

"ANFA has to take an imaginative step, taking a cue out of the success achieved by other countries," says Tashi Ghale, who once served as vice-president for the ANFA. "You don't have to go too far to see changes. Just look at the strides made by Maldives over the years."

The tiny island-nation, with a population of just over 300,000 introduced a semi-professional league a few years back. The result is all-evident: Maldives is ranked 27 slots above Nepal's 169 in the FIFA rankings. **N**

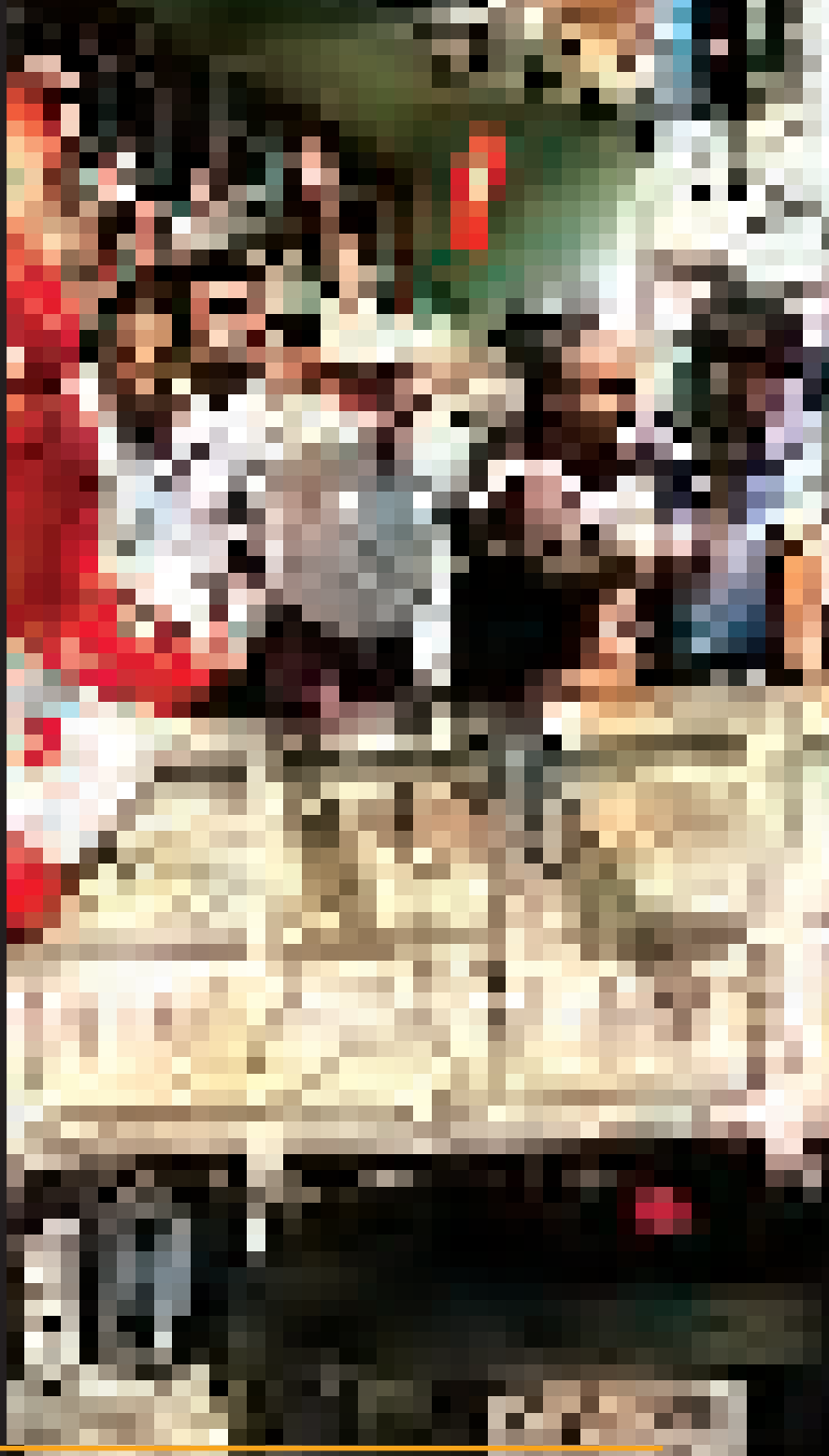
Party protests aren't getting anywhere but that doesn't mean people are happy with the status quo. The sooner the King and parties make peace, the better.

BY SUMAN PRADHAN

If you read mainstream newspapers and listen to private FM stations, the five-party anti-government demonstrations may seem like they are growing with each passing day. Screaming headlines tell you about the thousands of protestors marching in Kathmandu demanding restoration of a representative government. And accompanying news photos show demonstrators being beaten up and hauled into police trucks, testimony to the highhandedness of an undemocratic regime.

And yet, strangely, what is portrayed in the newspapers is far removed from what's happening on the streets. Except for the area around Bagbazaar in the heart of Kathmandu, the mass of demonstrators fighting to roll back "regression" in recent days are nowhere to be seen in other parts of the city. Most Kathmanduites seem snug in their daily lives, living a routine that is cut off from the protests and rioting in and around Bagbazaar. Frequent bandas and a never-ending series of street protests—they only lasted for two months in 1990—seem to have satiated the public appetite for mass demonstrations.

If the five parties—Nepali Congress, CPN(UML), Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Anandi Devi), Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party and Jana Marcha Nepal—had hoped that these protests would balloon into a mass uprising of the sorts witnessed in 1990, they must be clearly disappointed. Since the first few days of April, when



14 YEARS LATER



the turnout was in the tens of thousands, the number of demonstrators around Ratna Park has gone down considerably. And those who are there are almost invariably party activists, not the common citizens the parties had hoped to excite.

“There seems to be a disconnect from what’s being reported in the newspapers and what’s happening on the streets,” says Angie Krysiak, an anthropology student from the University of Wisconsin who has closely followed the protests. “The newspapers definitely seem to be exaggerating the movement.”

It wasn’t supposed to be this way. The year-old five-party protests gathered steam when the current round of demonstrations took off with a bang on April 1. For a few days, the parties managed to amass a sea of humanity in the heart of the capital, protesting King Gyanendra’s seizure of political power in October 2002 and demanding the formation of an all-party government. Some of these demonstrators came from as far away as Dhanusha, Jhapa and Gulmi.

On some days, like on April 2, 3 and 4, the protests turned violent. Surging

demonstrators tried to smash through the security perimeters and march towards the Royal Palace and Singha Durbar, only to invite stern police action. Demonstrators were brutally beaten and tear gas shells and rubber bullets were fired indiscriminately into crowds. Protestors resorted to pelting stones at the police and vandalizing cars and motorcycles. So far more than 1,000 protestors and dozens of policemen have been injured, some seriously. More than 5,000 protestors have also been arrested.

The joining in of civil-society groups like the lawyers, journalists and teachers in the movement, did make it seem like the ranks were about to grow bigger and stronger.

But that hasn’t happened yet. Even the planned “huge” demonstrations by the five parties on April 15 fell flat. The reasons could be many, but a couple of them stand out.

First, after the initial bungling, the government changed tactics, ordering police to show restraint in the face of protests. Senior officers could be heard yelling at their subordinates not to use

excessive force. When protestors pelted bricks and stones from Padma Kanya Campus, a senior Valley Police officer was heard saying, “Don’t throw the stones back. You are policemen. Show restraint and professionalism.”

Despite stray incidents, the security forces so far have by and large shown remarkable restraint, although the arrest Thursday in the capital of dozens of journalists covering the protest could mark a turning point.

The Home Ministry has declared key areas off-limits to public gatherings in a bid to pre-empt angry mass protests. Home Minister Kamal Thapa justifies it as an attempt to check Maoist infiltration into the movement. The strategy has worked so far: demonstrators are finding it increasingly difficult to gather at one single place.

The second, and a more important reason, is symbolic. It’s been 14 years since the 1990 Jana Andolan was successfully launched against the hated Panchayat. Most Nepalis do support democracy, all right, but years of political instability and an imperfect era



COURTING ARREST Police take UML leader K P Oli in custody

of multi-party democracy has made them wary of the leaders.

Consider just how changed the situation is today. It is no longer a docile King Birendra who reigns from Narayanhity. There is no longer 30 years of pent up public frustrations to fuel a popular movement. If anything, many Nepalis are still angry at the party leaders for not delivering the goods.

The international scene has changed, too. While in 1990 new democracies were sprouting all over the world as the Cold War came to an end, today, the "global fight against terrorism" means Nepal's democratic struggle is seen as a side bar to its larger fight for survival against the Maoists.

The biggest difference is that the anti-Panchayat demonstrations were not split between the parties and the Maoists, as it is now. And there is no charismatic leadership to whip the crowd. Leaders like Ganesh Man Singh and Madan Bhandari, who became icons of the 1990 Movement, are nowhere to be found today. As one observer puts it, "There is

There is no longer 30 years of pent up public frustrations to fuel a popular movement. If anything, many Nepalis are still angry at the party leaders for not delivering the goods.

no single political personality the demonstrators can rally around. Almost all the leaders have either lost their stature, or just don't have any stature to inspire the common man."

All this means the current anti-government protests is being seen not as an agitation to restore democracy, but as a movement led by the same old corrupt politicians jostling for power. "I could have easily joined the movement, but I ask, what purpose will that serve," says Rajesh Shrestha, a shopkeeper in Lazimpat who was active in the 1990 movement. "I don't want to be supporting the same politicians who made this country such a mess."

Without public participation in the demonstrations, the parties are finding it difficult to sustain the movement. Does the situation call for a new strategy? Isn't the movement against "regression" too vague a goal for an apathetic public?

"We will continue the protests until regression is defeated," says Madhav Nepal, general secretary of the CPN (UML). "We are certain that more and more people will join the movement."

While the movement does seem to be fizzling out now, the potential for a rebound is still strong, especially if the government miscalculates. The use of pro-government groups and plain-

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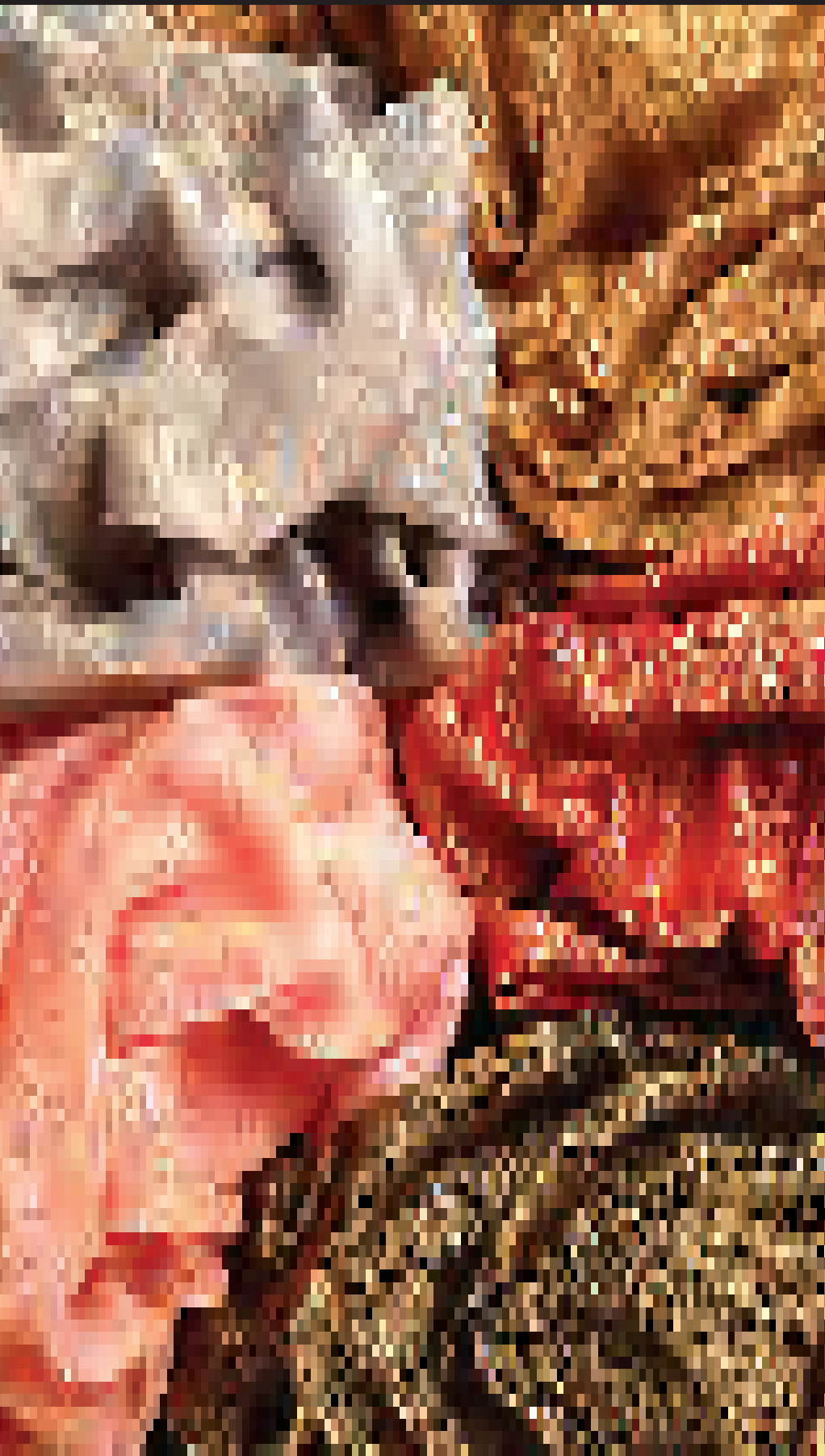
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BOOMERANG: Bagbazaar businessmen protest against the party protests

“All the constitutional forces must work together to bring the country back on track. No matter how much the parties are hated, they do represent a large section of Nepali society.”

clothes policemen to disrupt the protests in the initial days almost led to an explosion. And the recent move by the Home Ministry to isolate and prosecute Jana Morcha Nepal’s leaders and activists could lead to a popular backlash.

Some analysts believe that instead of waiting for the government to make mistakes, the parties could help themselves by instituting some drastic changes in their message and the messengers. But that is probably asking for too much.

“It is unrealistic to expect the parties to change leadership in the midst of a larger fight against the monarchy,” says Krishna Hachhethu, a political analyst associated with the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies. “They will first need to win back power before attempting internal reforms.”

But since the movement is not gathering steam, the parties could become desperate. The Maoists, the wildcard in the ongoing political struggle, have already positioned themselves to take advantage of the parties’ frustrations by actively courting them in their fight for republican goals. The parties are understandably wary of the rebels whose participation in the movement could give the government a pretext to use overwhelming force. Hence the order that went out from the party leadership to ensure that the demonstrations remain peaceful during the three days of the Maoist-called Nepal banda on April 6, 7 and 8. “We do not have any common platform with the Maoists and we don’t plan on having

any in the future,” asserts Dr Ram Sharan Mahat, a senior leader of the Nepali Congress.

Meanwhile, the target of the agitation, King Gyanendra, has followed a smart strategy. After waiting out much of the protests touring insurgency-hit Western districts from his base in Pokhara, the King, since his return to the capital on April 10, has continued to ignore the protests. He pointedly failed to even mention the demonstrations in his customary New Year Message on Baisakh 1 (April 13).

But the King could also be misreading the nation’s mood—just as the parties are doing. The people may not trust the parties and their agitation, but they don’t necessarily view the monarchy in a favorable light. The sooner the Palace realizes this and makes peace with the parties, the better it is for the country.

“In the end, all the constitutional forces must work together to bring the country back on track,” says a diplomat. “No matter how much the parties are hated, they do represent a large section of Nepali society, and it would be wise to get them on board.” **N**

OMINOUS RUMBLES

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

There are signs that the Indian position against the Maoists is hardening. And it's as much due to the alleged Maoists attacks against Indian vehicles and

nationals in Nepal, as it's due to India's growing realization that the Maoists can be a serious trans-boundary menace.

On April 3, 18 Indian oil tankers were torched near the Nepal-India border in Dhangadi. A day later, Maoists set ablaze an Indian truck on the Siddhartha Highway. On April 5, the Maoists issued "Quit Nepal" notices to Indian businessmen based in Guluria, Bardiya.

Many see these attacks on Indian property and nationals as retaliation against the arrest of Maoist politburo member Mohan Baidhya in Siliguri, West Bengal last month. Not surprisingly, the Indian External Affairs Ministry has reacted strongly and asked Nepal to prevent anti-India activities in its territory.

On April 9, the Indian Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani during his election speech in Jharkhand raised concerns over the possibility of unified attempts by Nepali and Indian Maoists to spread terror in the region. "Following political instability in Nepal lately, Maoists of that country have started trying to infiltrate into India to increase Naxalite activities," said Advani.



SPILLING THE BEANS: Maoist leader Mohan Baidhya has admitted that there is trans-boundary cooperation among Maoists



PRIZED INFORMATION: Maoists turncoats reveal that Indian guerillas have trained them

Less than a week later, he made similar comments in Orissa, adding that India would take all measures necessary against Nepali Maoists.

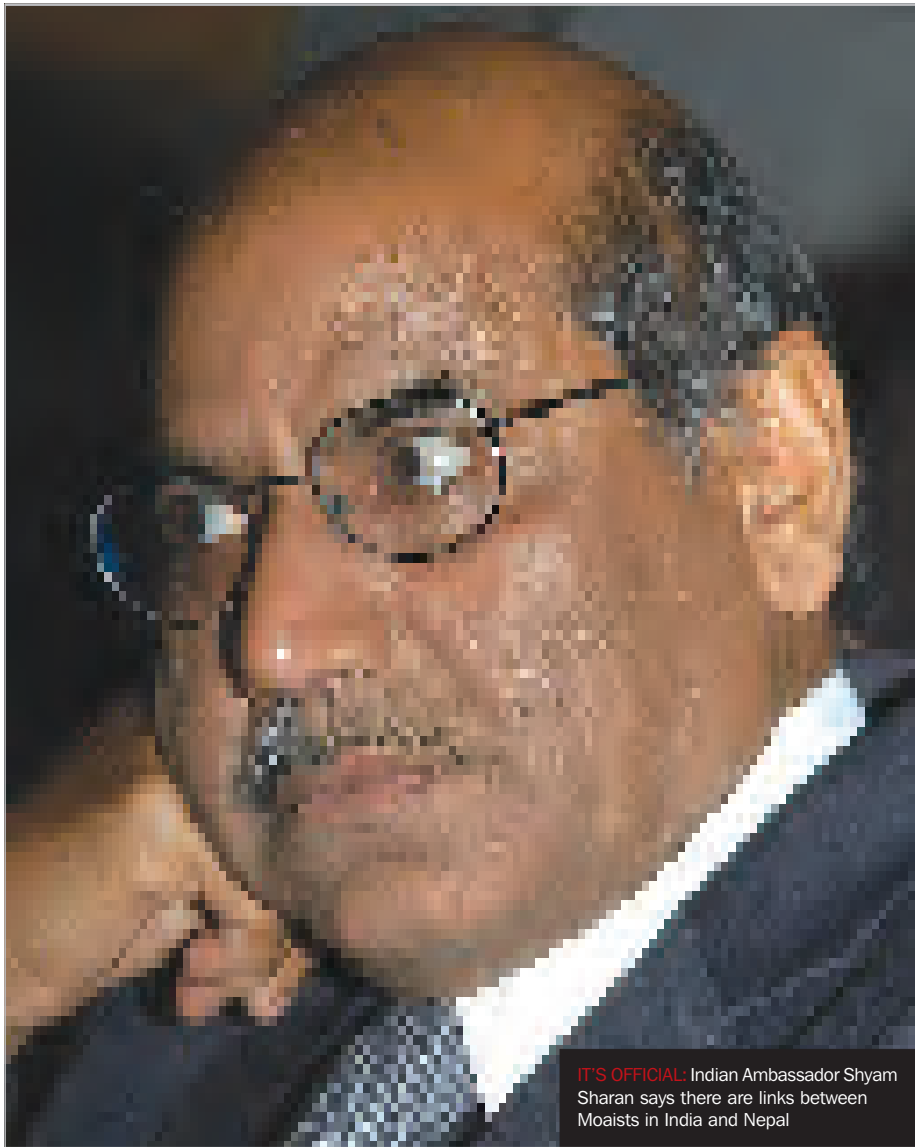
There are reasons for New Delhi to be nervous. Nepali Maoists are believed to have forged a "working relationship"

also a part of CCOMPOSA, is active across Bihar.

Last October, Andhra Pradesh's Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu escaped a landmine attack by the PWG. Like the radical leftists in Nepal, the PWG has also declared its own "Aadhar Chhetra" in Andhra Pradesh. And much like Nepali Maoists, the Indian rebels have started targeting security forces and candidates for the general elections that begin this week.

On April 7, the rebels killed 26 policemen in a Jharkhand landmine explosion, an attack reminiscent of Nepali Maoist tactics. Most recently, in a show of solidarity Nepali Maoists have called for a poll boycott in India.

On April 9, Lal Krishna Advani during his election speech in Jharkhand raised concerns over the possibility of unified attempts by Nepali and Indian Maoists to spread terror in the region.



IT'S OFFICIAL: Indian Ambassador Shyam Sharan says there are links between Maoists in India and Nepal

“The recent concerns raised by India show that New Delhi is now taking a harsher stand against the Maoists,” says Shyam Shrestha, editor of Mulyankan monthly. “Obviously, Indians are in no mood to allow Maoists a free lunch in their territory.”

Many Nepalis always believed that a number of senior Maoist leaders were taking refuge in India, at least intermittently, but it became public knowledge when CPN(UML) General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal blew their cover. He publicly declared that he had held a secret meeting with Maoist supremo Prachanda in Lucknow last November. Earlier, many people would either question or dismiss claims in the media that similar meetings had taken place in Siliguri and Noida, near New Delhi.

India’s response to such claims, until recently, has been routine: it was doing its best to curb the mobility of Nepali Maoists in its territory but given the country’s huge size and own share of security concerns, it wasn’t always possible to police the Maoists. Interestingly, New Delhi had declared the Maoists terrorists even before Nepal outlawed them in November 2001. Indian envoy Shyam Sharan has gone on record to claim time and again that Nepali Maoists have links with Maoist groups in India, including the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and the People’s War Group (PWG).

His thesis has been corroborated by former Maoist commanders. According to Jaya Bahadur Gharti, who surrendered to the security forces last July, Nepali Maoists received training from PWG and MCC guerillas in 1998, 2000, and 2001 in Rolpa. Last month during the Beni en-

counter, the Army for the first time got hold of an AK-47 rifle suspected to have been imported from the PWG.

“As we moved further up the hills away from Beni, the locals told us some of the Maoists involved in the Beni attack were using language they could not understand,” says Bimal Chandra Sharma of INSEC who visited the scene days after the March 20 attack to prepare an on-site report for the human rights group.

Nepal is most anxious to get its hands on two Maoist leaders who are currently in Indian custody—Baidhya in Siliguri and C. P. Gajurel in Chennai. Gajurel, who reportedly heads the Maoists foreign relations division, was arrested with a fake British passport at Chennai Airport while he was on his way to London last August. Two other Maoist central committee members, Matrika Yadav and Suresh Ale, were handed over in February.

Gajurel remains in Indian custody facing charges. The court ruled out his handover after Gajurel insisted that his life was in danger in Nepal.

“In Baidhya’s case, India has already gathered enough evidence that he had established contacts with the People’s War Group and other organizations declared terrorists by India,” observes Kantipur’s Jhapa-based reporter Chintamani Dahal, who has been travelling across the border to Siliguri to follow investigations on Baidhya. “His handover might be delayed for a while.”

Baidhya is considered the main ideologue behind Prachandapath, the Maoist roadmap to republicanism. Many also see him as the guru of Maoist chief Prachanda. Along with Baburam Bhattarai, the three are said to constitute the Maoist troika at the top.

For their part, the Maoists have tried to give their own spin to Baidhya’s arrest, calling the Indian action a part of a controversial deal involving exchange of land and water between the “feudal lords” of Nepal and India. Both New Delhi and Kathmandu have chosen to remain silent on the arrest, though Nepali authorities say they have initiated a legal process to extradite Baidhya but details are hard to come by.

Once the elections is over, New Delhi is expected to take up the Maoist issue with a renewed urgency. “It’s time too,” says Shrestha of Mulyankan magazine. “Otherwise, India would be seen as taking a double stand as in the past.” **N**



HUSHED EXPECTATIONS

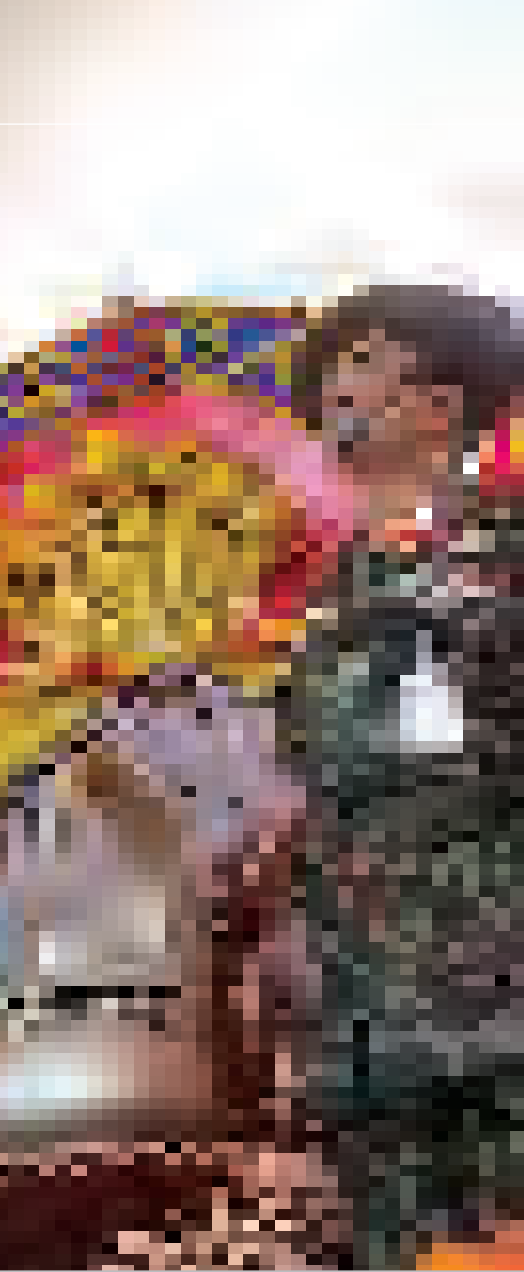
BY MAHESH PUN

It's been a week since the Royal Couple left for Kathmandu. And all the public attention has once again shifted back to the daily street protests in the

capital. But it was quite an event while it lasted: for 17 long days the Western Region played host to an

extravagant *abhinandan* and the problems of Kathmandu seemed a world away.

To be sure, royalties have never been an uncommon sight in this city. The Ratna Mandir Durbar, which stands on the shore of Lake Fewa, bustles with routine royal visits. And it was here that poet Kshetra Pratap Adhikari composed his famous line, "Chautarima Raja Bhetiyo" after spotting King Birendra



The King appealed to all parties to help organize elections. His lofty ideas, however, don't seem to impress political heavyweights.

ity in these times of globalization and rapid economic development.

These lofty ideas, however, don't seem to impress local political heavyweights, who were expecting a clearer commitment to an earlier timeframe for the handover of executive powers. Most, in fact, had called for the boycott of the reception, the fourth since King Gyanendra ascended the throne in June 2001. And many did comply, though they remained glued to their TV sets even as thousands of school children and village folks braved the midday heat (31 degree Celsius) in the dusty stadium.

"Let's go home and watch TV instead," one woman was telling her friend at Prithvi Chowk as a long procession marched towards the stadium past the deep gorge of the Seti River.

"The nation is on fire and this King was having people felicitate him here," says Rabindra Adhikari, local leader of the CPN(UML). Adds Nepali Congress (NC) lawmaker Shukra Raj Sharma, "Yet another civic reception just while the nation is reeling. Here, people have no time to put coffin on corpses."

But the reception did inject some life, at least for a while. Take 72-year-old Som Bahadur Gurung, of Balkot village in remote Parbat district, for instance. He had come to see the King and the Queen, though it didn't quite turn out that way. The former policeman also brought with him some petition letters to pass on to the King in the hope that his woes would be addressed. Gurung, who stands 5 feet 3 inches and wears daura suruwal and topi, was just another poor villager in the 20,000-strong crowd from 16 districts, many of whom had been bused and trucked from across the region, defying the Gandak region banda called by the Maoists.

Interestingly, everybody present at the Pokhara stadium that sunny afternoon had a petition. The Mayor of Pokhara Sub-Metropolitan City, Harka Bahadur

Gurung, demanded that a zoological park be set up in his city and that the city's main attraction, the Fewa Lake be conserved. The District Development Committee President of Kaski, Ganesh Man Gurung, rattled off his own list of demands: international airport in Pokhara, upgrading of the Prithvi Narayan Campus to a university, underground metro railway linking Pokhara with the capital, Kathmandu.

Yet their core demand remained the same: a lasting peace, which would pave the way for economic and human development in the region famous for its ethnic diversity and natural beauty. For their part, the Royal Couple did seem to reciprocate the cry for peace when they released two pairs of pigeons, setting off cheers from those present at the stadium.

"Everything will be alright once the monarch corrects his move (to wrest executive powers)," says Nepali Congress leader Sharma. "After all, it was the King's ancestor, the Great King Prithvi Narayan Shah who cared so much about his people."

But at least in the eyes of political workers like NC's Sharma, the King doesn't seem overly concerned about "correcting" himself. So much was evident during his stay in Western Nepal. Like his late father during these visits, King Gyanendra, 57, was keen on reaching out to residents of villages and towns across the region, including the people of Beni, who had only a week ago witnessed the worst carnage in nine years of "people's war."

Many people here recollect what his brother King Birendra did after his Pokhara visit in the spring of 1990. At the height of the Jana Andolan, he consulted party leaders and the rest, as they say, is history. The civic reception has been momentous all right but the residents of Pokhara are still hoping for a lasting peace. The street protests in Kathmandu, 200km away, are disturbing. **N**

under a tree, walking around like a commoner.

But even weeks before the current visit, Pokharelis knew this one would be more than a casual out-of-the-town trip for the Their Majesties. And so it turned out. At a March 28 civic reception, King Gyanendra announced elections in an extremely volatile political backdrop: a year and a half of non-representative government, a bloody insurgency, and with the city's own lifeline, the tourism industry, on the brink. He issued a salvo to political parties to seek a fresh mandate.

"I appeal to all the concerned parties to help us organize elections in 2061 B.S.," the King said in his address at the local stadium, as thousands converged from nearby districts to see their new King and Queen. He made a call to end violence and terrorism so that the nation could move in the path of prosper-

SONG OF SOVEREIGNTY

As one of the first Asian leaders to visit Victorian England in 1850, Jung Bahadur Rana, who became de facto emperor of the central Himalayas at the age of 29,

insisted that he be given a 19-gun salute (higher than the 17 reserved for princes from the plains). A rare treatment not assured for all guests of England, this was next extended to his cousin Chandra who collected his honorary doctorate at Oxford in 1908—a degree in Civil Law that was also given to Bill Clinton 87 years later. Jung and Chandra, the notable of Rana rulers, kept this land unconquered by sending as many hill men as necessary to fight the white man’s wars. And in doing so, gave the British one good reason not to wage an expensive mountain invasion.

Technically, thus, we were never colonized, but Nepal did not even have its own national anthem until

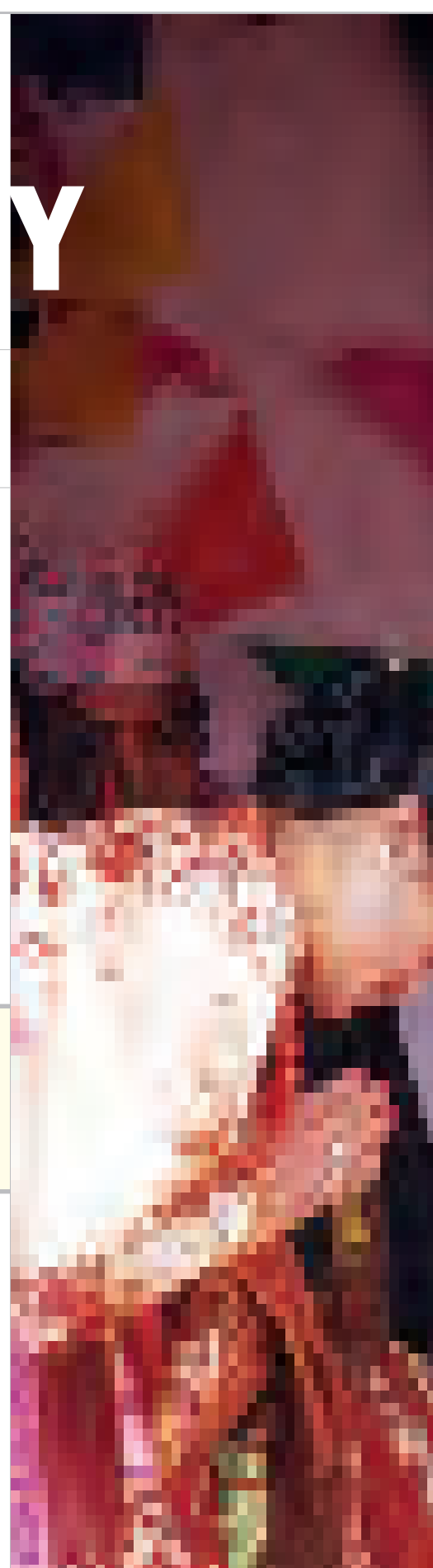
Ram Mani Dixit, advisor to Chandra Shumsher, writes in his “Purana Samjhana” (from where this story is taken) that he then recruited his poet friend, Chakrapani Chalise to construct Nepal’s own anthem. Like a dependent Consultant, eager to please his benefactors, Mr. Chalise enquired what “angle” he needed to pursue for his compositions. He was told they needed to be grand odes that felicitated the Shah King and his Rana Premier, “pure Ksetriyas who ruled Nepal, home of the brave Gorkha race.” An Indian gentleman from Rajasthan, M. A. Pathan, who was in town upon invitation by Chandra Shumsher to serve as Nepal’s bandmaster, then put music into Mr. Chalise’s words. Thus

We have come full circle. The cacophony of orchestrated felicitations of the King is growing.

Chandra’s final years. “God Save the King,” the English anthem, was played in the “independent” kingdom. And it would be played at the oddest of hours, for random pomp and amusement, much to the inconvenience of the poor British ambassador resident in Lainchour. He had to stand up, no matter what he was doing, whenever he heard his native tune practiced in Tundikhel. In a sparsely populated, traffic-free Kathmandu of the 1920s, much was seen and heard.

was born the infamous “Shrimana Gambhir”—a sycophantic mess that still stands as our national anthem.

The progressive drafters of the 1990 constitution thought they had reduced the King to his proper size. They thought so on the strength of Articles III (hint: sovereignty lies in the people, not the monarch) and XXXV (hint: the monarch makes no mistake, for almost everything he does is upon the advice and instruction of the elected prime minister). The drafters also thought reaching out fur-





ther to reform the Army, reducing royal claims on the exchequer, and dismantling iconic remnants like the national anthem, would be an unnecessary stretch on their mandate. Justice Biswonath Upadhyaya was right to be benign, but not everyone was happy. The extreme leftists that included today's top Maoists wanted to go all the way. They even goaded their ally among drafters, Nirmal Lama, to break rank. In those chaste times, however, even the rebels were restrained.

Thirteen years on, we have come full circle. The cacophony of orchestrated felicitations of the King is growing. In the remote district of Mustang early April, this columnist witnessed preparations for the King's Jomsom felicitation. Marshalling every single resource of the poor state in the poor district, from the Army and the CDO's office to the line ministries, ethnic leadership, and even airline agents, it was unclear how these costly *tamashas* could possibly gratify the King. In these events, the King routinely refers to the "glorious tradition of the Shah dynasty reigning in accord with the wishes of the people." This desire to locate a glorious past that probably never existed is puzzling to students of history. Of the 10 Shah kings after the great Prithivi Narayan in 1775, hardly three made any lasting mark. There simply is no consistent record on past royal glory notable enough to be evoked to justify active royal roles today.

The political parties have vowed to redress "political regression" definitively, especially the violation of the two articles cited earlier. And they should. But as custodian of state religion, language, and armed forces, the House of Gorkha is in equal need of shedding its baggage of "cultural regression." In this day and age, why should we be beholden to norms, institutions, and symbols in our statecraft in a manner that gives the impression that what we are holding on to, if let gone, would violate all sanctity?

Instead of basking in the nostalgia of absolute authority, the institution of monarchy is always better off seeking new legitimacy through deeds and gestures that are social, not political. A harmless point to start would be to encourage the replacement of icons like the national anthem that have inglorious origins. It is after all an unusual song loaded with symbolism of where sovereignty rested in the yesteryears. There is, of course, one more reason. The most striking adjective that describes the king in the anthem is "Prachanda." And this has long been famously co-opted by a bearded man from Chitwan who is not exactly friendly to either the crown or his state. **N**

Phalano: The Everyman

BY TIKU GAUCHAN

A picture may speak a thousand words but cartoons sometimes say even more. Rajesh K.C., the cartoonist at Kantipur, has been churning out ‘Gajab chha ba,’ his single-panel funnies, for more than a decade now.

Last week, K.C. was honored by the Creative Communication and Research Center, a media institute, for his contribution to society through his cartoons. What are his contributions? For readers tired of the same old write ups in the papers everyday, K.C.’s flashes of insight into the Nepali ethos provide both a welcome break and a catharsis: they offer a glimpse of the way things are and for once people can laugh at the expense of the high and mighty.

Just how does one come up with the laugh lines so consistently? “I don’t really know,” says K.C. “I keep abreast with the politics and general happenings and from my readings I create a theme and play with that until I have the cartoon in my mind. By the time I hit my work-desk at Kantipur in the evening, the cartoon is well set and it’s time to work on the caption. I have to create a caption that everyone will understand and at the same time it has to pack that punch.”

“Rajesh is essentially a funny guy,” says colleague and friend Bikash Rauniar, in an attempt to explain how K.C. creates his art. “He seems to have this knack for noticing the humor in everything. And when he’s talking to you his mind seems to be constantly thinking about absurd situations that will later appear on his panel.”

And all the pondering and planning definitely work in the end. K.C.’s cartoons pack a punch and the laughs they generate prove his success. William Carlos Williams once wrote, “It’s difficult / to get the news from poems / yet men die miserable every day / for lack of what is found there.” And just like good poems are able to convey what the media can’t, K.C.’s cartoons by giving voice to the everyman—the everyman who is above petty party politics and political



reports on death scores, political intrigues and the shenanigans of corrupt leaders hogging newspapers, readers don’t have much to look forward to. Yet hope springs eternal and as exemplified by the man reading the paper, people still look to the media for signs of redemption.

4. Political speak: Political figureheads have a knack for turning every event, even catastrophes, into occasions for political gain. “Pidit”

means anyone who’s been affected by some sort of setback. Much to the delight of ministers there are any number of pidit people—victims of the ongoing war, victims of natural disasters—whose cause the politicians are more than happy to take up in order to further their own interests.

5. The caption: It ties together all the elements that make up the panel and hits home the absurdity depicted: while the husband’s hoping for a windfall (the newspaper headline states that ministers will donate their 15-day earnings to pidit people), his wife knows better. She points out that what the victims will get, if anything at all, is not the money that politicians actually make by way of bribes and shady deals but 15 days’ worth of their government salary. **N**

RAJESH K.C. ANNOTATED

(See Cartoon)

1. Phalano: The Nepali everyman. He’s a mute observer (notice his zipped lips) bewildered by the absurdities in the country. In most panels he appears to be excluded from the situation depicted, as if to imply the exclusion of the common man from the political processes in Nepal’s “democracy.”

2. State of the nation: In tatters.

3. The press: Newspapers with axes to grind, yet working in a state that restricts them, produce the strange concoction that is Nepali news. And with



के लाखौं पाउने सपना देखिरा, त्यो पत्रिकाले गल्ती छाप्यो छ ! १५ दिनको आमदानी हैन, तलब दिने हो. तलब ।



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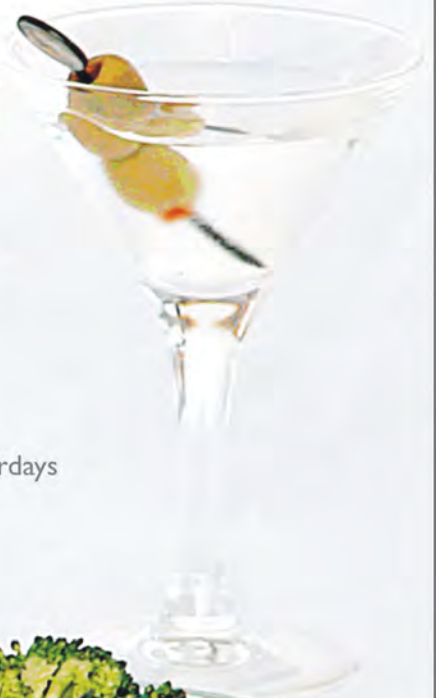


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The Sky in his Eyes

BY SANJEEV UPRETY

Buddhi Thapa's exhibition of paintings at Nepal Art Council that concluded last month presented three major themes that have haunted the artist for most of his career: ethnic portraits, depictions of Mother Nature, and spiritual quest. Thapa says that his spiritual paintings have their genesis in his childhood experiences of gazing at the starry skies. Growing up in Nagaland as the son of a Nepali soldier in the Indian army, Thapa used to spend countless hours gazing at the sky, wondering what lay behind its blue shell.

In the late 70s, his love of art took him to the Government Art College in Calcutta from where he completed his BFA. Somehow surviving on an exceedingly low budget, Thapa read books and painted. He was completely broke by the time he acquired his degree. He lingered at the hostel for one more year before the authorities decided to expel him from their premises.

On the night of December 24, 1983, as the hostel authorities were looking for him everywhere, he hid himself on the hostel roof and gazed at the sky all night. Midnight arrived and passed. Hungry and cold, Thapa still continued to stare at the skies. After 2 a.m., the position of the constellations in the sky changed, and the entire starry map of the sky turned upside down. Buddhi continued to gaze, however, wondering what had gone wrong with his career, why the map of his own life had turned upside down to leave him poor, lonely, and entirely without prospects.

The next day brought better luck. As he was contemplating suicide near the Hoogli River, Buddhi received a note from Mahendra Moktan, his one-time friend from Sikkim who was also a filmmaker. Moktan's marriage was foundering and he wanted Thapa to paint a portrait of his wife in order to please her and revive his marriage. It is

through Moktan's connections that Thapa received a commission from the Sikkim government's Tourism Department in 1985 to draw ethnic portraits. The next few years was a period of intense creative activity as Thapa painted ethnic images that were suffused with his own emotions and desires. He also painted mandalas and the cosmic maps of the universe, trying to memorize the spiritual visions that sometimes overwhelm him as he gazes at the open skies.

cellent view of the mountains and the skies.

"Art is not only my profession but also my only passion," says Thapa. "I'd rather live and sleep by the side of footpaths than work at anything else." He speaks of his two major desires that remain unfulfilled. The first is his dream of getting married. Thapa, 50, is worried that time is running out, and he is getting increasingly lonely as he gets older. "Not only do I need to find a woman who will match my age but the 'vibration' between us needs to work," he explains. For Thapa the entire universe, after all, is a play of vibrations; energies that pervade not only solar systems and galaxies but also run through each leaf, each blade of grass: a mystical motif that forms the basis of his spiritual paintings.

"My next major dream is to paint my spiritual visions upon large ten-by-ten



Thapa has been coming to Nepal for solo exhibitions and other art related work since 1985, and has also found a semi-permanent home at one of the studios of the Nepal Association of Fine Arts at Naxal. Among all other artists who have individual studios at NAFA, Thapa probably spends the most time in the building. He diligently paints in his rooftop studio day in and day out, by the side of an extended stone roof that provides an ex-

frames," he continues. "But how can a poor artist like me hope to draw such colossal paintings without someone sponsoring me? The walls of my studio at NAFA are not large enough to hold such big frames." Thapa's dreams are very simple. He is not ambitious enough to crave grand worldly successes or make a big name for himself as a world famous painter. He wants to marry, raise a family and paint his art on large canvasses. **N**



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(*13th Baisakh, 2061)

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When Rights Go Wrong

The popular human rights discourse in Nepal has turned unacceptably simplistic. It begins with the assumption that the Maoists and the security forces stand on the same moral plane

and that both are equally justified—or not so justified—in whatever they are doing. This offers an easy exit to an extremely complex debate: civil society leaders start out with knee-jerk condemnations of the security forces and make sure that they also call upon the insurgents to respect the rights of innocent civilians. Political correctness and the desire to sound “objective” presumably lead them into a framework of analysis that doesn’t go beyond this routine.

When Maoists gunned down dozens of security personnel in Bhojpur and Myagdi, and took dozens others hostage for weeks, the response of the civil society leaders was even more questionable. Few condemned the attacks on the two district headquarters. More than anything else, didn’t the fundamental Maoist philosophy that condones violence need to be questioned outright?

To be fair to human rights advocates, it is understandable where their framework of analysis and accusation comes from. The state has always been treated as the principal violator of citizens’ rights. Human rights organizations, many of whom have now become influential players in international discourse, were founded in the background of, and to raise voices against, dictatorships. They grew in stature while opposing the regimes of Augusto Pinochets and Pol Pots. Their modus operandi: shame states into behaving. Nepal’s current state of affairs, however, is rather complicated. First, how do you put a non-state party—Maoists in this case—on a leash? Is strict adherence to the classic human rights model the right way to deal with issues of morality and ethics? Does the clichéd state-centered human rights advocacy allow us to assess, analyze and understand the questions associated with human rights abuses? Is it enough to merely call upon the insurgents to respect the rights of the citizens? Have we not reached the stage where even the non-state actors have to be told to adhere to international human rights standards?

A better appreciation of the human rights situation is possible if the civil society is willing to conduct a dispassionate analysis of the moral and ethical foundations upon which the activities of the Royal Nepal Army and the Maoist insurgents are based; the way they target their enemies

or perceived enemies; and the degree and nature of human rights violations that each can be held responsible to. Towards that end, there are a few questions that beg answers.

First, is this a war that the Army initiated? Second, does the Army have a well-thought out plan of action that encourages and condones killing, maiming and torturing of civilians, or even the armed insurgents? Is it possible that barring some cases, most civilian deaths attributed to the Army occurred not because of its excesses but despite its best efforts to minimize casualties? Third, is our notion of fair play really fair to the security forces: can we put the cold-blooded killings of Krishna Mohan Shrestha, Gopal Giri and Ganesh Chiluwal on the same plane as the deaths in encounters? Fourth, if an international war crimes tribunal of some sort were to be established in Nepal, who is more likely to be found guilty of crimes against humanity—the Maoist leadership or the Army?

We may like to fudge the issue for as long as possible but from both moral and legal standpoints the Maoists are on the wrong side of this

debate—their claims as champions of the downtrodden notwithstanding. There are qualitative differences between the killings of the youth collecting donations on a national highway at dawn, which was clearly based on false intelligence reports, and the killings of a former lawmaker or of Chiluwal who came out vocally against Maoist atrocities. This however is not to condone rights violations by the Army. In fact, recent events have shown that its human rights record as a responsible institution leaves a lot to be desired. My problems start when human rights advocates

put the security forces and the insurgents on the same moral and legal plane; and though they blame both the parties, they especially up the ante against the security forces.

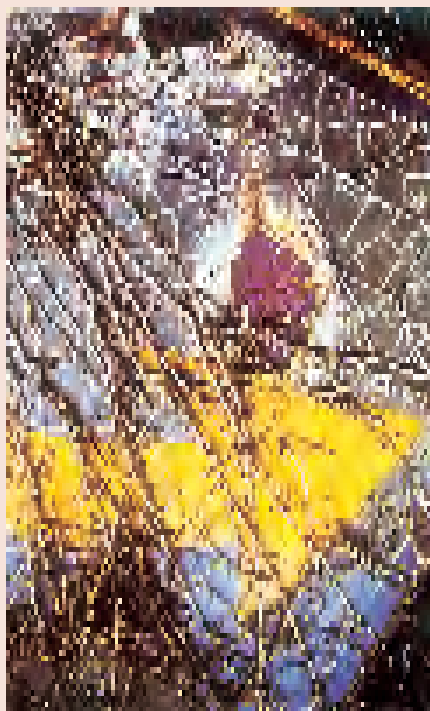
Given the vicious cycle of violence, and the confusion among Nepalis over allegations and counter-allegations of human rights abuses, it is important that human rights workers lead from the front by adding rigor to their treatment of the human rights debate. **(Ghimire is former Secretary of the National Human Rights Commission)** ■



STILL LIFE / STREET LIFE

Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babermahal Revisited.

An exhibition of photographs by Wayne Amtzis. "Street Life" includes Wayne's presentation of black and white photos from the late 80s and early 90s depicting life in Kathmandu.



"Still Life" is his recent work in colour with found objects. Together, the photos portray two ways of seeing—witnessing and expression. During the inauguration on April 15, Wayne read "Bloodscript" from his series of poems based on the current situation in Nepal. This is the 3rd exhibition by Amtzis at the Gallery. Till May 3
For information: 4414607.

OTHER EXHIBITIONS:

Lazimpat Gallery Café

"Samadhi: A journey through Sri Lanka" by Prakash Chandwadkar. Till April 26. For information: 4428549.

Lotus Gallery, Thamel

3rd Annual Contemporary Art Exhibition by 8 Tibetan masters. Till April 25.

New Orleans Café, Thamel

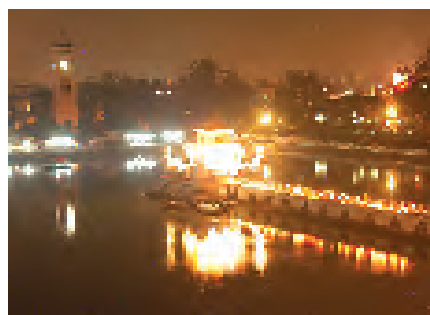
New temple wall exhibition of Tibetan modern art. Till April 20.

Caravan hall, Summit Hotel

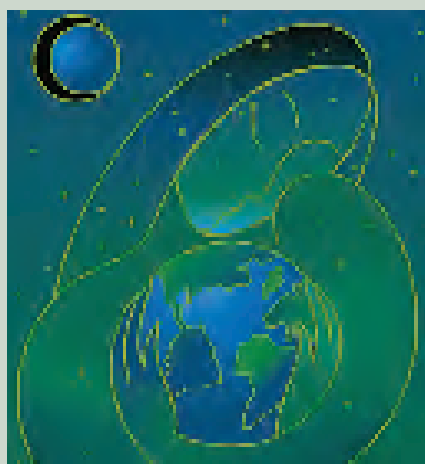
Exhibition of Tibetan Thangkas, pashminas and statues. Till April 30.
For Information: 5550415

RANI POKHARI FESTIVAL

KMC Wards 1, 30 and 31 are hosting a month long Rani Pokhari Festival to raise funds for the three wards. Festival features: rafting on the lake, photo exhibitions, live music, food stalls and consumer goods stalls. This is a rare opportunity to explore this historic lake-site, built by King Pratap Malla in 1667, which otherwise opens to the public only once a year on Bhai Tika.



EARTH DAY



Earth Day Celebrations
April 19—Talk program and quiz at City Hall.
April 20—Art competition at Paropkar High School
April 22—City-wide tree plantation drive, exhibitions and culture program.

MOVIE LISTINGS

Lazimpat Gallery Café

Admission: Free; Time: 7:00 p.m.
For Information: 4428549

April 22: The Mexican

In this romantic comedy Jerry Welbach (Brad Pitt) needs to negotiate two important events: his girlfriend Samantha (Julia Roberts) has dumped him and a mobster boss has ordered him to retrieve an antique pistol, "the Mexican," which has seen a history of murders. A well-plotted entertaining ride all the way.

April 20: The Man on the Moon

Two-time Academy Award-winning director Milos Forman teams up with Golden Globe winning screenwriters Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski in this movie on the life of enigmatic comedian Andy Kaufman. Jim Carrey is in his element portraying the antics of the eccentric genius that was Kaufman.



Inter Cultural Film Society

ICFS presents "Ithihas Jitneharu Ko Laagi," a documentary by Pranay Limbu and "Bheda Ko Oon Jasto," a documentary by Kiran Krishna Shrestha at Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap. The former portrays the changes in the Nepali music scene, as represented by Kuber Rai and Dhiraj Rai and the latter documents journalist Narayan Wagle's search for the source of folk tunes.
April 25; Time: 5:30 p.m.

Film Club, Baggikhana, Patan.

Satyajit Ray Special: Film club presents a collection of famed Indian director Satyajit Ray's movies. Till April 26

Anthropology and Development

BY SONDRA L. HAUSNER

Both anthropologists and development-walas have been part of Nepal's bidesi world since the early 1950s. But each group has its own language and culture, and there has

rarely been an overlap of their social worlds. This is somewhat ironic, because both groups precisely deal with social worlds: the academics studying social structures and meanings, and the development-walas trying to figure out how to help disadvantaged groups.

Western anthropologists may seem a strange species to Nepalis. We speak South Asian languages. We ask a lot of questions. We watch what people do, and many of us, wittingly or unwittingly, imitate what we see. But we are also undeniably Western. We ask questions like, "Why does that happen?" and "What does that event mean to you?" when most people in Nepal feel that things happen the way they do for reasons that are largely inexplicable, and that the question, "Why?" doesn't really mean very much. Although many anthropologists develop close friendships with people with whom they work—often over long periods of time, and quite devotedly—it's not always clear what they really have to offer to Nepal. We spend most of our time writing articles and books that end up in university libraries, often in an academic language that is almost impenetrable.

Development-walas have a different reputation. They clearly have access to a great deal of money by global standards, let alone by Nepali standards. The inequities of development work are glaring: the cost of a single Pajero could rebuild the entire infrastructure of any one village. And nobody even dares think what an enormous salary paid professionals must be getting. All too often, development-walas have very little idea about how Nepali society works, especially outside of Kathmandu. Most friendships exist within the development world itself, rather than between development-walas and the people they purport to assist. The idea that people in such a vastly different category would have any idea about how to help people whose lives they know so little about, seems rightly suspect to Nepalis.

Both of these impressions are based in reality to some degree, but both are also quite one-sided. Those books and articles that anthropologists produce are the sole stuff by which they get jobs or earn grants to return to Nepal. Anthropologists usually make very little money, and the status of academic life in the West—especially in the United States, where most of the anthropologists on Nepal are based—is very low indeed. (There is a saying in the United States: "Only in academia is the

competition so stiff for stakes so low.") Nobody really listens to what anthropologists have to say: just look at American foreign policy under President George W. Bush, at how little the State Department knew about life in Iraq, or at the upcoming presidential campaign, in which Democratic contender John Kerry is angling for presidency on the basis of any foreign experience at all. There is a cohort of scholars who know a lot about Nepal, but policymakers rarely listen to them.

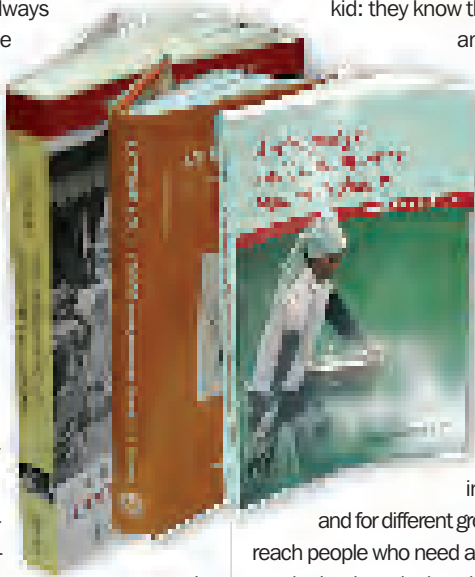
And on the other side of the equation, most development-walas actually do care a good deal about the countries in which they work, and about reducing poverty in the world. They would like to be able to direct development money to the right places. But the bureaucracies under which they are forced to work are huge, expensive, and time-consuming.

People are still having the dinner table conversations I overheard as a kid: they know that most of their projects are missing the mark, and they feel exasperated by their inability to change the larger systems to which they are beholden.

But together, anthropology and development might be able to break out of their isolated states, and actually help Nepal improve its social and economic conditions. If development-walas were to heed what anthropologists know and write about power, ethnicity, religion, gender, state structures, and cultural systems in Nepal, they might be able to design and implement better projects. Doesn't it follow that to help disadvantaged groups it might behoove a development planner to know how those groups function? With clear, culturally-based information about people's lives in different parts

and for different groups in Nepal, development projects could actually reach people who need access to reproductive health care, drinking water, good schools and education facilities, and real livelihood options.

And if anthropologists start telling development-walas what they know, they will be using their knowledge to contribute to Nepal in ways that reach far beyond the ivory tower. Studying social groups can give people in the development world, who have access to real power and real money, the information they actually need. There's a recipe in here for togetherness that has taken half a century to come to fruition. And the way committed foreigners can best help their adopted country relies on the marriage of these two social worlds: anthropology and development can help each other, and together may be better able to help Nepal. **N**



economic

Unsung Heroes

COMPASSIONATE STORIES

When Paul Theroux was still an emerging young writer, his mentor V. S. Naipaul used to tell him that no matter what, a good writer was bound to get noticed. But not every good writer is fortunate enough to be appreciated. A talented young writer, Mahesh Bikram Shah has been writing wonderful short stories for literary magazines like "Samakalin Sahitya," "Madhuparka," and "Garima" for nearly a decade and yet his name scarcely gets a mention in the Nepali literary world.

Some of Shah's formerly published stories have been compiled in books: "Sataha" (2053), "Shipahiki Swasni" (2059) and the most recent, "African Amigo." "African Amigo," which takes its title from a story in the collection, contains 15 stories published over a period of six years. Although these stories have different scopes and locales, a common thread runs through most: his concern for the poor and hungry. Shah works the cruelty and insensitivity that poverty, hunger, pain and suffering breed in village people, into his fictional characters so movingly that he would put most Marxist writers to shame.

Shah writes in the style reminiscent of 19th century writers like Guy de Maupassant and O. Henry. His stories linger on with little of interest happening till the last one or two paragraphs when he gives them a twist and ends them on an emphatically high note. His endings foreground human pathos so beautifully that the reader cannot help being deeply moved.

"Charaki," a story about a family that needs to marry off their daughter, probably captures best the overriding theme in Shah's work. In the story, men come to seek the daughter's hand, but the suitors won't marry her until the parents give the cow, Charaki, as a dowry. The family depends on the cow for a living, and anxious though the parents are to marry their daughter off, they can't afford to give the cow as dowry or sell it off to cover dowry expenses. Unable to get married the daughter commits suicide. The parents rush to where she is



lying dead, and weep. Outside, the cow cries. They fear the cow is also dying and rush to the cowshed, only to see the calf suckling on her mother's udder. Father ties the calf to a pole and starts milking the cow. Looking at the bucket filled to the brim, he smiles. Seeing him smile, Mother also smiles while the daughter lies lifeless inside.

Although most of Shah's stories work pretty well, at times they fail to pick up and fizzle out. The reader who keeps on reading his lingering narrative expecting the stories to come to life can feel disappointed. And while Shah does add a fresh voice to Nepali literature by bringing both foreign locales and provincial settings and dialects into his stories, his foreign settings sometimes seem generic. In stories like "African Amigo," "Mrigatrishna" and "Chihan," the reader cannot quite relate to the locales. But does this matter when he quite successfully brings foreign complexities into these stories and makes us relate to, or at least feel sympathetic towards, his characters' sufferings?

By Ajit Baral

SUBALTERN TEXTS

"Chitrakala Nirupan," written by Mukesh Malla, a painter and art critic, is a collection of 29 interviews and essays on contemporary Nepali artists. Although it is not an extensive writing on 20th century Nepali art, it is a good introduction for laymen about the artistic traditions of Kathmandu. The book developed out of Malla's visits to various exhibitions and covers a wide range of senior and young artists whom he interviewed, mostly on location.

The book reflects the tradition and works of master craftsmen as well as artists of the margin. There are interviews with veteran artists like Amar Chitrakar and Kalidas Shrestha, both of which were taken 13 years ago. From the interview with Shrestha we learn how Bhajuman's trip to England with Junga Bahadur Rana exposed the artist to the world of oil painting, and how Bhajuman on his return introduced the art in Nepal. The book also has interesting stories about how the artists learned their craft and how they live their lives: for example, there is a story about how Manoharman Pun used to sell traditional drugs as a hawker and ran a tiny pub in Darjeeling before he started painting. The essays also examine the different educational backgrounds of the artists: for example, did you know that Urmila Upadhyaya was educated at the esteemed L'ecole de Beaux Art in Paris? The book is packed with interviews with contemporary painters like Batsa Gopal Baidya, Shashikala Tiwari, Ragini Upadhyaya, Manohar Man, Yogendra Dangol, Uttam Nepali, Kiran Manandhar, Shyamal Shrestha, Hiralal Dangol and Ramananda Joshi.

"Chitrakala Nirupan" is a text from the margins in an age of glossy, mass-produced books. The Nepali market has dozens of small-scale publication houses which print books of poetry, fiction, essays and criticisms. Such print houses have contributed immensely to our reading culture even when western books on everything from politics and globalization to movies and art are available everywhere. Books published by such humble presses may lack the fashionably critical theories usually found in books published by big houses, but they brilliantly carry on the tradition of locals writing about locals. They document the cultures of a nation and invite readings.

By Arun Gupto N

The Longest Period of Unrest

Political parties have once again taken to the streets and the riot police are out in full force. As the turn of events in the past weeks show, the police have no permanent friends and foes: former Home Minister Bamdev Gautam himself received a bloody blow during the street protests. Sushma Joshi of Nation Weekly talked



Inspector Deep Rana

with Deep Rana, an inspector at the Nepal City Police Office at Bhrikutimandap, about his experience patrolling political protests and the challenges of his job during what he calls the longest period of unrest in Nepal's history.

How long have you been working at this beat?

I joined the City Police Office a year ago. You know what it's been like the past one year with strikes and protests. So I have been going out on the streets, and work to control the protests.

What was the toughest moment you faced?

There was a big protest in May 2003, and it got out of hand. During protests, certain areas like the Palace and Singha Durbar are closed off to the public. Bhadrakali was also cordoned off. Then protesters forcibly tried to enter. I was at the front trying to stop them. Then this little protestor grabbed my walkie-talkie and ran. I ran after him. He fell down, and my walkie-talkie fell on the ground. I was intent on retrieving it, and fell on top of him. When I was down, all these people started to kick me on the neck. When my boys saw what was happening to me, they couldn't hold back and went in and started to beat people up. Lots of politicians got beaten up that day.

What were the consequences of that event?

The DIG, Arjun Narsing, interrogated me about what had happened. I felt

like I was at the Hague Tribunal, and I was Milosevic. I explained the sequence of events, and was allowed to go.

What are your main challenges in this kind of work?

My cadres come straight from the villages. They arrive in the city, and have these plastic changes in lifestyle. They have a lot of stress on them. We have really good briefings—we tell them to make the protesters run by scattering them, or by beating them on the legs rather than hitting them on the head. But political parties don't have much credibility in the streets. People will actually come up to the police and urge them: "Beat up these corrupt leaders. They deserve to have a good beating. It makes the boys feel they are justified in their actions.

There is a rumor that businessmen in Bagbazaar and Putalisadak are trying to ban political protests in their neighborhood.

Business has gone down 15 percent in Bagbazaar and Putalisadak. The protests have been happening for a year now—this is the longest period in Nepal's history in which a political movement has been going on. In 1990, it was over in two months. I've been on the streets, and I've seen it all—it used to be around 5,000 people, and now it's no more than 2,000. People are fed up.

Do you know the student leaders?

I have a cordial relationship with them. If I see them on the streets, I ask them to control their boys, and I control mine. It makes it easier to do the job.

When violence happens, who instigates it?

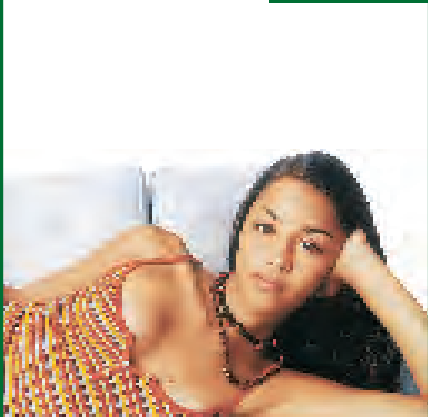
None of the incidents this past year has been provoked from the police's side. The student leaders themselves have praised us for our tolerance. We are trained from the beginning to be good to the public. Of course, it also depends upon the cadres. If there's a cadre with a UML affiliation, and he is sent out to control a Nepali Congress rally, he might see somebody who he knows and against whom he has a grudge, and decide to beat them up. That happens.

What are your personal thoughts on the political movement?

Multi-party democracy should happen, but political parties need to take the time to analyze what went wrong for the past 10 years. They need to do some introspection.

Are you afraid when you're out on the street?

In the beginning, I used to feel not fear, but anticipation when I went out on the streets about what might happen. But now I've seen the worst of it. I've been stoned so many times the dhunga-muda feels like dal-bhat now. **N**



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New Year, Old Problems

Even by Nepal's recent standards, 2060 was extremely messy. After holding out perilously for seven uneasy months, the ceasefire finally collapsed. The toll in the "people's war" galloped beyond the 10,000-mark. Once the peace process foundered, it was clear that Nepal was going to slide into a vicious cycle of violence and revenge killings. And events since then are an indication that there is more in store for the country.

Each time a ceasefire breaks down, the task of putting together another gets that much more difficult, simply because the parties to the conflict will approach the turn of events with the knowledge that previous attempts reached nowhere. And the public, whose concern for peace will remain central in cementing any peace process, becomes apathetic to the peace process.

For almost eight months now, both the security forces and the Maoists have been trying to score needless points over the other in an unwinnable war. Abductions, extra-judicial killings, rape, torture and arbitrary arrests have become so rampant that it is almost impossible to keep track of them. And it is not just the number game that is confusing (such as the wildly contradictory casualty figures given by the two parties on the Beni encounter last month). Even the human rights debate is getting extremely polarized.

At the ongoing annual meet of the UN Commission on Human Rights, Switzerland is sponsoring a resolution that would bind Nepal into improving its human rights record. India and the United States, on the other hand, are expected to block the resolution. The United States views

Nepal's Maoist problem through the prism of its global "war against terrorism," and India, which has never liked the international community's pronouncements on Kashmir, would like to see Nepal resolve the Maoist issue without outside intervention.

We understand U.S. and Indian concerns but we think more along the European line. We urge both parties to the conflict to ensure accountability for their actions. We condemn the Maoists for using child soldiers in the conflict and security forces for not applying enough restraint in their counter-insurgency measures. We welcome the Army's recent admission that Doramba was a mistake, and the various actions it says it has taken against offenders. But such acts of redemption have been few and far between.

We call on both the parties to sign a Human Rights Accord with commitments to respect international human rights and humanitarian norms. Toward that end, we call on the UN High

Commissioner for Human Rights to provide its good offices to offer technical assistance to the National Human Rights Commission in monitoring and investigating the situation of human rights in our country torn apart by the present conflict. We fear that unless the gross human rights abuses committed by both the security forces and the Maoists are quickly stopped, the spiral of violence will balloon out of control, if it has not already, and any possibility of reconciliation will be pushed back that much further. We want to restore sanity while there is still time. That will make it all the more easy to rebuild the country when the time comes—something we hope will happen sooner than later. **N**



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