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SEPTEMBER 5, 2004 VOL. I, NO. 20 भाद्र २०, २०६१ वर्ष १, अंक २०

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WEEKLY



Maoists Face Angry Civil Society

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For better or for worse, the Olympic Games are a political as well as sporting event, with enormous stakes for winners and losers.

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“ I am equally keen to see the CIAA take action against police officers ”

RAMKRISHNA BHUSAL

Young Maoists

BANDITA SIJAPATI'S COLUMN "CATCH Them Young" tells us in a nutshell the problem of the Maoist rebellion: The rebel soldiers are young and dogmatic (Guest Column, August 29). But that exactly is why the problem is ours as much as theirs.

Her journey to Makwanpur to see Maoist students was enlightening in more one way. She does well in talking about the attendant dangers of a Maoist rebellion without being too harsh on the Maoists and yet keeps short of glorifying their revolution. Like another letter writer last week ("Media's Maoist menace" by Navin Thapa), I have always felt that the Maoist problem has been much romanticized by the media and a complicit civil society. More than anything else, it may be due to their failure to analyze the events and issues at hand. What disturbs me the most is the swelling ranks of young Maoist fighters. When you have fighters as young as eleven, you can't help imagining the worst for the country. Sijapati is wary of the young fighters' "commitment"; I am scared to death by their dogmatism. Commitment to me has a positive connotation.

BINAY JOSHI
NAXAL

Mixed feeling

"ALL THAT JAZZ" HAS COVERED A watering hole that is extremely popular among the expats in Kathmandu (Lifestyle, by Aditya Adhikari, August 29). As someone who has spent a lot of time with them over the years I have come to see one thing: The expats quickly leave a place that becomes too popular, especially among the locals. Call it their love for privacy or a desire to

stand out. I am not too sure whether featuring Upstairs in your magazine was a good idea.

MAKAN GURUNG
VIA EMAIL

Humble man

MEGH ALE'S PROFILE WAS WELL DONE ("The River Guide," by Satish Jung Shahi, August 29). Thanks for highlighting a person who has put in a lot of hard work to reach where he is now. I have come to admire this man more than most other high-sounding professionals. He was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth, like so many other tourism entrepreneurs and second-generation success stories. Everyone can learn from this humble man.

SUBAS MAGAR
SAMA KHUSI

U.S. elections

SAMRAT UPADHYAY'S "A SOVEREIGN Summer" was an excellent read (Sense & Nonsense, August 29). The upcoming U.S. presidential election is going to be a dead heat, just as the 2000 elections. Bush never won the popular vote and yet won the election. So don't be surprised if something similar happens. The debate that followed the 2000 elections deadlock brought to the fore many issues that had remained buried under the carpet in the United States: minority issues, black rights, right-wing fanaticism and, of course, chad ballots. Let's hope that the American democracy functions better this election.

BISHAL KARKI
VIA EMAIL

Bush bashing

I KNOW THE ELECTION IS BIG IN THE United States now and Bush bashing is fashionable among liberals like your columnists Samrat Upadhyay and Sushma Joshi. So make hay while the sun shines.

PUSHPA PRADHAN
VIA E-MAIL

Omar of the Pacific

SWARNIM WAGLE HAS DONE A wonderful job in highlighting the achievements of K.N. Sharma ("On Migration And Omar Of The Pacific," Writing on the Wall, August 29). There are some amazing success stories abroad. While it is not so much of a surprise to see some Nepalis stand out among a much larger diaspora in Europe and the United States, they are few and far between in Asia where Nepalis are still busy toiling in the sweatshops. So Omar comes as a breath of fresh air.

TEJTHAPA
BHAISEPATI

CIAA needs support

IDON'T AGREE WITH THE ARGUMENTS offered in "More Bite" that the CIAA needs more legislative teeth to target the power centers (by John Narayan Parajuli, August 29). This in fact was a routine excuse offered by former CIAA officials for their inaction. Other things, I believe, are more important than that: the political will to pros-

ecute the guilty without vendetta and a civil society that supports the anti-corruption drive. While the media has been largely supportive of the CIAA's anti-corruption measures, it has time and again given unnecessary credence to the stories made up by the corrupt. One thesis doing the rounds is that Wagle is not the only corrupt politician and that the CIAA should have prosecuted others before booking Wagle. It's been said that Wagle is being made a scapegoat by the institution that suddenly wants to flex its muscles by going after high-profile leaders. I say this: The CIAA had to start somewhere and Wagle happened to be the one. No excuse can be offered for not taking action against him, though I personally sense that the Deuba government is dilly-dallying and delaying actions against Wagle. I am equally keen to see the CIAA take action against police officers—both the sitting and the retired ones. While politicians have rightly been fingered for their abuses, two of the most corrupt institutions in the country are the police force and the judiciary. The CIAA and the man behind the current mission, Suryanath Upadhyay, both need our support. I would be very disappointed if they were to back down—for whatever reasons. Corruption eats into the vitals of a society and someone has to take the initiative before it's too late. Maybe Upadhyay is the man of the hour. I wish him luck.

RAMKRISHNA BHUSAL
VIA EMAIL

Toast to local brews

SATISH JUNG SHAHI'S "A Toast for Good Health," about Nepal's only commercial vintner Maheshwore Lal Ranjitkar, was informative (Lifestyle, August 1). Thank you.

Maheshwore Lal has an illustrious pedigree. His father, the late Satya Lal Ranjitkar, was the first Nepali horticulturist and the pioneer of fruit preservation in Nepal. After his resignation from a government job in 1970, Satya Lal devoted the rest of life in a single-minded pursuit to develop jam and jelly under the brand name NESY.

Different kinds of wine are in vogue in different communities in Nepal. I myself have over the years tested many kinds of wine or wine-like products. I list some of them below.

VERNACULAR NAME	MADE FROM	CONSISTENCY	COMMUNITY
Bhyaabhar	Maize	Thick	Tamang
Thon	Rice	Thin to thick	Jyapu Newar
Hayun Thon	Rice	Thin to medium	Jyapu Newar
Jaad	Millet	Thin to medium	Tamang
Tongba	Millet	Thin to medium	Rai, Limbu
Nigar	Oat/Barley	Thin	Sherpa

All these products are locally made and have yet to be exploited commercially by modern winery. They hold great promise and it's time we did something about it.

SHIVA B. NEPALI PRADHAN
HORTICULTURIST

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WEEKLY

Nation Weekly, The Media House, Tripureshor,
Kathmandu, Nepal (Regd. 165/059-060).
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PUBLISHER: The Mirror Media Pvt. Ltd

AD ENQUIRIES: Tel. 4229825, 4261831, 4263098
COLOR SEPARATION: ScanPro, Pulchowk, 5548861, 5552335
PRINTING: Variety Printing Press, 4278869
DISTRIBUTION: R.B. News, 4232784, 4244679

Nation Weekly is published every Monday by The Mirror Media Pvt. Ltd.
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Vol. 1, No. 20. For the week August 30-September 5, 2004, released on August 30

C O N T A C T

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WEEKLY

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Nation Weekly, The Media House, GPO 8975
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THE NOTION
OF NATIONHOOD



WHAT'S COOKING? A trade union activist protests the closure of industries, including Soaltee Hotel by the Maoists



Blockade On My Mind

The international community must say in no uncertain terms that Maoist threats to re-impose blockades is entirely inconsistent with their desire for U.N. role in talks. And that the international involvement depends on improvements in the Maoists' respect for human rights.

BY SUMAN PRADHAN

The Maoists may have suspended their blockade of Kathmandu, but last week's episode brought to focus the stark realities of today's Nepal: The country's political process remains as deadlocked as ever. All sides involved in the eight-year-old conflict have been unable to muster the will to overcome the obstacles to a peaceful settlement. It's about time for the world to step in.

Despite our geographical isolation, it is hard to believe that the international community has not shown more interest in this ever-escalating conflict, which is arguably the deadliest in Asia. More than 10,000 people have died since the rebellion began in 1996, almost a third of them in the past year since the ceasefire between the government and the Maoists broke down.

It could have been different. In June, a new government came to office promising peace and stability. Sher Bahadur Deuba, who had been dismissed by King Gyanendra in October 2002, was reinstated by the monarch to quiet political protests and resolve the conflict. The prime minister had a good start, managing to bring together four major parties in his governing coalition and, crucially, lend his government a broad appeal.

But nearly three months later, that hope is dissipating, as the coalition partners publicly bicker about whether or not to hold peace talks with the Maoists. For their part, the Maoists have consistently said they are in favor of talks but only under U.N. auspices and only if the government agrees to their minimum demand of holding elections to a constituent assembly to write a new constitution.

In the meantime, the grim conflict continues. The rebels' hit-and-run tactics have succeeded in stretching thin the Royal Nepal Army. The blockade intensified that pressure, as Army and paramilitary units were reassigned to defend the two main highways that link Kathmandu to the outside world. The civilian population, of course, continues to endure the greatest suffering. The rebels have forcibly indoctrinated thousands of school children and teachers, and have lately been targeting joint-venture industries and journalists.

Under such circumstances, it is easy to forget that the warring sides do actually have some common ground on which to build peace. The idea of a constituent assembly, long an anathema to most political groups, has now by and large been accepted by the main parties. But the Palace is still reluctant, fearing that a new constitution would restrict

its powers. There is also fear that the Maoists could hijack any prospective constituent assembly to draw up a one-party republic with scant regard for human rights.

This is where the international community can play a very positive role. Quiet donor diplomacy has already led to the formation of a high-level peace committee comprising the four governing coalition partners and the King's representative. But a key player, the Nepali Congress, is still outside the committee and needs to be coaxed in, along with opposition parties, to lend it the broadest possible political base. The main outside powers here—India, China, the United States and Britain—should urge the committee to hold a conference involving all political forces to build a common position on constitutional reforms. This is crucial if future negotiations with the Maoists are to make any headway.

Experience has shown that the main parties have different views on reform; harmonizing their position before any peace talks therefore is paramount. But first the international community should make clear to the Maoists that they cannot return to the tactic of blockading Kathmandu or

any other part of the kingdom. The Maoists may believe the past week has achieved their minimum objective—to show that the government is not in control of the highways—but their threat to reapply the blockade in a month must be condemned internationally. Such a message should hit home, given the rebels' desire for international acceptance.

Earlier this month, UNICEF Deputy Director Kul Chandra Gautam, speaking in his personal capacity as a

Nepali citizen, struck the right note when he called for the government to accept U.N. involvement before it is too late. There is no reason why our neighbors should block such attempts because resolving the conflict peacefully is in their interests too. Most government officials here fear that U.N. involvement means instant recognition for the Maoists. Gautam made it clear that it wasn't the case. The international community, therefore, must say in no uncertain terms that Maoist threats to re-impose blockades is entirely inconsistent with their desire for U.N. role in talks, and that international involvement also depends on improvements in the Maoists' respect for human rights.

If this point could be hammered home to the Maoists, and if all political parties are united on a common constitutional agenda, then there is a real possibility of breaking the political roadblock that keeps Nepal mired in conflict. **■**

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DAMAGE CONTROL: Tourism entrepreneurs say Nepal's problems have been exaggerated by the media, both domestic and foreign

Maoist warning

The CPN-Maoist has called on the Chief Election Commissioner Keshav Raj Rajbhandari, and four other commissioners at the Election Commission, to resign from their posts within the next four days or face "serious consequences." Maoist leader Prabhakaran and the commander of the Maoist special task force for the Valley, who goes by the name Bhisani, have accused the Election Commission of "plotting to organize elections" in the country. The latest Maoist threat came a day after they called off their blockade of the Valley.

Gurkha compensation

The British government has compensated 101 ex-Gurkhas who were held as prisoners of war by the Japanese during the Second World War. Two years ago, a British court had ordered the British government to pay compensation of 10,000 pounds to each prisoner of war. The Kathmandu office of the Far East Prisoners of War has received 1,400 applications for the compensation. The office will remain in Kathmandu until 2005, by which time all eligible claimants must apply for compensations.

FNJ ultimatum

The Federation of Nepalese Journalists has given a seven-day ultimatum until August 31 to Maoist leaders to make public their stand on press freedom. It has also asked the Maoists to hand over the body of journalist

Dekendra Raj Thapa to his family, to provide compensation to his family and take action against those involved in the murder of Thapa. It has asked the Maoists to make public whereabouts of abducted journalists Dhan Bahadur Magar, Kul Bahadur Malla and Parej Raj Shahi. The FNJ has threatened to boycott Maoist-related news if the demands were not met within the specified date.

Rapist dacoits

Dacoits from neighboring Indian villages are reported to have raped at least a dozen women in Harchagadi, Morang, 25 kilometers east of Biratnagar. The women reported the incident at the local police post. Among the victims, six were married women aged 27 to 35 years, while the rest were unmarried girls between 15 to 18. Some 25 fami-

lies have left the village. The dacoits raped the women because they did not find valuable goods in the houses, according to the victims. The victims were gang-raped in front of their husbands and parents, reports said. Babaita Devi from a village in neighboring Dainiya VDC was murdered after she was raped.

Arrest Wagle

The Special Court sent a written order to the Kathmandu District Court to arrest and confiscate the property of Chiranjivi Wagle, who was convicted on charges of corruption on July 22. The court sentenced Wagle to two and half years in prison and imposed a fine of Rs. 27.2 million on him. Officials at the Kathmandu District Court have reportedly started collecting details concerning Wagle's property to be sent to the Revenue Department. The Kathmandu District Court has also sent an official letter to Wagle informing him of the Special Court's final verdict.

Maoist camp

Police in the Indian state of Uttaranchal found a Maoist training camp in a forest near Chorgaliya and Hanspur in Nainital district during a search operation, reported Dainik Jagaran, an Indian daily. The find

came after the Special Security Bureau carried out the search operation. The Indian police had intensified their search operations based on information that armed people in combat fatigues were active in the area. Additional paramilitary forces have been deployed following the discovery, the daily said.

Talk team

The Maoist-aligned student body, the ANNISU-R formed a four-member team for talks with the government. The committee comprises central secretariat members Ramesh Malla and Shivaram Yadhav, Office Secretary Suresh Gautam and General Secretary Himal Sharma. Sharma is alleged to be in Army custody. The students said they would sit for talks after consultation with other student unions. The government said it had not received confirmation from the Maoists on the appointment of a talks team.

TU quotas

Tribhuvan University announced reservation quotas for women, dalits and ethnic students. The university said 20 percent quotas will be made available for women, 15 percent for dalits and 10 percent for students from ethnic communities.

No to Kuwait

The government temporarily suspended work permits for Kuwait and Jordan. The move comes after militants abducted 13 Nepalis in Iraq. A large number of Nepalis have entered Iraq through Kuwait and Jordan. After the hostage crisis, the Jordanian government has dissolved the Amman-based employment agency Morning Star Company, which was responsible for sending the 13 Nepalis to work in Iraq. Meanwhile, police in Kathmandu have arrested six persons from two employment agencies for sending workers illegally to Iraq. Offices of Quick Manpower Agency and Pioneer Manpower Agency

were raided, and 24 Nepali passports were recovered. In related news, the Iraqi interim government arrested 14 Nepalis for entering Iraq illegally.



Blockade off

The Maoist “district chiefs” of Dhading, Nuwakot, Rauswa, Sindhupalchowk and Makawanpur said they were postponing the Valley’s blockade for a month. They said that the blockade was called off after requests from the civil society, political parties and intellectuals. In another development, the Maoist trade union said the ban and 12 businesses in the Valley will remain. They have also ordered all businesses with U.S. investments to close.

Int’l intervention

The Asian Human Rights Commission said that immediate international intervention is needed to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe in Nepal. The Hong Kong-based organization said that the situation of law and order and internal security is deteriorating, reflecting government’s inability to ensure safety and security for its people. Urging the international community to condemn the killing of civilians by both sides to the conflict, the Maoists and the government forces, the commission said the international community should consider current events as a sign of warning and intervene to encourage both sides to head for peace talks.

Women’s varsity

To raise funds for the establishment of a women’s university, Padmakanya Multiple Campus organized a *Srimadbhagawati Mahayagya*. The 53-year-old campus hopes to raise over Rs.100 million from the program. The campus was able to collect more than Rs.1.1 million on its first day. The *Mahayagya* runs for seven days.

More fare

The Civil Aviation Authority has recommended a seven percent increase in airfares. The recommendation comes amid

growing pressure from air transport entrepreneurs on the Ministry for Tourism and Civil Aviation to increase the airfare. The airlines said that they had been operating at a loss since the increase in the price of aviation fuel. The airlines have been demanding an increase of Rs. 200 for flights whose flight time is less than an hour and Rs. 300 on longer flights.

VDC resignations

Fifty-one secretaries of Parbat’s village development committees resigned en masse citing security reasons. The Maoists had accused them of misusing the VDC budgets and ordered them to resign. The secretaries collectively handed their resignation to the local development officer and board chairman of the district development committee, reports said. The resignation has caused a lot of inconvenience for the people in Parbat. Such administrative works as verification of family relations, recommendations for the citizenship, details of elderly allowance, marriage registration, and birth and death registrations have come to a halt.

Refugees critical

Bhutanese refugees in Jhapa and Morang criticized the Bhutanese government’s campaign to distribute new citizenship certificates to its nationals. They said the new citizenship campaign was yet another plot to make them “non-Bhutanese” after their repatriation. The Bhutanese government started issuing new citizenship identity cards from August 20.

Lever bombing

Maoist rebels detonated three bombs simultaneously at the main factory of Nepal Lever Limited, a major Nepal-India joint venture company, at Basamadi in Hetauda. A group of armed rebels took control of the security guards at the factory before setting off the bombs, reports said. The details of the loss were not available by the time we went to press. The Indian Embassy has condemned the attack and demanded actions against those responsible.

Transport strike

Transport entrepreneurs in the Eastern region have called an indefinite strike starting from Au-

gust 26. The strike was called against the Department of Transport Management’s decision to issue permits to light vehicles on the hill routes. Entrepreneurs said that the permits were a complete violation of established regulations. Over 500 buses are expected to remain off the roads.

NC supremo

President of Nepali Congress Girija Prasad Koirala was stopped from boarding a flight to Bhairahwa by security personnel at the Kathmandu airport. The Army spokesman, Rajendra Bahadur Thapa, said that the former prime minister had not informed the security personnel of his trip. He denied any misbehavior on the part of the security personnel and said he regretted the incident. The NC spokesman Arjun Narsingh K. C. denounced the move. The government has formed a five-member committee under Medini Prasad Sharma, joint secretary at the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, to investigate the incident.





SURE HOME PREGNANCY TEST KIT

Population Services International Nepal has launched the Sure Home Pregnancy Test Kit. Sure is a discrete, reliable and easy-to-use home pregnancy test kit that provides quick results. Sure is affordable at Rs. 20 and is available in selected medical outlets as well as some general stores. Population Services International Nepal is a non-profit organization working in the areas of HIV/AIDS prevention, maternal child health and family planning. Marketing home pregnancy test kit not only encourages women to detect pregnancy early, but also allows women the much needed option of consulting a physician for pre-natal care if they are pregnant, thereby increasing their chances of having a healthy pregnancy and birth. Sure is also an ideal "gateway product" for consumers, especially women, to find out more information on available family planning methods, with the aim of encouraging increased contraceptive use as appropriate.

BPL TV IN MARKET

BPL televisions have been introduced in the Nepali market by Jaiswal Enterprises, the official seller and distributor of the television sets in the country. BPL TVs are available in five



different sizes (14', 20', 21', 25' and 29'). They have been manufactured with technical assistance from Sanyo, a popular Japanese brand. They are equipped with quadra point focus, white tone and plug and play features, 100 channel settings and 150-watt sound system. According to Mr. Rajendra Jaiswal, proprietor of Jaiswal Enterprises, BPL televisions meet the standard of Sanyo electronic goods.

BEAUTI AND BOUTIKA-2004 TO AWARD MR. INNOVATIVE

The Beauti and Boutika-2004 program scheduled to be held on September 9-13 at the Birendra International Convention Centre will include the Mr. Innovative 2004 contest, as part of the exhibition. A man between the age of 16 and 30 will be selected as Mr. Innovative, based on a set of questions asked during the final round. Out of the 40-50 entries each day, two will be selected. Among the final eight entries, one lucky winner will be selected as Mr. Innovative. He will win prizes worth Rs. 10,000 in cash and six months of free haircuts.

PHONE SERVICE WITH OPTICAL FIBER

The installation of optical fiber cable between Bhadrapur in the eastern Mechi district to Lamahi in Rapti district in the West under the East-West Highway has been completed. Optical fiber lines have been installed along 900 kilometers from Bhadrapur to Lamahi at a depth of one and a half meters. This technology is more dependable than traditional telephone lines. According to Nepal Telecom, once the new

technology comes into effect, telephone services improve in quality, and 10,000 customers will be able to call overseas simultaneously. The technology is already in use in Kathmandu and Biratnagar on a trial basis. The total cost of installing optical fiber is Rs. 1.74 billion out of which Rs. 1.34 billion was provided as assistance by the Indian government the rest was met by Nepal Telecom. The next phase will cover the Lamahi-Kanchanpur segment.

HULAS MUSTANG VANS LAUNCHED

Hulas Motors, the only auto manufacturer in the country, started commercial sales of its four-wheel pick-up vans. The new Mustang models were unveiled at a function organized by the Morang Trade Association. According to Surendra Golchha, managing director of Hulas Motors, the Nepal-made vans are capable of carrying 25 percent more load than Indian-made vans.

COUNTRY CRACKER

Quality Biscuit Company recently launched Country Cracker, a low-calorie, sugar-free biscuit with high fiber content and rich in vitamins. The biscuit is ideal for people suffering from diabetes and also suitable for people with high blood pressure because of its low salt content.

NATIONAL HYDRO POWER SHARES

National Hydro Power Company recently announced the flotation of shares worth Rs. 140 million at the rate of Rs.100 per share. Of the total shares, 70,000 shares will be reserved for NHPC employees and the remaining 1,330,000 shares will be made available for the public. NHPC was established in 1996 by N.B. Group to develop small and medium size hydropower projects. Indrawati III was one of the first to be constructed by the company. It has a capacity of 7.5MW and produces 51 million kilowatt-hours of electricity in a normal year.



Proposed Revised Flight Schedule
(Covering remote sectors)
Effective from 25 JUN-15 SEP'04

Lost

Sangina Vaidya—Nepal's best Olympic hope to date—never made it beyond the first round in Athens. Her defeat came against Shih Hsin Chen of the Chinese Taipei, who later went on to win the gold in the flyweight (under 49kg) category. The Taiwanese thrashed the Nepal's lone star 4-0. While Sangina's loss to the Asian champ was hardly a shock, she failed to make any headway in the battle for bronze: She was again knocked out in the first round by the Cambodian, Mora Romero Gladys Alicia, who defeated her 5-1.

A lot was expected of the Bruce Lee fan. With 18 medals, including 15 golds and a silver in South Asian championships, she is certainly South Asia's undisputed taekwondo queen. She has golds in the last two SAF Games. She also brought home a gold from the 12th Asian Taekwondo Championships held in Australia in 1996. She confirmed her place in the Athens Games and in Nepal's sporting history when she finished third in the flyweight category at the Asian Taekwondo Qualification Tournament in Bangkok in February.

Although she started with wushu in her early teens, Sangina soon decided it was going to be taekwondo. And taekwondo it was all the way. Early this year, the 29-year-old was named Player of the Year by Nepal Sports Journalists' Forum. She was also awarded the prestigious Trishakti Patta.

With her loss, Nepal's dream of an elusive Olympic win has to wait for another four years. "I might retire after the Olympics," Sangina had said before she left for the Olympics. It now remains to be seen where she will go from here. Despite her loss, however, she will be an inspiration for a new generation of Nepali athletes. Her records outside Nepal speak for her.



nm/ss

From	To	Flight Nto.	Days of Operation	Dep. Time	Arr. Time	Rupee Tariff One way	Dollar Tariff One way	Remarks	
Kathmandu	Lukla	YA 111	Daily	0630	0705	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Lukla	YA 101	Daily	0635	0710	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Lukla	YA107	Daily	0810	0845	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Lukla	YA113	1,2,3,4,5,7	0815	0850	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Rumjatar	YA 221	2,4,7	0950	1025	1245	61	DHC-6/300	
	Phaplu	YA 181	1,3,5	0955	1030	1480	85	DHC-6/300	
	Manang	YA 601	6	0815	0915	2995	122	DHC-6/300	
	Simara	YA 147	Daily	1135	1200	970	55	DHC-6/300	
	Simara	YA 141	Daily	1300	1325	970	55	DHC-6/300	
	Simara	YA 143	Daily	1430	1455	970	55	DHC-6/300	
	Bharatpur	YA 173	Daily	1115	1140	1160	61	DHC-6/300	
	Bharatpur	YA 175	Daily	1400	1425	1160	61	DHC-6/300	
	Biratnagar	YA 151	Daily	0700	0740	2585	85	SAAB 340B	
	Biratnagar	YA 153	Daily	1040	1120	2585	85	SAAB 340B	
	Biratnagar	YA 155	Daily	1620	1700	2585	85	SAAB 340B	
	Pokhara	YA 131	Daily	0905	0930	1710	67	SAAB 340B	
	Pokhara	YA 135	Daily	1530	1555	1710	67	SAAB 340B	
	Bhadrapur	YA 121	Daily	1200	1250	2950	109	SAAB 340B	
	Nepalgunj	YA 177	Daily	1245	1345	3500	109	SAAB 340B	
	Bhairahawa	YA 163	Daily	1425	1500	2220	79	SAAB 340B	
	Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 152	Daily	0800	0840	2585	85	SAAB 340B
	Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 154	Daily	1140	1220	2585	85	SAAB 340B
	Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 156	Daily	1720	1800	2585	85	SAAB 340B
	Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 132	Daily	0950	1015	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 136	Daily	1615	1640	1710	67	SAAB 340B	
Bhadrapur	Kathmandu	YA 122	Daily	1310	1400	2950	109	SAAB 340B	
Nepalgunj	Kathmandu	YA 178	Daily	1405	1505	3500	109	SAAB 340B	
Bhairahawa	Kathmandu	YA 164	Daily	1520	1555	2220	79	SAAB 340B	
Lukla	Kathmandu	YA 112	Daily	0720	0755	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 102	Daily	0725	0800	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 108	Daily	0900	0935	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 114	1,2,3,4,5,7	0905	0940	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
Rumjatar	Kathmandu	YA 222	2,4,7	1040	1115	1245	79	DHC-6/300	
Phaplu	Kathmandu	YA 182	1,3,5	1045	1120	1480	85	DHC-6/300	
Manang	Kathmandu	YA 602	6	0930	1030	2995	122	DHC-6/300	
Simara	Kathmandu	YA 148	Daily	1215	1240	970	55	DHC-6/300	
Simara	Kathmandu	YA142	Daily	1340	1405	970	55	DHC-6/300	
Simara	Kathmandu	YA144	Daily	1510	1535	970	55	DHC-6/300	
Bharatpur	Kathmandu	YA 174	Daily	1155	1220	1160	61	DHC-6/300	
Bharatpur	Kathmandu	YA 176	Daily	1440	1505	1160	61	DHC-6/300	
Nepalgunj	Dolpa	YA 717	1	0630	0715	1315	85	DHC-6/300	
	Simikot	YA 711	4	0630	0730	1800	96	DHC-6/300	
Dolpa	Nepalgunj	YA 718	1	0730	0815	1315	85	DHC-6/300	
Simikot	Nepalgunj	YA 712	4	0745	0845	1800	96	DHC-6/300	
Surkhet	Jumla	YA 713	2	0705	0740	970	63	DHC-6/300	
	Rara	YA 715	3	0705	0745	1800	96	DHC-6/300	
Jumla	Surkhet	YA 714	2	0755	0830	970	63	DHC-6/300	
Rara	Surkhet	YA 716	3	0800	0845	1800	96	DHC-6/300	

Monday 1, Tuesday 2, Wednesday 3, Thursday 4, Friday 5, Saturday 6, Sunday 7

■ Subject to change without prior notice.

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Tribhuvan Airport Office:

4493901, 4493428

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

The story behind the first large-scale abduction of Nepalis in Iraq is unfolding. The time has come for the government to regulate the Iraqi market and start cracking down on culprits.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

FAR AWAY FROM HOME, THERE is another killing field waiting for Nepalis. Most seem happy to go, even if it requires a bit of self-deception and the willingness to turn a blind eye to the lies of the crooked agents and middlemen. Three Nepalis have already lost their lives in Iraq, one in Basra and two in Baghdad in the past few months. Another succumbed to jaundice in Mumbai, en-route to Iraq this month.

"We don't know who took my son to Iraq," says Jit Bahadur Khadka, father of Ramesh Khadka, who was abducted with 11 other Nepalis on August 19. "I appeal to the kidnappers to release my son and other Nepalis," pleads Khadka's mother, Radha in grief. But Ramesh is not the only one.

As many as 23 Nepalis could have been kidnapped in Iraq in August, according to a government official. Fourteen others have been arrested by the Iraqi government for illegally entering Iraq.

Nepal's Foreign Ministry has confirmed 12 abductions. The Amman-based recruiting company, Morning Star, had subcontracted 67 Nepalis to work in Iraq—out of which 12 have been abducted.

Details are still sketchy, but a militant group, the Army of Ansar al-Sunna, has shown pictures of Nepali hostages on its website. It's hard to speculate why the militants have targeted the Nepalis until the Nepal government establishes a clear communication of line with them. But militants have said they want to set an "example to all the collaborators of American and other imperialist forces and to those combating Islam." In a vaguely-worded charge, the Iraqi militants accuse the Nepalis of supporting the American "infidels" in their crusade against Iraq but everyone is at a loss to explain why Nepalis, neither citizens of a powerful country nor with any established connections with "the American infidels," have been targeted.

"As far as the militants are concerned, the Nepalis are being taken hostage for specific reasons," says Bishnu Rimal, vice chairperson of the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions. The Iraqi militants increasingly see the Nepalis in Iraq as mercenaries working for the British and the Americans, he adds, claiming that a growing number of Nepalis are working for American and British security companies based in Iraq. The number of Nepalis caught in the Iraqi quagmire is rising, but none of the culprits behind the rackets that get them there have been nailed.

But who is the culprit? Government officials say they cannot be blamed as the hostages crossed into Iraq illegally, though they admit they have moral responsibility to do their best to free the hostages. By all indications, the employment agencies were willing to go far to cash in on the Nepalis' desperate search for employment. The employment agencies say the government is responsible as much as the agencies. There are allegations that some labor officials maybe hand in glove with the culprits. Many smell foul play behind the government reluctance to take action against Moonlight Consultancy, the employment agency that's responsible for sending the abductees to Jordan. Officials avoid directly commenting on whether they would take actions against the operators of Moonlight Consultancy.

"We have formed a committee to probe the incident," says an official, insisting that the government would take action only after the probe is complete.

The director of Moonlight Consultancy, K.B. Rana, confirmed nine names out of 12 as having gone through his agency, but he denied that he or his firm had anything to do with workers going to Iraq. Here in Nepal, police raided offices of two recruiting agencies



NOT ME: Moonlight Consultancy's director K. B. Rana talking to Radha Khadka, mother of an abductee

State of Shock

**BY SHUSHAM SHRESTHA
IN LELE, LALITPUR**

In a humble house on a gravel road, the family of 19-year-old Ramesh Khadka is wondering why an Islamic militant group in far-away Iraq would hold him hostage.

Ramesh's father, 55-year-old Jit Bahadur Khadka, holds onto a picture posted on an Islamist website and repeatedly reproduced in newspapers that shows his son demurely holding his passport in front of the militants' banner. "All we can do is pray for his safety and his safe return," says the father, who is in tears.

The government has appealed for the release of the 12 Nepalis abducted but says it has no independent information on their whereabouts.

Ramesh is one of five children, four sons and a daughter. The family survives in Lele by sell-

ing milk to the local dairy and working in the fields. Khadka says the family had taken a Rs. 150,000 loan in belief that his son was heading to Jordan. The sum is a fortune for the family, he says. He recalls his son saying, "Since things are not looking up in Nepal, why not go abroad to make some money?"

"I don't understand why and how Ramesh got into Iraq in the first place," says his 23-year-old brother, Sudarshan Khadka. "His employment company in Kathmandu had said he would be going to Jordan to work as a cook at a hotel in Amman, as he had trained as a cook in Kathmandu." Sudarshan says his brother's employment company in Kathmandu had promised that he would be able to earn at least \$400 a month.

In Amman, Haytham Mohammad, assistant manager of

the Morning Star employment agency, says the Nepalis were hired to work there but like "everyone who comes to Jordan," they heard of higher paying jobs in Iraq and decided to try their luck.

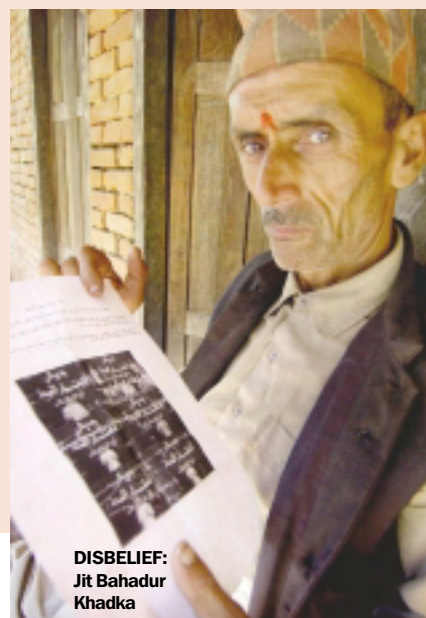
The family last heard from Ramesh a month ago when he called from Jordan to say that he was still without work. "He is not even politically motivated, let alone [interested in] helping a foreign country's army in a foreign land," Sudarshan Khadka adds.

Bishnu Khadka, Ramesh's 16-year-old sister, says the family first heard about his situation while watching television Sunday evening. Officials at the labor and foreign ministries

have assured the family that they are doing all they can to free Ramesh.

Neighbor Sudarshan Dattel says, "We are really surprised by the charges against the Nepalis abducted in Iraq. They had gone to work in Jordan as cooks at a hotel. I think they have been framed." Nepal had declined U.S. requests to send troops to Iraq, saying its army had its hands full with the Maoists.

(Shrestha writes for AFP, the French news agency.)



ROK ELLIOT/AFP

who were reportedly taking interviews to send Nepalis to Iraq. The police took into custody the operators of Quick and Pioneer Manpower Agency days after militants kidnapped Nepalis in Iraq.

This is the second kidnapping incident involving Nepalis in Iraq. In April one Nepali was kidnapped along with two Turks and two Indians. The Army of Ansar al-Sunna, kidnappers of Nepalis hostages, is a dangerous outfit, believed to be an offshoot of Ansar al-Islam, "Defenders of Islam," a group with ties to al-Qaeda. The group has been involved in killings of civilians including Iraqi "collaborators," Canadians and Britons.

The Army of Ansar Al-Sunna staged a high-profile attack in February this year when it struck the offices of two prominent Kurdish political parties. Suicide bombers entered the PUK and KDP headquarters in Erbil, Kurdistan, an autonomous Kurdish enclave in the north of Iraq, and detonated bombs simultaneously, killing 109 people, including

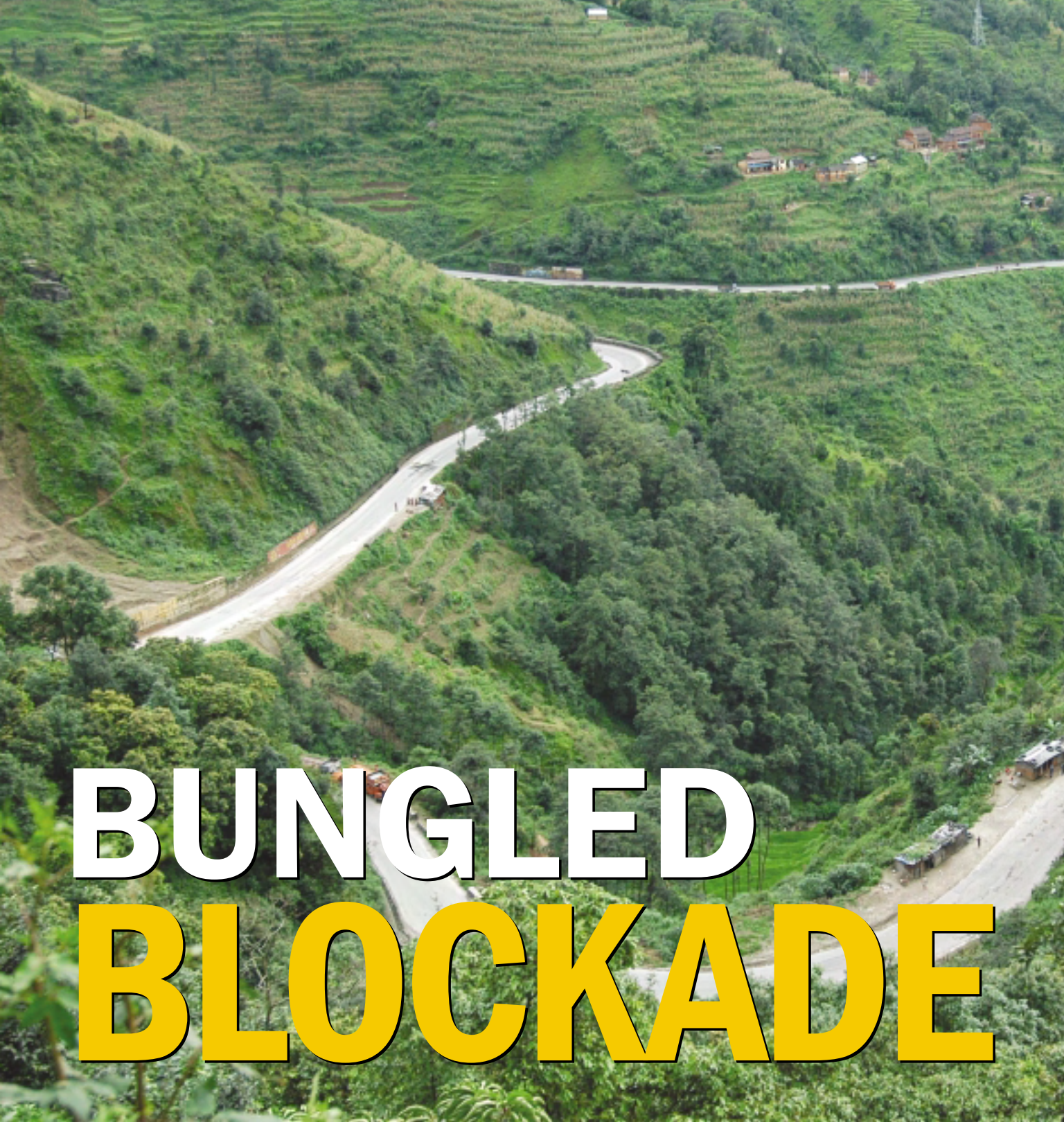
KDP Deputy Prime Minister Sami Abdul Rahman and KDP Minister of Agriculture Saad Abdullah.

Iraq is rapidly becoming an eyesore for the Nepali government. The government has long banned Iraq as a labor destination for Nepalis, but hundreds of Nepalis are bypassing the official prohibition to reach this forbidden destination. "There has been repeated oversight from the government officials too," says Dan Bahadur Tamang, former president of the Federation of Foreign Employment Agencies Association. Not just oversight there has been gross negligence on the part of the government. The shocking tale of Nepalis stranded in Mumbai is a testimony to it.

Thousands of Iraq-bound Nepalis are stranded in Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, Kuwait and Jordan. Sujit Mahat has reportedly died of jaundice while waiting for his visa to go to Iraq. Most of the job seekers took loans or sold property to go to Iraq. Now that the touts have taken

their money, they have nowhere to go. Some women job seekers have started taking odd jobs in Mumbai, and some even have reportedly taken to prostitution in a city notorious for its red-light districts. Reports coming from Mumbai say some 2,500 of those stranded there have been rescued and sent back home with the help of local NGOs.

The Iraq issue is increasingly becoming problematic both for the government and the recruiting agencies. It's a test of their commitment to the people who have been and are being tricked to collect the forbidden fruit in former Mesopotamia, where legend says the Garden of Eden once existed. The government needs to regulate the Iraqi market and start cracking down on unscrupulous agents and fly-by-night companies who are devising fraudulent ways to break the law under the government's very nose. **N**



BUNGLED BLOCKADE

The blockade failed because most people ignored it. That's hardly a resounding victory for the government, but it may be enough of a blow to the Maoists to edge them toward the negotiating table. So the civil society hopes.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

AFTER TRYING THE nerves of Valley's residents for a week, the Maoists finally called off—postponed, in their terms—their indefinite blockade of the capital. A statement issued by their “district government chiefs” had grown mellow in the intervening

week. “We are calling it off on the request of the civil society and human rights activists...,” the statement said. That surely must have been an excuse to pull out from an action that most people had ignored and that was about to backfire. By the time the blockade was called off last Tuesday, the Maoists knew they had antagonized quite a large section of the Valley's residents. Civil society leaders were angry; the media was livid.



Karki, president of the NGO Federation. And there are reasons to believe that the Maoists still care about how the civil society responds to them. It is perhaps because the civil society still recognizes them as a political force and it holds the key to their legitimacy. The media played a crucial role in telling the Maoists that the blockade was a very unpopular decision. And for once, the government and the media seemed to have made peace. "The media coverage helped in belittling the blockade," says Army spokesman Rajendra Bahadur Thapa.

Analysts now say the Maoists made a hasty move in announcing the blockade in the first place and completely misread the mood of the Valley's residents. But it was always going to be difficult to close down the country's nerve center. Kathmandu, after all, is both the country's economic and political hub and the state was bound to go to great lengths to keep the highways open.

The Maoists must have held high hopes, though. The blockade called by their "district governments" in Dhading, Nuwakot, Rasuwa, Makwanpur and Sindhupalchowk had the full blessings of their central leadership. Analysts say they were testing the Kathmandu waters, the seat of the "reactionary" government, before launching their "final offensive."

The officials describe it as their "endgame," their last shot to bring the government to its knees. "The Maoists are trying to exploit the fear of banda that is deeply rooted in people's psyche," says the Army spokesman Thapa. They had hoped to attain much more, he says.

Independent observers say the blockade had several objectives. The first was psychological. The Maoists wanted to prove that they had attained more than a "strategic equilibrium" and that they were capable of taking on the state's security apparatus head on. "The Maoists wanted to make their presence felt without firing a single shot," says Narayan Wagle, editor of Kantipur. It ended up, at best, as a mixed blessing for them, he says.

That's not how the officials view the blockade and its aftermath. A senior Army official says that the security forces didn't encounter a single Maoist along the highways for all seven days of the blockade. The Maoists will now have to redraw their strategy if and when the

"The blockade collapsed due to two reasons," says Minendra Rijal, spokesman for NC-D, the prime minister's party. "First, it never enjoyed popular support, and second, the Maoists just don't have the resources to sustain an indefinite blockade." The Maoists were certainly not hoping to beat the 30,000 security personnel manning the Valley. They attempted to create a virtual blockade for other reasons, say civil society leaders.

"The blockade was more a psychological tactic," says Krishna Pahadi, a human rights worker. The Maoists never manned the highways to ensure the strict implementation of their decree in a military sense. It was more to see if their whip would override the government's presence in the Valley.

There is every reason to believe that pressure from civil society forced the Maoists on the back foot. "It's a success of sorts for the civil society," says Arjun

'No Military Solution To The Conflict'

The United Nations Resident Representative **Matthew Kahane** spoke with Akhilesh Upadhyay about the U.N. role in Nepal's conflict.

What is the U.N. position on mediation/facilitation in Nepal's conflict?

The position of the secretary general is that his good offices are always available for facilitation. The secretary general is willing to meet various actors in Nepal's conflict should the state wish so.

How best can the United Nations do that?

To begin with, we can help the parties in the conflict meet without putting up formal preconditions. This could be quiet preparatory talks.

There are speculations that some of that is already underway?

I am not aware of that.

How does the United Nations view the situation in Nepal?

First, we are very concerned about the situation in the country. Daily loss of lives of all sections of the population. Frequent closures of schools, colleges, bandas, and now the blockade. Second, this is a war

and there has been a great deal of military buildup. It could be difficult to get the opposing sides into a peace process because they mutually feel stronger about the conflict because they have built up strong feelings about the conflict. This is a political conflict and can only be solved with the Nepali parties coming together.

Has Nepal's plight drawn enough attention of the international community?

What has intrigued us is that the mainstream international media has neglected Nepal for months and months on end. I am delighted to see much more of international coverage of Nepal



even if it's because of the blockade. But the way they have presented the turn of events doesn't quite reflect the situation on the ground. Nepal's have been very resilient in dealing with the situation.

There is a feeling here among a section of the society that that the international community now views that it's endgame in Nepal and that the country could be better served by an intervention of some sorts?

No. That's not the case. There's no military solution to the conflict. The United Nations however could help if the government and all sides agree.

The overriding fear among the critics of U.N. participation is that its involvement will legitimize the existence of two states

within a state, something that the Maoists badly want—again according to the critics?

We simply don't see it that way at all. There needs to be some form of peace process. For such talks to be going anywhere, the two sides should talk to each other seriously. That's not an issue of conferring legitimacy.

What's the U.N. track record as mediator/facilitator in conflict situations?

As varied as the conflicts have been. I can talk about the situation in Tajikistan with some authority since I was there. The mechanism put in place through United Nations allowed the parties to come together.

Lately, a lot has been mentioned here about the South African experience?

The authorities in South Africa recognized Nelson Mandela and they had to deal with him. Mandela and F. W. de Clerk had the stature and moral authority in front of their people.

Does Nepal have Mandela and de Clerk to deal with the current situation?

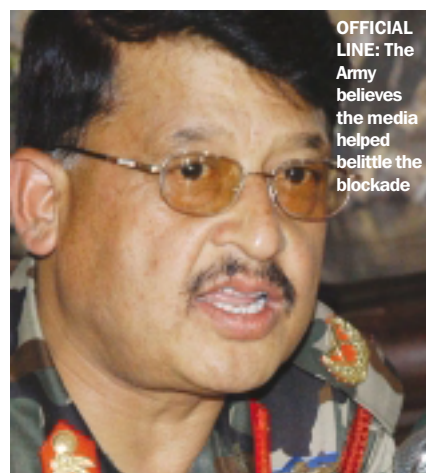
That's for the Nepalis to decide. **N**

blockade resumes—in a month if their demands are not met, according to the Maoist statement last week.

Secondly, the Maoists wanted to raise the morale of their war-weary fighters. The argument is that the Maoists, over the years, have kept their ranks motivated more from the talk of their military offensives than by the military offensives themselves. The third objective was to send a message to the international community that Nepal is a failed state, and that the Maoists are capable of doing anything, including suffocating the capital.

Analysts believe that a prolonged siege, even a virtual one, would send Nepal's friends into a state of panic. Many say the Indian contingency plan to airdrop supplies to Kathmandu was a clear hint of Indian concerns. Although

the press secretary at the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu, Sanjay Verma, denied media reports that JN Dixit, the Indian national security advisor, had convened a meeting of the security chiefs in the



OFFICIAL LINE: The Army believes the media helped belittle the blockade

South Bloc to discuss the contingency plan, many in Kathmandu believe the information may have been deliberately leaked and later denied. "The Maoists will have to be blamed for taking the country this far," says Pahadi.

Political instability and security situation are likely to top the agenda during Prime Minister Deuba's visit to New Delhi slated for September 8-11.

The blockade may have gained the Maoists some propaganda value among the cadres, but the message to the international community may have backfired: The last thing the ultra-nationalistic Maoists want is foreign involvement. And the blockade failed to impress residents of the Valley. In trying to strangle the capital by blocking its supply lines, the Maoists are employing the



BLOCKADE: It's over for now, but the Maoists have threatened to be back

same tactics as the king they say they loathe most, Prithivi Narayan Shah. Once the Maoists mocked his tactics as “feudalistic.” Last week they were emulating his campaign. There is a huge gap between what they say and do.

The press has turned away from the Maoists since the killing of journalist Dekendra Raj Thapa. To many in the media, the blockade was just another instrument for the Maoists to push for their core demands one last time before the peace process gets underway: U. N. mediation and a constituent assembly. “It was a clear shift in Maoist tactics,” says Kantipur’s Wagle. The Maoists were trying to pressure the government without a large-scale bloodbath—a clear shift from tactics of mere killing and violence.

One Maoist demand that has been consistent is the call for U.N. involvement. And even the United Nations believes that it has a role to play in Nepal, provided that all parties to the conflict so want. The role could range from facilitation to active political mediation. Secretary General Kofi Annan’s special envoy, Samuel Tamrat, has been making frequent forays to Nepal in recent months and meeting with all kinds of leaders—from the civil society and the political parties. Kul Chandra Gautam, U. N. Assistant Secretary General who was in town recently, gave a well-rounded argument on why United Nations should be



KEEP MOVING: The public face of a banda

asked to step in now. “If Nepal can take help from the international community for development, in procuring weapons and training its armed forces to fight the Maoists, it can very well do so to restore peace in the country,” he said.

The United Nations remains open about its role in Nepal, say civil society leaders who have met U.N. officials, including the secretary general, Kofi Annan. Unlike most countries, the United Nations is seen as neutral by all parties to the conflict. At the end of the day, however, the differences have to be sorted out among the Nepali actors, says Matthew Kahane, the U.N. resident representative in Nepal. But the presence of an objective third party could significantly narrow down the differences.

The last two peace process could possibly have been salvaged in the presence of a credible third party.

Activists say U. N. presence is key to stopping human rights violations, which then holds the key to creating an environment congenial for talks. NGO Federation’s Karki believes that the United Nations can work in partnership with local institutions to facilitate the peace process, even if the warring parties can’t agree on its active role.

“It’s wrong to allege that both the parties are not serious about the talks,” says Karki. “My impression is that they are doing serious homework to broker a peace.” It remains to be seen whether the failed blockade will hasten the elusive peace process. **N**

SCARY BUSINESS

The Maoist ban on businesses with U.S. investments has sent the business community into a tailspin. There is massive confusion on the ground.

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

THE MAOIST-ALIGNED ALL Nepal Trade Union Federation's demand on August 27, Friday, for the closure of all businesses with U.S. investments has confused the business community. Many businesspeople are plain nervous over the topic of whether their companies fall under the Maoist rule while others just don't know what to make of it.

The Maoists' earlier call for the closure of 12 businesses, including the Soaltee Hotel, cited concern for workers' exploitation. No such concern seems to have driven this move: Unions doubt that companies with U.S. investors are any worse than others.

"If the Maoist move has to do anything with labor exploitation then why differentiate American from Nepali, Japanese or any other investors?" questions Bishnu Rimal, vice chairperson of GEFONT, the largest trade union organization. "The Maoist move is like saying a black cat would not hunt a mouse while a white cat would." GEFONT has ties to the CPN-UML; the other major unions, NTUC and DECONT, are aligned with the Nepali Congress. All three unions have jointly protested the latest Maoist move and the closure of the 12 businesses since August 17. Thousands of workers are now jobless.

Apart from the job losses, Rimal is concerned which businesses were subject to the Maoist order. "The Maoists have now forced us to think who the foreign investors are and the level of their stakes in Nepali companies, and who is

a potential Maoist target." President of the umbrella organization of industries, the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industries, Binod Bahadur Shrestha said he wasn't ready for comments and was "following the developments closely." Very similar were responses from other business leaders.

The Soaltee Crowne Plaza Hotel, one among the 12 businesses ordered by the Maoists earlier to shut down, had contacted its employees verbally to resume services starting August 28, Saturday. The assumption was that since

their shareholders, in hopes they wouldn't become the next Maoist targets. Bottlers Nepal, which produces the famous U.S. brand Coca-Cola, said that U.S. investors no longer hold any stakes in the company. U.S. investors had sold off their 98 percent share in the company to a South African company, SABCO. A group of shareholders, all Nepalis, owns the remaining two percent and also controls 92 percent of its subsidiary in Bharatpur. The Nepali public owns the remaining shares.

But it is still unclear how the Maoists will treat Surya Tobacco. One of the company's shareholders is British-American Tobacco Company, which does have U.S. investments. "It is difficult to distinguish the Americans in most companies," says GEFONT's Rimal. "It

seems the Maoists are only adding political color to their protests, and the workers are being made the scapegoats."

Rajdhani daily reported on August 28, Saturday that at least 90 companies in Nepal have U.S. investments. But that doesn't mean others are safe. The bombing of a factory belonging to an Indian joint venture, Nepal Lever, in Hetauda Friday night deepened the confusion. A

Maoist statement the same day had asked businesses without U.S. investments to resume regular services. The unpredictability of the situation is worse than paying extortion, say businesspeople.

"Most businessmen like us were asked for money by the Maoists, for our own safety," says an industrialist who did not want to be named. "But the situation is turning scarier with the Maoists looking into the nitty-gritty of our internal workings. That could turn extremely nasty for the entire economy." **N**



CLOSED DOORS: Soaltee Hotel and 11 other businesses remain closed

there were no U.S. investments in the hotel, it was alright to resume operations. But the hotel management decided at the last moment that the Maoist statement was still not a clear green light for it to open its doors.

The Soaltee Hotel says it has no U.S. investment, but it is not clear whether the Maoists will promote it to the "safe-list," as there are investments from royalties.

Other companies were quick to either guard or disclose information about

Gai Jatre Sur Taal



Program:

Humorous Performances by various artists

Parody/Humorous performance by Sisnupani Nepal

Performance of the seasonal folk Nepali instrumental Music Group

Appearance of Khyalaas (jokers) at various points

Emergency facilities provided by paramedics and doctors

Volunteers & Participants in funny/ fancy attires and painted faces

On-the-Spot painting session by the students of Lalitkala Campus

Painting Exhibition by Mr. Bipin Shrestha

Cartoon Exhibition by Mr. Rajesh K.C.

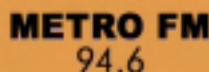
Logistics such as; Emergency facilities, Water & Snacks to be provided to volunteers, participants of Gai Jatra

Venue: Hanumandhoka Durbar Square

Time: 1:30 pm – 5:00pm

Date: 31st August 2004 (15th Bhadra 2061)

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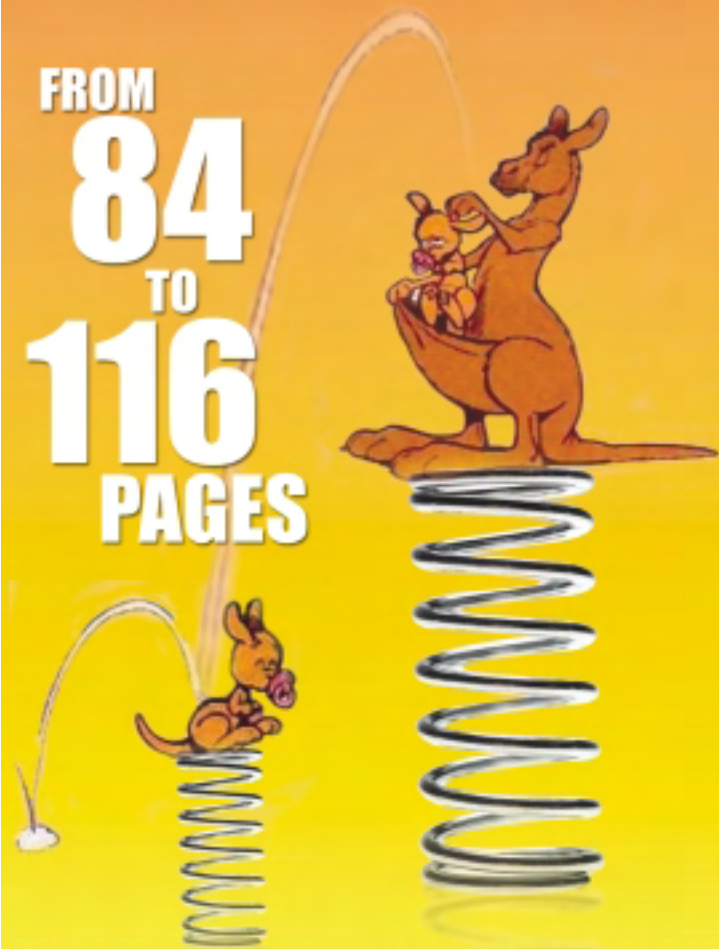
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ROYAL NO-HOPE ACADEMY

The Royal Nepal Academy is adrift—poorly managed, highly politicized, unproductive and expensive. It needs professionals, not politicians or poets, at the helm.

BY AJIT BARAL

THE GOVERNMENT LAST WEEK appointed Basudev Tripathi as vice chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy. It was a long time coming: The post had remained vacant for four months after former vice chancellor, Mohan Koirala, left office in March.

Shortly after Koirala's departure, a selection committee, comprising artists Manoj Babu Mishra, singer Bachhukailash Bahadur Basnet, Rastrakavi Madhav Ghimire and Tribhuvan University Vice Chancellor Govinda Prasad Sharma, had been formed. The committee was chaired by the then Minister of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation Sarvendra Nath Shukla. According to a member of the committee, the committee had recommended three names for the post in this order: Taranath Sharma, Tulsi Diwas and Basudev Tripathi.

But Minister Shukla resigned before he could recommend Sharma's name to then Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa. Even then, many had thought Sharma would be appointed. No one knows why Tripathi has now been tapped.

It was politics, apparently. The continued weight of parties and power play in the corridors of the Royal Nepal Academy doesn't inspire hope that the academy can fulfill its mission to help promote art, literature and culture in Nepal. Novelist Narayan Dhakal says, "I am not optimistic that anything good will come out of the Royal Nepal Academy. Since 1990 we have been able to put our faith in democracy but not in the academy."

People close to the power centers have always dominated the academy, with berths and funding going to scholars with the right connections and the correct

opinions. Ramesh Bhattarai, who teaches Nepali at TU, says, "Representation from the left has been next to nil." He adds, "Ramesh Vikal is perhaps the only left-leaning writer to be represented in the academy." Women have also been under-represented. People like Dhakal demand that the academy be made into an autonomous body.

Other academics have started to suggest that representatives should be selected through elections. "In countries like England, academicians are selected through elections," says Bhattarai. Maybe we should follow suit. But Dhakal doesn't quite agree. He says, "Elections could be an alternative, but it's a very complicated process. We should focus on value systems instead." Basanta Thapa, columnist with Himal Khabarpatrika and director of Himal Association, says: "It doesn't matter a fig to me whether academicians are elected or appointed. What matters to me is that the academy should know where its orientation should be. And its orientation, I think, should be on research."

Thapa and his association are one of the few organizations making real advances in social science research. While other fields are advancing, social science research in Nepal is falling behind. Yet the academy rarely gives grants to researchers. It has brought out a social science journal. But such poor quality as to be laughable, say other academics. Thapa says the academy should be funding research and confining its publications to reference works. "The academy should not be publishing any other books. Our writers are doing that. It should bring out books that would be a standard which we could follow."

Instead the academy has become a haven for poets and writers, and its membership is heavily skewed. Not surprisingly, most of its resources have gone into the development of literature. Even then, little has come out of the resources that are purportedly being pumped into the task. For instance, the academy hasn't done anything to standardize the Nepali language by publishing a language or editing manual.

The academy-sponsored dictionary, "Nepali Brihat Sabdakosh," is a good work, but the academy has been reprinting the book without ever thinking of updating it. Oxford updates its dictionaries every year, incorporating new

words that have been adopted into English. As a result the English language has expanded a great deal. Thapa says, "The academy should bring out books like encyclopedias that will be impossible for others to bring out." Referring to the "Brihat Paribhasik Sabdokosh," a dictionary of science, laws and humanities brought out by an Indian government commission, he says, "The academy should publish this kind of book."

A common feeling is that the academy has been unproductive because the writers and artists running it have weak managerial skills. People are therefore coming around to the idea that professional managers should be given a chance to lead the academy. Sangeeta Thapa, director and curator of the Siddhartha Art Gallery, says, "Someone with good management training should be drafted to run programs at the academy." She adds, "Many countries now offer courses in hospital management...is anyone from Nepal attending these courses that could change the pathetic and incompetent way hospitals are functioning in Nepal? If our academicians don't realize the importance of professional managers, the state of the arts will remain like the state of Nepal's government hospitals...sick and pathetic, in the gray zone of profes-

sional mismanagement, providing only a nebulous glimpse of what could be."

The appointment of Tripathi doesn't provide any indication that the things will change for the better. Tripathi was upbeat about the controversy surrounding his appointment: "People come and go, but the institution remains. It's the institution that creates a *naya yug*, a new era. My efforts would be towards that end." The complaints concerning his appointment aren't about his qualifications. Indeed, he received the first Ph.D. in Nepali, has taught at the Nepali department at Tribhuvan University for 37 years, has published 16 books of essays and criticism and has written many journal articles. But his moral integrity isn't beyond reproach.

Questions involve the reported inclusion of many of his unpublished works in the Master's degree syllabus while he was head of the Nepali department and a member of syllabus selection committee. He also listed books he wrote for grades 9 and 10 as reference material for Master's students. He is allegedly on the academy's list of scholars who have neither completed their work according to the conditions specified nor returned their grant money. There are other charges as well.

The government spends more than

Rs. 20 million each year on the academy, a sum equal to that set aside for the new Peace Secretariat. It's time to question spending so much on an institution that delivers so little. The government should stop paying for the academy's expenses. Instead, the academy should be made to generate money for itself from its assets, estimated at Rs. 2 billion. Professional managers can turn those assets into a regular source of income; artists and writers cannot. But can good managers rid the academy of politics? Only if they, and the academy, are autonomous. **N**

nw/ss



BURDEN OF BEASTS

In olden times the King sometimes gave an elephant to a retainer with whom he was displeased. The royal gift could not be refused or disposed of, and the cost of caring for the beast would eventually bankrupt the poor official. Tourism has dried up in Chitwan, and it's having the same effect.

BY SUDHAR NEPAL

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN Sauraha meant elephant rides. Everyone who visited the “Thamel of Chitwan” would look forward to experiencing the jungle with an enchanting elephant ride across the Rapti and through the dense tropical forests where grasses grow as tall as the elephants themselves. The Royal Chitwan National Park has been a tourist’s dream destination since its establishment in the 1970s,

and the elephant-back jungle safari has contributed significantly to making Chitwan a must-do in travel experience.

A carpeted platform high on an elephant’s back is a splendid vantage point, and there is no danger of getting lost or of a breakdown in the middle of the huge forest. Elephants, after all, have an uncanny sense of direction, and other wild animals seldom attack them. In the jungle book, the pachyderms are right on top of the hierarchy. You can see the tigers, rhinos and the migratory birds—the latter as



far as from Siberia—from the top of the elephant, comfortably and safely.

But times have changed for the elephants who once had regular loads of tourists. They are now seen mostly in the Rapti river, sloshing and splattering, joyously playing with their mates or quietly dozing off for an afternoon slumber. They are well fed by the mahouts. They have never had it so good. But times are not good for their keepers: The elephants have now become a burden.

During the tourist season, every elephant would make four to five trips a day. Now with infrequent tourists, every single trip is good news. Gopi Sapkota, who has been in the business for a decade, says, “It’s now become unimaginable to support yourself on the meager income from the elephant business. Times have changed. Keeping the elephant has now become a huge challenge.”

When the tourists were coming in, elephants meant very good business. Every Nepali is charged Rs. 250 for a single ride, South Asians Rs. 300 and all others Rs. 500. The owners contribute





Rs. 300 to for the upkeep of the local forests for every single trip an elephant makes from Sauraha to the national park. Only four persons are permitted on the elephant at one time. The total income generated from one ride of four riders, mahouts say, does not even cover the cost of a day's meals for the elephant. Meeting medical expenses that recur every three to six months, caretakers' salary and amortizing the money spent to buy an elephant, which cost from Rs. 5 to 8 million, is impossible.

When tourism slowed, half a dozen elephants were taken from the roughly two dozen elephants once kept for tourism purpose. If the tourists don't return soon, other elephants may have to go too.

That's not the end to the woes of the elephant owners. These days elephants are not allowed entry into the national park, and the tourists they carry have to make do by visiting the

nearby Kumroj and Baghmara community forests. "We have spoken time and again to the related authorities, but nothing has been done so far," says Gopi Sapkota.

In such a predicament, it is a treat to see any tourists in Sauraha. Sauraha does not even attract domestic visitors anymore. Last year, in an attempt to revive tourism, the residents of Ratnanagar planned a fair, the Ratnanagar Mahotsav, in Sauraha, but frequent and, often, unannounced curfews by the Army in Narayangarh eventually led to a further decline in the number of tourists and discouraged them from holding the fair. Orders from the Army forbidding two persons on one motorcycle have also put domestic tourists off from visiting Chitwan, says Manish Khan of Unique Elephant Booking.

The manmade problems are glaringly evident, but if they aren't enough, natural calamity has also struck Sauraha: Floods have completely destroyed the town. Frustrated businesspeople have nothing left to do but to hope and pray. **N**





THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION

In 1994 the Supreme Court made an important decision regarding the right to information. Ten years later, Nepal still does not have a right to information act.

BY PRATYOUSH ONTA

NEPAL STILL DOES NOT HAVE a right to information act. About four years ago, there was a lot of discussion regarding a draft act that had been prepared by some media-related organizations. However our parliamentarians never passed a bill on this theme when they had a chance. In the absence of such an act, a Supreme Court (SC) decision of 10 years ago provides legal guidelines for media practitioners and activists to secure information from the state. This short essay highlights the Supreme Court's guidelines and the draft act.

Certain Nepali activists and NGOs have contributed to the legal and social opening up of Nepali society by actively searching for information about development projects that had been shrouded in governmental secrecy and filing cases of public interest litigation (PIL) that has forced the apex court to make decisions impacting the citizen's right to know. An example of this would be the case between Gopal Siwakoti 'Chintan' and others versus the government, the Finance Ministry and others filed in 1993.

This case is known in general parlance as the Arun III case because it refers to a hydroelectric project that was going to be developed on the Arun River in eastern Nepal with the financial participation of the World Bank and some donor countries. 'Chintan' and his colleagues had asked for information regarding this development project from the Ministry of Water Resources and other relevant government offices. When they were stonewalled, they filed a PIL against the concerned ministries by invoking Article 16 of the 1990 Constitution, which states that "Every person shall have the right to

demand and receive information on any matter of public importance."

By referring to the Directive Principles of the State as elaborated in Articles 24 through 26 of the Constitution, the SC adjudged in 1994 that the particular project was of public interest and hence it was a matter of public importance. In other words, the petitioners were correct in seeking the SC's help in exercising their right guaranteed by Article 16. But since there was no provision in the Constitution with respect to the procedures regarding the exercise of this right, the SC provided an eight-point guideline to obtain information from government offices until the Parliament passed specific legislation on this subject. Since such legislation had not been passed by the time the last Pratinidhi Sabha was dismissed in May 2002, the SC's guidelines are still valid today.

GUIDELINES

These guidelines are (in my rough translation from the original Nepali): (1) the interested individual can ask for a list of written documents (from any government office) related to the subject of interest; (2) the office has to make available such a list within seven days and the interested individual can then make a request to have a look at the relevant documents; (3) if such a request is received, the office has to, within three days, inform the interested individual the date, time and location where such an inspection of the documents can be held; (4) after such an inspection/reading occurs, the interested individual can note down points from the documents or if s/he is interested in obtaining a duplicate of the documents concerned, a request to that effect can be made to the designated official; (5) if there are no rules regarding

how duplicates are to be made available, then the office can charge the interested individual the actual cost of preparing the duplicate copies and certify them as such; (6) if the office has reasons to not make available either a partial or complete list of relevant documents to the interested individual or has reasons to not make such documents available for inspection/reading and for duplication, it should explain the reasons to the interested individual within three days after receiving the initial request; (7) if the interested individual is not convinced by such a denial or the reasons given for them as per (6) above, s/he can approach the Supreme Court within seven days of receiving such a notice of denial of access; and (8) the procedure to be applied to such requests will be according to the rules of the Supreme Court.



Gopal Siwakoti 'Chintan' says that he and his colleagues have used these guidelines repeatedly to seek information about other development projects they have scrutinized since 1994. Given the frequency of lamentation regarding the unwillingness of government authorities to provide needed information to the public, it would be interesting to find out how many other individuals (and organizations) have used the same guidelines to ask for information from government sources in the past 10 years.

THE DRAFT

Now we move on to the second theme of this essay, the draft right to information act. One version was prepared about four years ago by the NGO Nepal Press Institute (NPI), which offers various types of training to potential and working journalists and the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ), the largest elected body of journalists in Nepal. After some public discussions with legal activists and others, its initial text was revised and that version has been published in NPI's bulletin *Khabar* (Vol. 5, No. 4, August 2003).

Looking at the published draft act, we can say that there are many positive aspects in it. First, the definition of public authorities as conceived by this draft act is very broad and includes governmental offices, councils, commissions, working committees, political parties, non-gov-

ernmental organizations and any other institutions that influence public welfare. Second, the draft act requires public authorities to publish, from time to time, a whole variety of information of public importance. It also requires such authorities to store information in an orderly manner and make them available to those who request them. Third, the draft act requires public authorities to identify an "information officer" who has the obligation to store and provide information immediately to those who seek it. This would prevent the "passing of the buck" between officials in any given office as so often happens. Fourth, the draft act contains a public interest override in the form of Article 8 in which information officers are required to provide information that would show negligence or illegality on the part of public authorities or their abuse of authority. Information officers are also required to provide information regarding possible harm to the health of individuals and the public at large as well as the environment. They are also required to divulge information regarding the misuse of public funds. Fifth, the draft act clearly spells out the process that needs to be followed when an application seeking information is received.

However the draft act is still inadequate in many ways. Article 7 of the draft act provides for a set of exceptions for public authorities who are not required to reveal,

among others, information that would adversely affect national security, criminal investigation, and Nepal's sovereignty and integrity. Other exceptions include premature disclosure of information related to the budget, customs, currency exchange rates, interest rates and other taxes that could have a negative effect on the national economy or result in illegitimate profit or loss to any individual or organization. Additional exceptions are also listed regarding the disclosure without consent of information related to the personal privacy of third parties and also regarding their trade and commercial rights protected by other laws.

HIDEOUS WAYS

Some analysts feel that the set of exceptions listed in the draft Act is too broad and hence it can be misused to deny information rather than facilitate an environment of information flow to serve the public interest. As journalist Shiva Gaunle has noted, a bureaucracy noted for its ability to hide information can use the smallest of excuse (within the exceptions provided by Article 7 of the draft act) to not provide information. Hence it is possible that the "space" for the flow of information opened up by the 1994 decision of the SC and its subsequent application could be inadvertently diminished by this set of exceptions. In addition, as in the case of many other acts currently in use, Article 7 of the draft act is non-specific regarding the process of interpretation that could lead to the conclusion that a listed interest had been adversely affected. For instance, how are the information officers to conclude that if the information requested if disclosed would adversely affect Nepal's national security or its sovereignty? Or what constitutes 'premature' information about the budget?

In 2003, it was rumored that King Gyanendra's government was going to issue a right to information ordinance that would be some revised version of the draft act. Given the deficiencies noted above and more importantly, given the present political context, it would be rather futile to issue such an ordinance without further public debate on its contents. Nepal certainly needs a right to information act but not one that is issued surreptitiously by a government that is not accountable to the people of Nepal. **N**



PROUDLY MADE IN CHINA

Chinese goods, traditionally cheap but now aiming for quality too, have spread from sidewalk stalls to swishy supermarkets

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

HERE, THERE AND POSITIVELY everywhere, from shoes and garments to watches, decorative items and television sets, Kathmandu is flooded with goods that are really cheap. The "Made in China" label is ubiquitous. Decades ago, the trend started on the footpaths of the old city areas in places such as Mahabaudha and then the bazaar at Brikhutimandap. Suddenly, Chinese goods are everywhere.

"Earlier, the supermarkets thought they would be losing their good name by selling Chinese goods. Now they have been forced to by market demand," says Kesav Bahadur Rayamajhi, general secretary at Nepal Trans Himalaya Border Trade Association. Rayamajhi also runs Chandrasurya International, a company that imports Chinese electrical goods. He says that 60-70 percent of the items in the supermarkets are now Chinese and that wholesalers like him are enjoying the benefits.

The main factor that makes Chinese goods so inexpensive is economy of scale, say business analysts. Goods made in China have flooded the whole world, now that the once-isolated communist nation has encouraged capitalism and adopted "economic diplomacy." The huge volume China produces makes each item less expensive than the same goods made elsewhere in lower volumes.

"China's strategy is to produce goods according to the market," says Durga Bahadur Shrestha, president of Nepal Trans Himalaya Border Trade Association. "You can get the same goods ranging from a price of Rs. 600 up to Rs. 3,000 depending on the quality. Some of the Chinese goods are as good as those made in Japan or anywhere else, if you are willing to pay the right price."

For some consumers, price is all that matters. Shoppers told Nation Weekly some Chinese goods presently available in the market were so cheap that it would cost less to get a new one than to get an old one fixed. And many Nepalis have no choice but to buy cheaply.

"A lot of Nepalis would have died during winters hadn't it been for the influx of cheap Chinese garments that are warm enough to keep away the bitter Kathmandu cold," says Sandhya Shrestha, who was shopping in China Town Shopping Centre in Sundhara. She had a pair of jeans for her young son in her hands. They cost Rs. 200; making a pair of cotton trousers in Nepal would cost at least Rs. 250.

The prices of even electronic goods are pretty low. A DVD player costs around Rs. 3,200 and a VCD player between Rs. 1,900 to Rs. 2,200. An additional Rs. 5,000 could even get you a full surround-sound system with five speakers. A telephone set with caller ID is just Rs. 525. But there are also goods that have a claim to top

quality while still remaining inexpensive.

Rayamajhi's company, for example, sells television sets from Conic in Hong Kong that come with a three-year warranty. A 21-inch flat-screen set costs about Rs. 18,000. A similar Japanese TV costs Rs. 5,000-10,000 more. "Plus, Conics come with 200 channels. You can even check time, date and temperature while you're watching TV," says a salesperson at Rayamajhi's showroom in the China Market. There are at least a dozen Chinese television brands available currently in the Valley.

Despite the increasing demand for Chinese goods, businesses fear the future.

"There are rumors that India could be opening its business transit point with China through Sikkim, and then there's the ongoing Maoist insurgency at home that is affecting everybody, including businesses like ours," says Rayamajhi. That would mean new competitors with floods of Chinese goods coming in



BUSY: The China Town Shopping Centre

nw/ss

through more accessible Indian transit points even as a large part of Nepal remains cut off. Local commerce is in ruins and when it is not, the villages aren't always accessible for business expansion.

Rayamajhi says his association is constantly trying to raise this issue with the government and unite importers to prevent their market share from decreasing. The Maoists have shut the Tatopani border crossing with China at least three times over the years, most recently for 18 days in May.

Another problem importers are increasingly facing, says Rayamajhi, is the extremely bad condition of the Bahrabise-Tatopani section of the 114-km Arniko Highway. "There's the constant threat that heavy trucks bringing in goods could skid into the Bhotekoshi," he says. "It's high time the government realized the increasing revenues businessmen like us are making for the country."

Last fiscal year the Customs Department made at least Rs. 3.98 billion in revenues at the Tatopani checkpoint alone. Readymade garments, shoes, electronic goods and fabrics are the major Chinese imports.

Businessmen are positive that Nepalis want more. Importers of Chinese goods opened the China Town Shopping Centre in March 2002—it's supposed to be the "all under one roof" market for Chinese goods. The four-story building next to the Kathmandu

Metropolitan City offices has about 50 percent occupancy, with 112 shops open. Stalls sell goods ranging from cosmetics, readymade garments and consumer goods to snacks and TVs. The Chinese government built a gate at the premises recently at a cost of around \$20,000 as a token of friendship.

"The response we have received so far is tremendous," says Nilendra Man Pradhanang, office secretary at the shopping center. It will launch the Dashain Festival 2061 next month. "We will also be holding fashion shows, musical concerts and various food stalls to attract more customers."

"With the onset of Dashain the shopping season is beginning, and businesses are highly optimistic that sales will boom once again," says Pradhanang. To tens of thousands of Valley's two million residents, it will be more of Made in China come this Dashain. **N**



CHEAP: These sets cost less, but don't lack in features



As Always A Novelty

Contemporary Indian paintings are a rich banquet of delight. An exhibit at the Siddhartha Gallery offers a tiny taste.

BY AJIT BARAL

A familiar refrain in the Nepali art circles goes like this: Nepali art is stuck at a point. Some interesting works do come up but few and far between. So whenever an international exhibition travels to Nepal, we invariably find it refreshing and novel. "Contemporary Expressions from India," an exhibition of paintings from India on display at the Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited is a case in point. The show ends Monday, August 30.

The gallery is instrumental in bringing paintings from other countries for the benefit of Nepali artists and viewers. This time around it has



work she has on display, wild buffaloes and other animals gallop in the foreground. The background is done in shades of yellow with hieroglyphic signs scattered here and there.

Ananda Mali's paintings are impressionistic renditions of landscapes, but they look more like abstract paintings. Her subtle gradations of colors create depth and fuzzy effects, giving her paintings an aura of the abstract. She seems to paint what she experiences at the spur of the moment,

but she says the moment that she experiences doesn't reflect her art, but rather the art itself becomes the moment.

Beena Pradhan's painting captures powerfully a woman with a child in a moment of fear. One

(perhaps herself?) sleeping on a couch. One image is in a corner of the painting, and the other on a mysterious floating space, creating a scene of a woman in the midst of a dream. In her other painting, she has herself perching on a thin tendril in a vast space. As a critic wrote, she writes herself into paintings in the shape of photo cutouts. This is her way of making herself the subject and protagonist of her paintings—paintings in which she seems to invoke conversations with multiple aspects of herself.

Sheila Makhijani and Chintan Upadhyay are technically different than the others. Sheila's paintings look like etchings but are mixed media paintings, intricately done. Upadhyay's paintings are digital prints on red paper. Both of these artists prefer to use minimum space and have left most of the field of their painting untouched, perhaps in an attempt to focus the attention of the viewer directly on their subject.

Pramod Kumar's watercolor landscapes are excellent. His command over lines, color and forms are immaculate. His touches are quick and deft. And he seems to paint with playful ease. His landscapes of buffaloes grazing by the river,

people around the temple on the other side of the river and clouds opening up after the summer rains all vibrate with life.

Anand Panchal's and Dipali Bhattacharya's paintings to me are the best of the lot. Panchal has three small paintings of human figures. These are drawn with childish simplicity, yet they bear an unmistakable stamp of Indian-ness. Bhattacharya looks assured about the way she handles her colors. Her paintings of someone, perhaps a princess, decked in gold and livery are remarkable for their balanced tones.

The exhibition pooled together too many artists. That

would have been good had the artists been adequately represented. Unfortunately they were not. Some of the artists had only one painting on display; I didn't quite feel I had enough of them. After seeing this exhibition I felt like I had tasted an array of delicacies but returned home with an empty stomach. **N**



brought 44 artworks of 20 contemporary artists from India in association with the Gallery Beyond of Mumbai. The artists and their works vary widely to emphasize the vibrancy of contemporary Indian art.

Shoba Ghare infuses elements of primitive art in her work. In the single

doesn't know the source of her fear, but the unmistakable expression seems etched on her eyes. The background done in swathes of yellow, red and white heightens the effect.

In her two paintings, Hema Upadhyay creates dreamscapes. In one of her paintings she uses two photographs of a woman



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Comedy TV

Comedians are finally stealing primetime TV slots

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

Actor and comedian Deepak Raj Giri starts the day catching up with news and current affairs from newspapers, radio and television. It's not a hobby. He is hard at work, collecting material for his regular comedy satire "Tito Satya" (The Bitter Truth), which airs Thursdays at 8:40 p.m. on Nepal Television.

"It is all for the daily bread and butter," says Giri, whose show dominates the Thursday primetime slot. Having major market share is an experience Nepali TV producers have almost forgotten since Kathmandu households tuned into satellite channels and were captivated by Indian television serials such as "Kusum," "Kasauti Jindagi Ki" and "Kyu Ki Saans Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi."

"At least selling laughter has suddenly started to be good business here," says Giri, who adds that he has been making a decent living by making people laugh. That's good news, especially at a time when the movie industry is complaining that Nepali cinema has literally gone down the drain. Suddenly, Nepali humor is starting to steal television primetime. Why?

"The quality of most Nepali TV serials has come down drastically, as most of them have been copied from India," says Santosh Silwal Giri, not related to comedian Giri, who is chief of the entertainment department at Nepal 1 Television. "Comedy has now become a major crowd puller as

the next best alternative [to the serials]," he says. According to him, there is a demand in the television market for more comedies and satirical serials. They are will-

ing to pay almost any amount, depending on the quality of the content and the popularity of the comedians involved. Nepal 1 had been airing Santosh Pant's "Jan Gunaso" (People's Grievances) and is now on the lookout for more.

State-run Nepal TV also has a primetime winner in the 8:40 timeslot on Fridays, Santosh Pant's "Hijo Aja Ka Kura" (Talk of the Town). It has a record for being the longest running comedy serial in Nepal. Nepal TV also has "Tipan Tapan" (Bits and Pieces), which airs on Sundays at 1:30 p.m. Not far behind are the private stations, also aiming to use humor to win more viewers. Kantipur Television has at least three programs scheduled in primetime: comedian Prakash Ojha's "Tite Kareli," (Bitter Gourd), on Fridays at 8 p.m.; comedian and singer Narad Khatiwada's "Post Mortem" on Mondays at 7:30 p.m.; and "Pothi Bashyo" (The Hen Crows), on Saturdays at 7:30 p.m.

Luniva Tuladhar of "Pothi Bashyo" says she wanted women to enter the comedy scene: Tuladhar and Deepanjali Lama host the program. Channel Nepal had actor and comedian Gopal Raj Mainali's "Foo Mantar" (Abracadabra) until recently. They now have the reality-comedy series, "Fifty-Fifty," on Sundays at 7 p.m. Image Metro Television has "Khota Baji" in Newari at 10:30 p.m. every Tuesday.

"The television is providing a huge platform for satirical comedies by extending our reach to the people," say Madan Krishna Shrestha and Haribansha Acharya of MA-HA, legendary comedians who are celebrating 25 years of working together this year and have produced more than half a dozen big television hits. "Even the returns for the comedians have now become commercially better," they say.

Though most comedians refused to divulge their earnings, industry insiders told us each episode earns them between Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 60,000, if the televi-

sion stations have outsourced the serials. The top rated shows are NTV's "Tito Satya" and "Hijo Aja Ka Kura," and KTV's "Tite Kareli."

"These comedies on TV are a good time pass," says Sharmila Karmacharya, a housewife who lives in Maharajgunj. "Some of them are so good that they nicely reflect the current state of the nation." But increasing competition has also kept actors and comedians on their toes to focus more on quality. "People don't laugh at funny faces and scenes where someone slips on a banana peel any more," says Khatiwada, who is also popular for his humorous songs. "Comedy script-writers like us have to do substantial research, and the humor now has to be more content oriented."

There's a lot to poke fun at just now and plenty of reasons why we need a laugh. **N**



Giri



nw/ss

Khatiwada

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Socrates Square

New Road's Pipal Bot is both an open-air editorial office for freelance writers and penniless editors of little literary magazines. It's here you meet most of the members of Nepal's literary family: from Krishna Chandra Singh Pradhan, Bimal Nibha, Shailendra Sakar to very young writers like Chunky Shrestha, Mani Lohani and Buddhi Sagar Cheppain.

BY YUYUTSU RD SHARMA

In the early 80s when I first visited New Road I came across a strange scene. Beneath the Pipal tree I saw about half a dozen decent looking, well-dressed men begging. On an inquiry I learned that these men were Nepali poets begging to save the life of an ailing fellow poet, Mohan Koirala, who lay on his deathbed and needed urgent medical treatment abroad. Moved by the emergency call of these unknown poets I had stepped ahead to drop my meager contribution and moved on.

Little did I know that day that these poets would become my best friends and active partners in several literary ventures in the years to come. How could I have known that this fanciful New Road was in fact a grand place of power, an irresistible temptation for poets, politicians and political activists?

With the passage of time I learnt that like the coffee houses of Calcutta or restaurants of Paris the place with its small Kavi Kuna teashops possesses a dynamism that speaks of the tumults of this nation's democratic struggle to usher modernity into this once sequestered medieval kingdom.

The origins of New Road go back to 1934 earthquake that rocked Nepal, killing many, turning the area into rubble. "The then Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher was off to the western Nepal, hunting," says historian Kamal Raj Singh Rathaur. "When he came back he was shocked to see the ravages of the quake and soon decided to build a new world out of the debris, symbolically putting Nepal on the path of urbanization and modernization."

Juddha Shumsher named this once-narrow path New Road. Rathaur believes Juddha Shumsher built Bhugol Park to assert that there existed another world beyond the cloistered Nepal. "These buildings you see from here, they all belonged to Hanuman Dhoka complex," points out senior poet Upendra Shrestha as he discloses the forgotten chapters of history while sharing the long bench on the Kavi Kuna teashop along the pavement." This Photo Concern building, they used to have sheds for Army horses here. The long line of shops beginning with the Juddha Shumsher's Square and ending at Indra Chowk, all the area had been a heap of wreckage during the earthquake."

Today Juddha Shumsher's statue stands staring into the long row of fancy shops and plazas displaying various riches. But there's more to this place than a cursory glance can assess. After 1950 democratic revolution the political significance of the place gradually started becoming conspicuous. During the one-party Panchayat it became an influential platform for political activism. "The place was a virtual dread," says novelist Nararayan Dhakal. "In that autocratic system the scene was volatile. Imagine how in the bustling crowd someone would raise his voice, furl a handful of pamphlets or start a speech holding the bars of the plinth that circles the historic banyan tree. Or all of a sudden a leader,

say, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai would come up, bringing every thing to a standstill."

"The place used to be infested with spies," recalls Upendra Shrestha, "the moment anyone raised his voice, they would grab him." Interestingly the place holds great romance for writers. In fact Nepali literature owes a great deal to this illustrious place. It's from here great poet Gopal Prasad Rimal used to initiate his evening walks to the temple of Mahankaal to utter a prayer of rebellion to topple the autocratic Rana regime. Literary giants like Bal Krishna Sama, Laxmi Prasad Devkota, Hridya Chandra Singh Pradhan, Bhawani Bhikshu, Siddhi Charan Shrestha, Vijay Malla Gothale and Kedar Man Vyathit, all used to visit this place. "This was the only place you could get a newspaper in Nepal," discloses Upendra Shrestha. "In addition to Gorkhapatra, one could find Indian newspapers in English here"

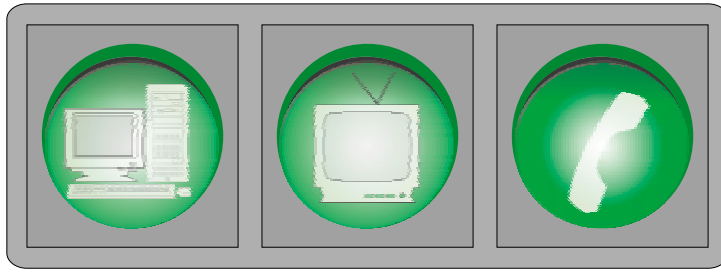
Shrestha tells how it was Hridyachandra Singh Pradhan who registered New Sandesh Griha. Later, he handed it over to Maskey Brothers. "It's just part of history, you see," Upendra Shrestha emphasizes.

During those days they had restaurant called Tripti where several significant writers would gather. It's here they launched the famous literary movement "Amlekh." Krishna Bhakta Shrestha, Poshan Pandey, Bhupi Sherchan, Basu Shashi, Tana Sharma, Upendra Shrestha, Hari Bhakta Katuwal, Madan Regmi, Dwarika Shrestha and scores of other writers used to gather to exchange their views and works. Several populist movements like Sadak Kavita Kranti (Poetry of the Road) and Boot Polish Movement rocked the streets and squares of New Road. Bhawani Ghimire and Sakar remained the main voice behind this movement. Meanwhile, Boot Polish Movement and Aswikrit Smaj, the movement of the discarded communities, were launched to raise voices against Panchayat hegemony over media and freedom of speech on the streets of New Road.

I've found New Road's Pipal Bot both an open-air editorial office for freelance writers and penniless editors of little literary magazines like myself. It's here that the exchange of manuscripts takes place. It's here you meet the most of the members of Nepal's literary family. It's here you meet almost everybody who matters in the literary scenario from Krishna Chandra Singh Pradhan, Bimal Nibha, Shailendra Sakar to very young writers like Chunky Shrestha, Mani Lohani and Buddhi Sagar Cheppain.

It's an honest literary wrestling ring as well. Here you have to be honest. You have to be ready to face the worst blows of blatant criticism. That's why those who have joined power and are corrupted in the corridors of power often shun this place. The place appears to be a democratic alternative to the conventional places of establishment like the Royal Nepal Academy or a university campus. It represents everything urgent, candid, ongoing, honest and modern. It's Socrates' square in the polis of the Himalayan kingdom. **N**

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SUBSCRIBE AND ENJOY SUBSTANTIAL SAVINGS

Unblock The Block

With the blockade lifted, Kathmanduites have lost a great opportunity to relearn the tricks of survival

BY KUNAL LAMA

I was not amused to read the headline, “Maoists call off their ‘blockade’ for a month.” There are number of reasons.

First, I am a Virgo, and, as aficionados of Linda Goodman can rattle off immediately, Virgos are organized to the point of being obsessively anal. Consequently, predictably, I have a hoard of edibles and inedibles stored in various nooks and crannies of my tiny flat, not to mention every cubic centimeter of my cupboard, wardrobe and the refrigerator. Having paid inflated prices for all these items, I look rather a fool now. There is no telling if the blockade of Kathmandu really will be re-imposed in a month’s time. In these wavering times, who can be trusted to keep their word? Looking—in no particular order—at the pile of Wai-Wai Instant Noodles (chicken is my favorite flavor); several Tetra Paks of Today UHT Milk, undrinkable but could be useful; sacks of sugar the color of sand on the beaches of Bangladesh’s monsoon-inundated coastline; liters of kerosene from my local dealer who is an ace in hiding his goods for the benefit of his customers; Dove soaps and shampoos; bottles of Shilajit capsules (I could have lost my youthful vigor in a prolonged blockade); rolls and rolls of loo paper; Nebico biscuits (I still eat them and so does my puppy); tins of tuna-in-olive-oil; DVDs from Khasa Bazaar; boxes of “mineral” water; a chestful of antibiotics (all of us would be dead by now if we are not prescribed these at least twice a month, even if the complaint is only about a few sleepless nights); oh, the list is endless, and it makes me sick to see them. All this IN ADDITION to the earthquake kit I have hidden in the corner of my garden, almost away from the shadow of the 7-foot-wide, 7-storey building built in 7 weeks of loose bricks and powdery cement not too long ago.

Second, I have no excuse now to give for the non-delivery of all the deadlines and work that I am supposed to do but didn’t really want to do even though I expect to get paid for them nonetheless because that is what my contract says. Now you know why this column is appearing as it is supposed to; if the blockade were on, it wouldn’t have.

Third, Kathmanduites have lost a great opportunity to relearn the tricks of survival without having to be rescued by our friendly neighbor’s excessive offer to bread-bomb us, just because the Maoists decided to listen “to the requests made by general public, civil society and human rights community.” Why, now, did they have to be so darned humanitarian and complying and concerned for the welfare of the citizens of the Valley? Blockade or no blockade, life was normal in the city, in spite of all

the hyped-up reports the foreign press were having a field day reporting. Routes to Kathmandu were not totally cut-off, neither were the highways captured; there was ample food stock—well, at least in my house there certainly is—to last for more than just a few days. Kathmanduites were not gasping or dying, even though it did not seem to have occurred to some of them that one sure way out of the Valley would have been to commandeer a rubber dinghy and float out on the Bagmati, straight into the Ganges eventually. If the blockade had extended beyond the week, indefinitely, perhaps, Kathmanduites would have lazily stirred out of their complacency to delve into the skills that their countrymen away from the checkpoints in Sanga, Nagdhunga and Mudkhu have to over-exercise every minute of their existence, while we express shock and horror at Space Time’s audacity to beam at us Italian and Russian channels instead of the beloved ZEE English and HBO Movies. Gobar-gas instead of LPG; vegetable patches instead of eco-unfriendly hectares of slippery,



nm/ss

concreted, brick-paved driveways and courtyards; walking and cycling instead of gas-guzzling in foreign-exchange-wasting motorcycles and motor vehicles. Kathmandu, wake up before Nepal is gone!

Fourth and finally, the blockade has ended before the Olympic games. There is every chance now that I will miss Sangina Baidya’s gold-medal-winning fight. And I might also miss that long-awaited Olympic moment: a glittering synchronized-swimming contestant emerging spluttering and embarrassed from disturbed blue waters, all aquatic elegance lost, because her nose-clip decided to dislocate, and descend to the bottom of the pool! My Wai Wais are waiting. I must go and start eating. Nebicos next. **N**

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The Himalayan

The Ad Gurus

BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

If you're flipping through the pages of a magazine and an arresting picture and caption makes you grin, chances are it's the creation of the Battisputali-based Business Advantage. Remember the hilarious The Himalayan Times advert: A shirtless, pot-bellied man reclining on a rickshaw ("Didn't make it to the Olympics?") or the one with two children pointing at each other in accusation in front of a parent ("There are two sides to a story")?

Business Advantage has emerged as a trendsetter in some areas of advertising. "In the past, for example, all advertisements that colleges put out were notices that declared admission was open and listed the facilities offered at the college," says Subu Shrestha, one of the directors. "Young people now who are exposed to the international media are not going to be attracted by such ads." It all started with taking a more creative approach with an ad for Ace Institute of Management. Now there's keen competition among the colleges to do it better.

Not many years ago advertisements were mere notices, like the ones that still dominate the pages of Gorkhapatra—no graphics, heavy on text. Since the advent of color and innovative designs, glossy ads featuring a variety of eye-catching pictures and punchlines have replaced the old genre.

Manufacturers now realize that a product must have an image that separates it from its competitors and also resonates with the target audience. Business Advantage has been specializing in creating quirky adverts for such manufacturers for the past five years.

The agency is the brainchild of the tall and

expansive Subu Shrestha and the goateed, contemplative Deependra Tandon. Though they are both involved in every aspect of the firm, Shrestha primarily heads the creative team, and Tandon focuses on managerial and financial responsibilities. They operate with a team of 18 people; everyone is under the age of 30.

In a country where hierarchies are prevalent in all areas of society, there is a remarkable egalitarianism about Business Advantage. Creative dissent and irreverence are encouraged. Conscious efforts are made to keep the atmosphere light. They believe that genuinely original ideas can arise in only such conditions. Little importance is given to work experience in prospective employees because, as Shrestha says, "with experience, often comes conformity as well."

Shrestha has a warm, welcoming presence. He warms up readily and is quick to answer questions thrown at him. Tandon cuts a more sober figure. There is always a pause before he starts speaking, and he speaks slowly and precisely. It is not too difficult to see how they complement each other. Often when Shrestha discusses a theme Tandon steps in to add a comment or qualify it. Shrestha begins: "Most agencies in Kathmandu have at least one Indian member on their team. Some clients are surprised, sometimes even disappointed, that we have none." Tandon adds: "But sometimes this works to our advantage. Some people like that. We are a small, all-Nepali team."

The two have known each other since 1993, when they studied B.Com in Delhi together and also shared an apartment. Later, they moved to Kathmandu and both did their Masters in Marketing at Kathmandu University. By that time, another commonality had emerged: They shared an aesthetic interest in advertising. "We used to follow various ad campaigns that would interest us, and discuss them," says Shrestha. But as Kathmandu University did not offer an independent advertising major, they never thought beyond admiring ads in the foreign media.

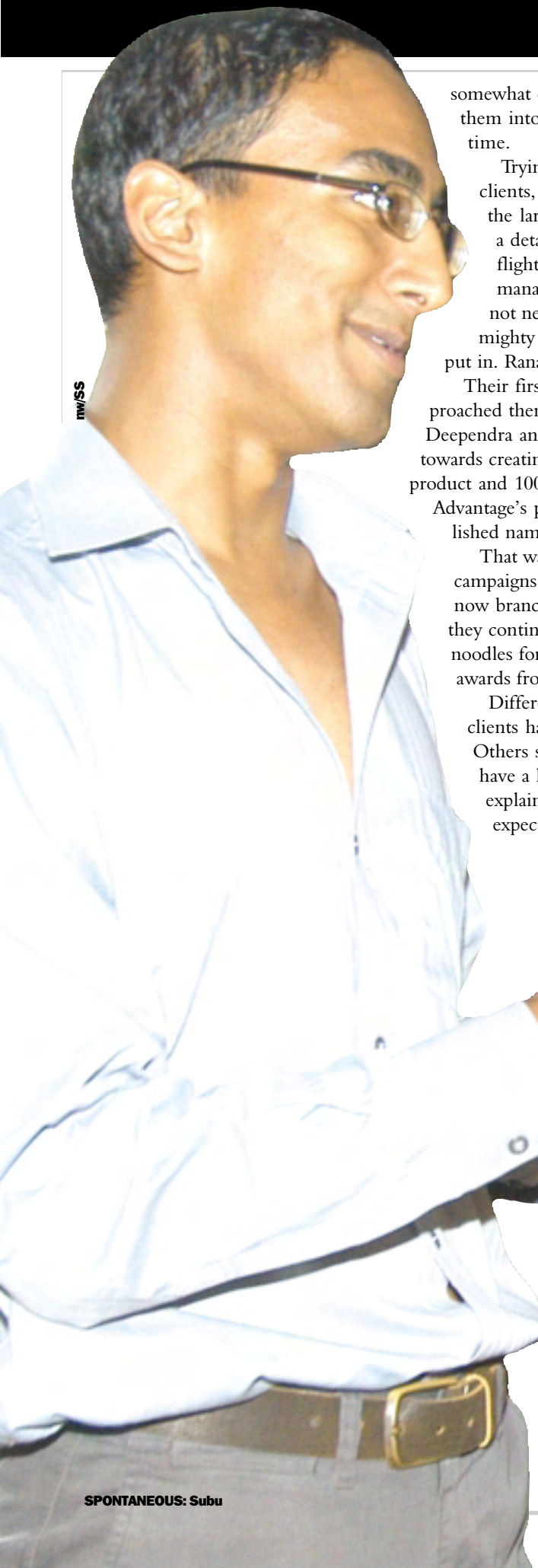
They still haven't stopped doing that. Just the approach has changed. They follow campaigns they admire and spend much time on the Internet looking up ads. "We have always really liked Nike ads," Shrestha says. "They still inspire us."

The inspiration started early. A turning point in their career came when they devised a marketing campaign for Wimpy's as part of their course requirements for Kathmandu University. A prominent advertising executive who was teaching them was so impressed that he suggested that they try to sell the approach to Wimpy's directly. They began to think they possibly had a flair for advertising.

After graduation they parted ways. Shrestha got a job with Buddha Air; Tandon joined the House of Rajkarnikar and then moved to Toyota. In 1998 they both called it quits and decided to go into business on their own. Business Advantage at that time was an agency meant to conduct market research for businesses. They operated from a small room in Tandon's house in Baneshwore, without any employees. Their only possession was a computer.

Early days were tough: No one would even approach the young and inexperienced designers. "The first year and a half we just pretended we had a job," says Shrestha with a laugh. "Basically we were just hanging out full time." It was





somewhat of an accident that pushed them into the advertising world, full time.

Trying various ways of attracting clients, they approached Necon Air, the largest domestic airline then, with a detailed proposal to create an in-flight magazine. Anup Rana, the managing director of Necon Air, did not need such a magazine. But he was mighty impressed with the work they had put in. Rana hired them. They were asked to create an advertising campaign.

Their first major commercial break came when the Khetan Group approached them for an ad campaign for a new product, Mayos Noodles. Deependra and Subu hired four people and devoted themselves with passion towards creating an aggressive campaign. "We came up with 250 names for the product and 100 package designs," recalls Subu with enthusiasm. Business Advantage's proposal was selected. They had edged out a number of established names in the game.

That was in 2000. Since then they have created many ad campaigns. From their early area of expertise, the print media, they have now branched out to offer full services in the electronic media as well. And they continue to hit headlines. The advert they created for Shakalaka Boom noodles for the Khetan Group was named best TV advert at the 2061 Crity awards from a field of 23 ads.

Different approaches are needed to create ads for different clients. "Some clients hand us a portfolio with detailed specifications of what they want. Others simply tell us the basics, like the audience they are targeting, so we have a lot of freedom to follow our inclinations," says Shrestha. He explains how the work is formed within the framework of the client's expectations. "We have assignments where we are continually thinking of

the client, while in others we think only of the audience. The ones that come out the best are those where the focus is the audience."

When it comes to questions about the market situation, Shrestha turns to Tandon, who is in control of the facts and figures. "Two years ago businesses stopped advertising because of the insurgency," he says with a pensive look on his face. "They felt they had to keep a low profile. Now they have realized that the Maoists are not going to go away, and so advertising is on the rise again, even though it hasn't regained the growth of the mid-90s."

The advertising market is growing at a rate of 10 percent annually. Business Advantage has done better: It has grown 100 percent in the past five years. "But that doesn't mean that our growth is satisfactory," says Tandon. "Our problem is that we are not aggressive in going out and getting clients." Still, they have not done too bad for themselves as figures show. And with the ad pie growing, their own share can only grow larger. **N**

CITY ThisWeek

EVENTS



Gai Jatre Sur Taal

Gai Jatre Sur Taal is a culture specific event designed bearing in mind the cultural importance of Gai Jatra to the people of Nepal and Kathmandu in particular.

One of the most popular festivals of Nepal, Gai Jatra has its roots in the ancient age when people feared and worshipped Yamaraj—the god of death. However the most famous tale relating to this cultural feast still remains the endeavoring story dated back to Pratap Malla's reign. When Pratap Malla's son died, his queen was in a state of shock and couldn't get over it for long. Considering her state, the king summoned all those families who had lost a loved one to start a procession

through the streets led by a cow. Finally, this procession made the grief-stricken queen realize that it wasn't only her who had lost her loved one, and was back to her senses. Ever since then, Gai Jatra has become an annual practice.

Gai Jatre Sur Taal will incorporate various elements of Gai Jatra such as humor and music. Musical performance by Kutumba at Basantapur, appearance of Khyalaas (jokers) at various points and art exhibitions will be the major events to look out. Venue: Basantapur Durbar Square, Gai Jatraroute: A son, Hanuman dhoka, Basantapur. Date: August 31. Time: 2 p.m. onwards. For information: 4434350.

SAMYAK DRISTI

PHOTO EXHIBITIONS

Journalist, critic, and filmmaker Shekhar Kharel comes up with the latest in his series of photo exhibition "Samyak Dristi." "Samyak Dristi" (Rightfold Vision) is one among the eight principles propounded by Lord Buddha. Shekhar is the recipient of the first prize in a nationwide photography contest that marked the Visit Nepal 1998 campaign. He is currently working with Nepal Weekly. Shekhar has dedicated this exhibition to his son, Samyak. He says, "For me, photography is the juxtaposition of beauty and technology. It is a new age art."



Cine Club

Movie: Josephine et les gitans st/ang(1995). Director: Vincent Ravalec. Starring: Miou Miou. At Alliance Francaise, Tripureshwor. Free admission. Date: September 5. Time: 2 p.m. For information: 4241163.

IT Exhibition

Dristikon Nepal invites everyone associated and interested in Information Technology to participate at its 2nd IT Exhibition-2004. Venue: Birendra International Convention Hall. Date: September 3 to 5. Ticket: Rs. 25/-



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Play @ Gurukul

Gurukul is showing "Khuma," a play directed by Anup Baral. The play is based on the story by Mohan Bikram Shah. Showing from: Sep 1 onwards. For information: 4466956.

Martin Chautari

Open discussions at Martin Chautari, Prasuti Griha Marga 509, Thapathali. Participation is open to all. For information: 4256239, 4240059.

This Week At Martin Chautari

**AUGUST 31
MANGALBARE**

DISCUSSION

Topic: How to improve the quality of air service?
Pundit: Birendra Bahadur Basnet, managing director, Buddha Air. Time: 5 p.m.

**SEPTEMBER 1
ADDITIONAL
DISCUSSION**

Open discussion on the activities of Martin Chautari, Time: 3 p.m.

**SEPTEMBER 2
MEDIA DISCUSSION**

Topic: What is the Film Development Board (FDB) doing?, Pundits: Sambhujit Baskota, president of FDB and Ashok Sharma, member of FDB. Time: 3 p.m.

**Films @ Lazimpat
Gallery Café**

21 GRAMS

The film explores the emotionally and physically charged existences of three characters: Christina (Naomi Watts), Paul (Sean Penn) and Jack (Benicio Del

Toro). Initially not even acquainted, the trio and their destinies become irrevocably intertwined in a fusion



of love, redemption, and obsession. Date: August 31.

GLADIATOR

Commodus, son of the aging emperor Marcus Aurelius is angered when his father announces Maximus (Russell Crowe) as his successor. Power-hungry Commodus kills his father and orders the death of Maximus. But the latter flees to become a gladiator. Eventually, Maximus journeys back to Rome to confront his archrival. Date: September 2.

Time: 7 p.m. For information: 4428549.

ONGOING

Sekuwa Saanjh

At the Dwarika's Hotel every Friday from 7 p.m. onwards @ Rs. 555/- plus tax per person. Includes BBQ dinner, a can of beer or soft drink. Live music by Abhaya and The Steam Injuns playing blues, jazz and more. Drop your visiting cards or BBQ coupons for a "Lucky Draw". For information: 4479488.

Spin And Jive With DJ Raju And The Cloud Walkers

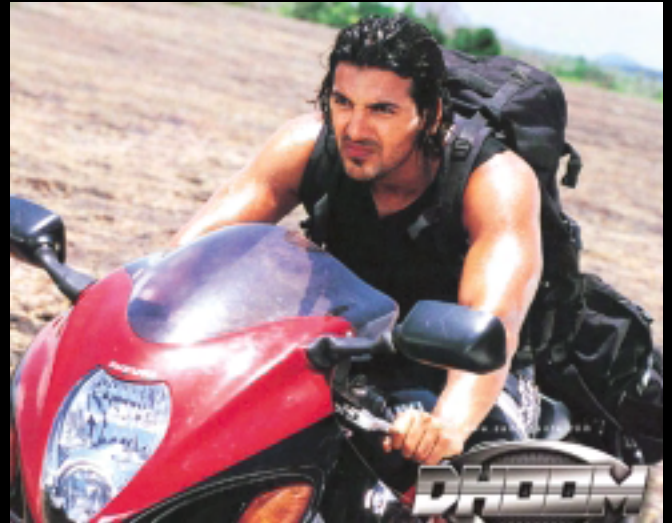
DJ Raju spins out the beats catering to the needs of the dance floor—hip hop, reggae, rock, pop, latino, arabic, underground, electric and music

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during the Rana years and then again during the Panchayat, when political expression was considered unpatriotic, famously labeled “anti-political.”

The severe restrictions on freedom of speech could be bypassed, briefly, at Gai Jatra. Over the years, the idea of Gai Jatra changed to a festival where you had license to say whatever you wanted. Well, just about whatever you wanted.

Before 1990, Gai Jatra meant a sophisticated forum for satirists, writers, stage actors and cartoonists. “During the Panchayat, Gai Jatra was a big event,” says Khagendra Sangroula, a prominent writer and columnist, well known for his sharply critical satire. “One rarely got the opportunity to criticize people in high places,” he adds.

After 1990, though, Gai Jatra seems to have lost much of its sting. Not many people really look forward to the Gai Jatra publications that used to be the talk of the town—at chowks, bus stops, colleges, you name it. So why has this colorful festival lost its luster?

Some reasons are obvious. One is that after 1990, freedom of expression is no longer restricted to Gai Jatra, an annual event. Another is that there has been so much “Gai Jatra” in our society lately that we seem to have lost our capacity to be shocked. Bandas, blockades, and bombs are an everyday occurrence. Pity that the mother-of-all-laugh-fests now fails to invoke more than a passing chuckle.

It wasn't always this way. Sangroula recalls how Gai Jatra was the time for people to speak their mind during the Panchayat. In his essay “The Panchayat Media,” Pratyoush Onta observes: “Private Nepali newspapers and their editors who were critical of the King's regime were variously punished... During 1961, several newspapers...were banned for various periods of time.” The government actively restricted freedom of expression. Gorkhapatra and The Rising Nepal became mouthpieces of the government; so did Radio Nepal. No criticism was allowed, be it of the government, the system or the people involved.

The pent up frustrations of the people needed an outlet. Gai Jatra became the ideal occasion for people to let off steam. There were outrageous publications, performances at City Hall, the Royal

Use It Or Lose It

Gai Jatra is an opportunity for people to come out and say whatever they want. Too bad we pass up the opportunity every year.

BY YASHAS VAIDYA

It's that time of the year again. A time for merriment, a time for people to poke fun at our own shortcomings and a time for society as a whole to laugh at itself. It's time for Gai Jatra, The Festival of the Cow.

Gai Jatra is a rich and colorful annual festival, initiated, folklore says, by Pratap Malla. His original festival, a procession of bereaved households followed by a day of merriment, was hardly about free expression. But Gai Jatra gained importance as a forum for expressing dissent



Nepal Academy's "Gai Jatra Mahotsab" and more. Satire took center-stage, as people came out and spoke their minds, poking fun at everything and everyone, though the royalties were still un-touchables. There were other restrictions too. The government would step in from time to time to ban magazines—the special Gai Jatra issue of Samikshya was banned in 1980 for being a bit too bold.

Now that we do have freedom of expression, a sensational media that exercises very little self-restraint says all there is to be said, every day, over and over again. "I think there is little left to say during Gai Jatra now," says Sangroula. It's Gai Jatra in the newspapers and on TV every day.

One Gai Jatra tradition, special publications for the event, survives, but does not necessarily thrive. The publications that come out during Gai Jatra attract little attention, that too mostly for the wrong



reasons. The thrust of the humor in these magazines is crude, at best, and, at worst, it's plainly pornographic. Publishers would like to disagree, shake off such charges lightly. Kushal Gautam, editor of Kamana, which brought out a special issue for the festival, maintains: "We've tried to bring out a magazine that people can take home. "Some readers may find something offensive, but from our side, we've tried our best to remain within social norms." But not many people are

buying their claims, or their publications. Book-sellers admit that there isn't much enthusiasm for these magazines anymore.

It's saddening that the prospects that Gai Jatra provides go wasted. Gai Jatra is to Nepali society what the jester is to the court. The court jester was considered a madman, not bounded by norms. He was given the liberty to say anything. Gai Jatra is a platform

for all-out expression; it's an opportunity for people to say and do things that would otherwise be considered deviant. But instead of a sharp festival on satire, we end up with a sorry display of vulgarity and pornography.

Gai Jatra is an opportunity for people to come out and say whatever they want. It provides a platform for "meaningful and artistic" expression. Too bad we pass up the opportunity every year. **N**

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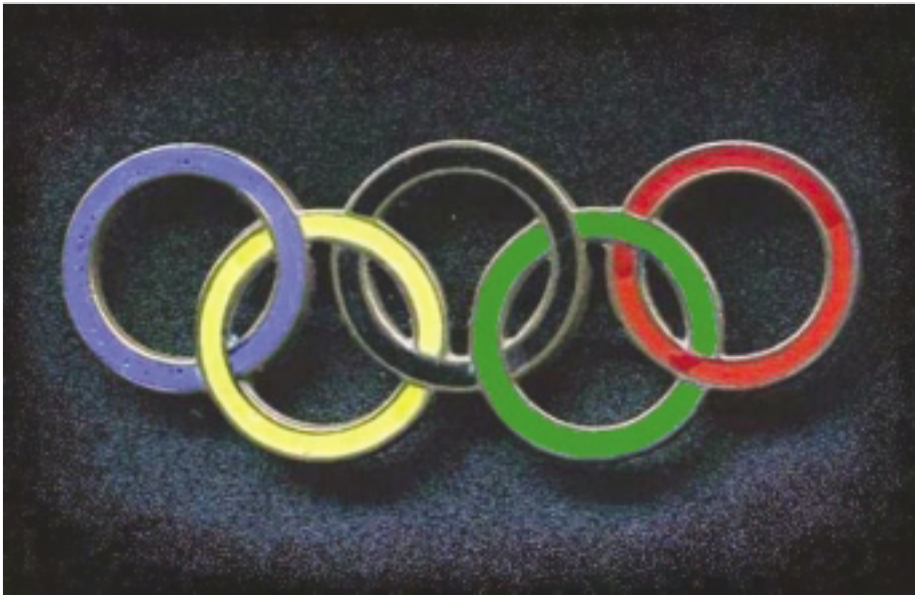
There are always two sides to every story. Who's right and who's wrong does not depend on which side you're on. To a third person, there may not even be a right or wrong, just a difference of opinion.

The important thing is to move on, change and adapt while keeping your goals intact.

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The Himalayan

A GREAT NEWSPAPER



Only A Game?

For better or for worse, the Olympic Games are a political as well as sporting event, with enormous stakes for winners and losers

BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

With the Olympic Games over and talk about the victories and losses of individuals and nations done with, conversation turns to more philosophical matters. Often someone will express dissatisfaction with the modern Games, and say they no longer reflect the true values of the Olympics. Those true values are, presumably, the values of the Games during their re-establishment in the last years of the nineteenth century: International trust and understanding, and amateurs participating in the true spirit of sportsmanship. In those years, athletes were not nationally chosen but came at their own expense and wore their athletic club's uniform instead of their country's. Even tourists who happened to be in the vicinity of the Games could participate. All this seems now to have been a golden period, before the dominance of nationalistic fervor and the influence of large corporations.

Few remember, however, that the games as practiced now are close to the original Olympics of the ancient Greeks.

Though the scale was much smaller, the objectives were the same. Huge numbers of visitors came to Olympia as spectators. Every participant was fighting for the glory of his hometown. Many athletes employed professional trainers to coach them, and they adhered to training and dietary routines much like athletes today. Cheating, bribes and match fixing were common. Athletes were professionals in the sense that they lived off the glory of their accomplishments for the rest of their lives. Their hometowns awarded them cash, free meals for life, tax breaks and even leadership positions in their community. Sometimes they were immortalized through statues and poems.

For better or for worse, the Olympic Games have become more like they were during the time of the ancients, a political as well as sporting event, with enormous stakes for winners and losers. What is different is the scale. Due to the global market and inter-

national participation, the Games have grown to proportions inconceivable two thousand years ago. No wonder that the games are now viewed less as an opportunity for mutual understanding and peace than as an arena to display the strength and superiority of nations.

That view of the games is common to all countries, and to spectators as well as participants. Now that the novelty of mere participation has worn off, it is increasingly important for Nepalis that we win a medal. Failure to do so feels like an international humiliation. Though there is cynicism about the bureaucracy of the Nepal Olympic Committee, Nepalis invested much hope and anxiety into the performance of our only medal chance, Sangina Baidya. The support provided by private sector to her and, to a lesser degree, the other athletes reflected the nation's pride. The Himalayan Times announced that it would be awarding lakhs to Baidya if she won a medal. This was welcome in a nation where state support is minimal, and it demonstrates the importance that Baidya's performance had in our minds. But it may also have had the adverse effect of putting undue pressure on her.

Without Nepali participants to cheer for in most televised events, we seemed to support China and other Asian nations. China was the most visible and significant competitor to the United States, a nation well liked in other areas but perceived to be too powerful. China's proximity allows us to harbor brotherly feelings towards them, while the differences in our cultures provide enough distance for us not to feel too much rivalry toward them.

"I like China because I think they are well disciplined and work hard from an early age," says one television viewer watching a badminton match in a café in Thamel. In contrast, India's abysmal performance at the Games was source of satisfaction to many Nepalis already insecure about Nepal's own performance. **N**



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RJ And More

Did you know **CHIRAG BANGDEL**—the radio jockey at K.A.T.H 97.9 F.M.—does much more than just rock the airwaves? A poet, a writer, a television personality and an artist: He is all of these. “It’s all my interest,” says Bangdel. “So more than work, it’s fun I get through all of it.” Sure he does. Bangdel had his fifth solo art exhibition early this month and it surely didn’t go unnoticed. “I mainly do figurative pieces, but this time my paintings depicted eastern religion. So that was different and appreciated.” Bangdel will soon be coming out with his third book of poetry. With such a pace and talent, he surely has a world to capture.



nm/SS

Together We ‘CAN’



nm/SS

What is the mantra for a triumphant venture? Ask **BIPLAV MAN SINGH**—the newly elected president of the Computer Association Nepal, which is better known to computer enthusiasts as CAN. “Together we CAN,” says Singh. His vision? To bridge the huge digital divide that exists between the Valley and outside. In view of CAN Info Tech’s success in the capital, he now harbors hopes of taking digital literacy beyond the mountains of Kathmandu. Let’s hope that he really CAN.

Bagmati Boy

You can’t pass by the Bagmati and not feel helpless about its sorry state. But some decide to go one better. **SUNIL TIMILSINHA**—or the Bagmati Boy—geared up for the rescue around a decade ago. Since starting a door-to-door waste collection campaign in Sinamangal, Timilsinha has come a long way. Last Saturday, as the coordinator of the 4th Bagmati River Festival, he tried hard to make the residents of Kathmandu realize one more time the poor state of the river. “In the beginning I just started out to keep myself busy,” says Timilsinha, recalling his early association with the Bagmati campaign. “Now it’s my dream to see a clean Bagmati.” We hope, for our own sake, that he succeeds.



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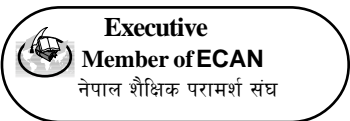
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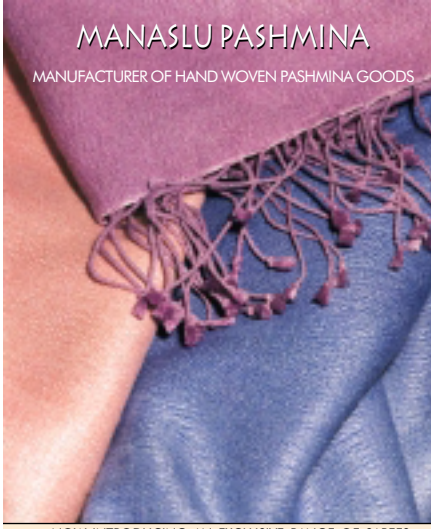


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Around The World In 25 Years



Comedian duo Madan Krishna Shrestha (MA) and Haribansha Acharya (HA), popularly known as **MA-HA**, need no introduction. Ever since their first performance “Bankeshwore,” marking the silver jubilee of the Rastriya Banijya Bank, the duo have been a major crowd puller. Shrestha and Acharya, first introduced

as colleagues working at the bank, have become best friends. MA-HA will be on stage at the capital’s Birendra International Convention Hall with MA-HA Gajatra from August 28 to September 6. The performance marks their 25th anniversary together. Dhriti Bhatta pieced together this conversation about their comeback, life on the stage and their take on the state of the nation, where one of them would begin and the other would end.

Your program in Kathmandu at the Convention Hall comes after a long gap. What have you been doing all this time?

Well, Nepal is not only Kathmandu. We have got to please our fans from all over the country and those living abroad as well. Most of the time we were busy performing out of station. Last year alone we did more than 100 shows, most of them outside the Valley and abroad. On our foreign performances, almost 80 percent of the crowd is Nepali.

Both of you are natural at work. Are you both funny in real life as well?

We are just normal Nepalis when we are off the screen. This means we are loyal citizens concerned about the state of affairs in the country and desperate to make some positive changes. It is only when we start writing our scripts that we come up with insane ideas. It’s like we’re under the spell of some deity. Otherwise, like any other person, we are husbands, sons and dads.

How do you manage your family life with your busy schedule?

We do manage. We take our families along during long tours. Last year we were away for four months. It was fun. When in Kathmandu there’s always time for family, despite our performances.

What is the state of freedom of expression now compared to 25 years ago?

Certainly it is a lot different now. During the Panchayat, it was not very easy to speak your mind. We stepped forward to generate awareness among the general public even then. Our performance was the best medium of information. Our viewers ranged from young children to the elderly. Then we were fighting for democracy. Today we are more or less doing the same, but rather to protect democracy

During the Panchayat, it was not very easy to speak your mind

Are you two joining politics?

No, not as of now, though most of our plays are closely related to politics. Do not bind us to any political party. We are the voices of the people and our ideas reflect what they want. We are doing the same job as any politician. But we think we are doing a lot better.

Both of you are now also into singing...

MA: I started singing even before acting, more than 38 years ago. My first song was on Radio Nepal. But more

than Nepali songs, I have a long list of Newari songs to my credit. Though I later went more into acting, singing is something I always want to continue.

HA: I thought I too could sing, after hearing others sing. I was a little shy at first. I wrote the lyrics and started humming the tune to myself. Eventually they became complete songs. Later, I hear the songs became instant hits.

We heard Madan-ji never combs his hair. Is that true?

MA: I guess my hair has its own style. I don’t need a comb, my hands act as one. I don’t have much hair to use a comb on anyway.

Which work of MA-HA has been your favorite so far?

Naming just one out would be totally unfair. Each of them required a lot of hard work. But the message-oriented serials we made that were telecast by Nepal Television have contributed a lot to the society. We are proud to have worked on those.

Is the present state of country just like Gajatra?

The country has fallen into a deep pit. The smiles of the innocent citizens have been snatched away, and terror is everywhere. It’s high time politicians and philosophers made the country their top priority. There should be no more fighting for power. Let’s end this conflict and bring back smiles to the faces of all Nepalis. **N**

How They See Us

Onta's book is an engaging account of how social science research about Nepal has developed in the U.K. and where it is headed

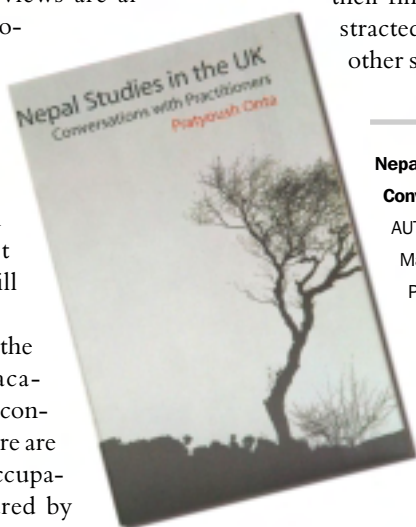
BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

Pratyoush Onta's "Nepal Studies in the UK" is a collection of interviews with 19 scholars based mostly in the U.K. who have been or are engaged in research on different aspects of Nepal. An introduction by Onta precedes the interviews. In it he discusses the history of British scholarly interest in Nepal and presents short analyses of themes common to the interviews that follow. The interviews are arranged in a chronological order according to when the interviewees received their doctorates, the first in 1966 and the last whose thesis is still to be published.

As the focus is the research these academics have done concerning Nepal, there are themes and preoccupations that are shared by many of them. It is thus possible to read the book not as separate accounts of the works of different practitioners but as a single, connected narrative. Moreover, Onta asks each of the interviewees the same questions, an approach that suggests that the purpose of the book is to reveal general trends of social science research and not to provide accounts of the individual works of the people involved. What results is an engaging account of how social science research concerning Nepal has developed in the U.K. in the last fifty or so years, the problems it has faced and faces today and the directions in which it is going.

Since the 70s and 80s, we learn, most western academic research in Nepal has

been in the field of social anthropology. This is partly because of the influence of the anthropologist Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, who was, among other things, Dor Bahadur Bista's mentor, and partly because anthropology departments receive more funding than history or literature departments. But the most important reason is because most researchers were not interested in Nepal as such; they were more interested in the theoretical constructs behind their findings, which could be abstracted and used in analyses of other societies. In the 70s and 80s



**Nepal Studies in the UK:
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AUTHOR: Pratyoush Onta
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most anthropologists were concerned with the societies of single tribal groups.

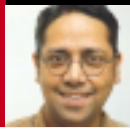
Since the 90s, however, anthropologists have been interested in other themes, such as public health, the media and the effects of globalization. Academics are also getting increasingly involved in viewing Nepal through other lenses than those of anthropology. Michael Hutt, who teaches Nepali language, among other things, at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, is a prominent figure. He is often viewed as a central figure in British social science research about Nepal today because he is connected to many British and Nepali academics and often acts as an intermediary between them. In addition he is the only academic in the U.K. with the word Nepali in his job title. He has been responsible for inspiring a younger generation of research-

ers. Hutt says, "The new generation's interest in Nepal probably converges with Nepali concerns rather more closely than that of earlier generations." Mark Turin agrees: "Studying in Nepal can no longer just be working with 'one people' without taking into account the functioning of the modern nation state."

These researchers face problems in disseminating their work in Nepal. Most of them are forced, particularly because of their interest in advancing their careers, to publish with western publishing houses. Because of the high costs of the books, they become available to the Nepali audience only years after their initial publication, when the original publisher agrees to have the book published in cheaper editions in India and Nepal. Also many academics are uncomfortable about how Nepali audiences respond to and use their writings. David Gellner comments that Newari activists distorted the findings of his book on Newari ethnicity as a defense for Newari culture. Similarly, Mark Turin writes, "I know that I am being consciously and willfully manipulated by the various Thangmi ethnic communities when they ask me to come to their meetings."

Nevertheless many interviewees, including Turin, are keen that Nepalis read their works, and they remain deeply engaged with the Nepali public. They find current intellectual circles in Nepal much more congenial and stimulating than in the past, they are much better acquainted with Nepali languages and literature and they are deeply dedicated to their professions. However, Onta bemoans how "embarrassingly ignorant" we are regarding "the institutional and disciplinary dynamics that generate and constrain scholarship about Nepal."

Foreign scholars have tackled subjects that still lie outside the ken of traditional Nepali scholarship, which is still concerned mostly with modern political history, and they have revealed important truths about our nation. Only by engaging with their works can we reach a mutual level of understanding where, in Michael Hutt's words, "the *kuire-puja*" will cease, but at the same time will "not give way to indiscriminate *kuire-bashing*." ■



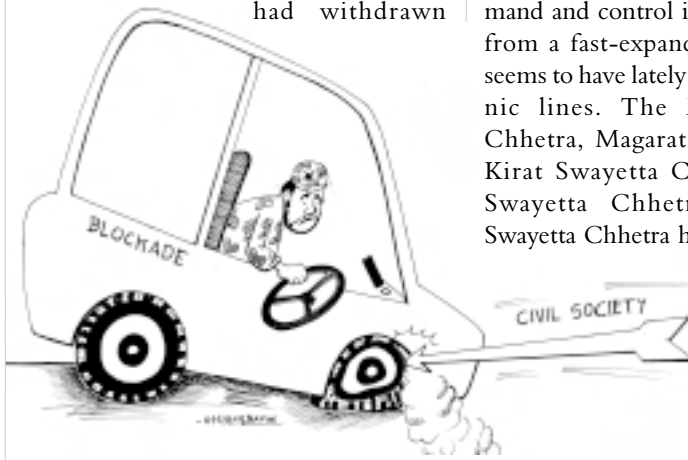
Endgame?

The blockade ended last week after seven days of confusion before the Valley's million-plus residents had quite felt the pain that's become an everyday occurrence to those outside. When the blockade ended with a joint statement from Maoist commanders in "ring" districts bordering the capital, most motorists still had their tanks full and their households were still stocked up with essentials. The Maoists said they had withdrawn

We think that their central leadership still believes in a negotiated settlement, though they are under strong pressure from the middle ranks and downwards to continue with the war. They still care about how the civil society views them. As much as was once again evident last week. They haven't reached a point of no return yet.

But that's not the whole story. There are fears that the CPN-Maoist command and control is under severe strain from a fast-expanding party base that seems to have lately developed along ethnic lines. The Madhesi Swayetta Chhetra, Magarat Swayetta Chhetra, Kirat Swayetta Chhetra, Tharuwan Swayetta Chhetra and Tamuwan Swayetta Chhetra have certainly not orga-

nized along ideological lines. We fear warlords running amok, should the central leadership lose its hold.



the blockade in view of the "requests made by the civil society."

There are two stories behind their withdrawal. First, they just didn't have the military capability to face dangers attendant to continuing with an indefinite blockade of Nepal's most fortified city. It became evident that both the government and its foreign allies were willing to go far should the need arise. Second, the Maoists didn't want to continue the blockade at the cost of completely losing face with civil society.

We are inclined to believe the answer lies somewhere in between. Some 30,000 security forces were deployed to keep the highways open. Though the Maoists could still severely paralyze traffic with stray attacks, the fact that they didn't do so is meaningful. After eight years, their "people's war" has come far, but the scale still hasn't tipped in their favor yet; their "strategic offensive" will still have to wait. The question then comes: Why did the Maoists withdraw the blockade when they did?

Much like the Maoist leadership, the government also still believes in talks and has done substantial groundwork for peace lately. But just as with the Maoists, a section within the government—or the state—is facing a strong militarist pull. Pressure to announce an election scheduled when the country is barely discussing peace again is a dangerous proposition. It's just not common sense. There is another interesting dynamic emerging. Along with the Maoist ranks that see war as the only solution here on, ranking security officials seem to be hardening their position against the talks. That's disturbing.

We urge both the sides to the conflict to scale down their rhetoric and military activities and talk peace seriously. Failure to do so could push us into a full-blown civil war and make foreign intervention inevitable.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor



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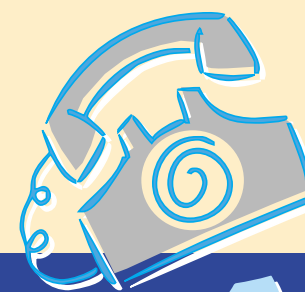
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