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WEEKLY



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Letters



“What happened early this month had shame and failure writ large on all fronts”

NEETAPOKHREL

Shame!

YOU WERE RIGHT IN SAYING WHAT happened early this month had shame and failure writ large on all fronts (“Shame!” Last Word, September 12). Yes, they all failed us—the state, the international community, political parties, the Muslim and Hindu worlds and our own government. But most importantly, we, as a community, failed ourselves. And big time. You mentioned all the above except the last one, which, to me, was the most dire realization from the events of September 1. Regarding all other entities, I doubt many of us had any expectations to begin with.

Definition demands a “state” to be a centralized unit, to have a government and autonomy to enter into relationships with other states. We knew, or know for sure this time around, that we did not have a government; we were never truly centralized—the last few years of civil war has shown that we are anything but centralized—and do not have the rest of the “stately” attributes. We have now disintegrated to such a point that we cannot even say if we have a state at all. So why lament over the failure of something that doesn’t even exist?

However, what was truly shameful and saddening to me was that we failed on a deeper level: We failed as a community. Black Wednesday showed that our community values, that I used to take pride in, have deteriorated simply to hatred, anger and fear. What we saw was neighbors ushering *goondas* into their neighbors’ homes, or looking on quietly, almost with vengeance,

when the houses were burning. When we were kids, if anybody was hurt, the entire neighborhood would gather to find the culprit. My house once caught fire, and the whole town came out to help. This is what I thought living in a Nepali community was all about, what foreigners mean when they say “Nepalis are sweet and loving.” Was that tribal behavior? Have we now modernized/urbanized to this sorry state?

Yes, we have shamed and failed ourselves to our core, because losing the essence of a community is irreversible. We may get our government and our state back, but the sense of kinship among community members once gone will not return.

NEETAPOKHREL
KATHMANDU

Exotic Nepal

THAT WESTERN MEDIA USUALLY exoticize and distort our living realities is a pedestrian truth; yet I still read “De-exoticizing Nepal” (Perspective, September 12) with a lot of



interest, hoping for fresh insights and strategies for combating stereotypes, as the title seemed to suggest. No such luck. After the ritual scolding of the big, bad western media and after inundating the reader with routine information (in that they further no new arguments, provide no new insights), the article concludes with a recommendation that we Nepalis exoticize ourselves! Hey, Ram, with writings like this, who needs western media? If the recommendation was tongue-in-cheek, then what exactly was the point of the article, besides flogging a long-dead horse and reiterating the obvious? On a positive note, overall, I think Nation has done a wonderful job so far, and I intend to keep reading your magazine.

ANANDSUBBA
VIA EMAIL

Helpless Nepalis

ANIL J. SHAHI SKETCHES THE REAL image of our national fate ("Helpless," Guest Column, September 12). It is a bloody mess everyday. The rebels and the security forces kill each other through modern weapons; and there's poverty, illiteracy, despair, corruption, terror, listlessness and backwardness that is bleeding all of Nepal. Indeed, violence has become an integral part of our daily lives. There are innocent deaths everywhere—of security forces, Maoist rebels, political workers, civilians, journalists and social workers in the killing fields.

In our bid for a brighter future, we fight among ourselves, force schools and colleges to close, teach our young ones the art of battle and send them through manpower agencies to work in alien lands. We stop development projects and destroy local infrastructures. Does such reckless abandonment of the present secure us a better tomorrow?

Vincent Androsiglio best describes the Nepali psyche, "This hopelessness and seemingly endless journey of torture and uncertainty that has left the psyche in a state of collapse." ("A Disguised Hurt," Cover Story, September 12). He then implores, "We must do something to deal with this chronic de-

pression that haunts the Nepali soul." Indeed we must.

JAGANNATH LAMICHHANE
VIA EMAIL

Valley-centric

ONE CAN SAY THE "BELGIAN IN THE Congo" kind of exploitation by the Kathmandu Valley of other parts of the country is responsible for Nepal's misery ("The Curse Of The Blue Sea," Writing on the Wall, by Swarnim Wagle, August 15). The curse in Nepal is that everything in the country is centralized in the Kathmandu Valley, whether it be politics, education, health care or jobs, you name it. One can also say that all the concentration towards Kathmandu began with King Prithvi Narayan Shah's unification of Nepal. Before unification, Nepal was made of many decentralized pockets of tiny states; the decentralization then helped these tiny states to prosper. Kathmandu Valley's prosperity (say, in terms of GDP per capita) of that period was probably not less than any of the moderately developed European countries of that time. Just look at the richness of Newari architecture, food, music and festivals, which developed long before the unification. After unification, as rulers and elites moved to the Kathmandu Valley, they did not think beyond the Valley. For example, did Prithvi Narayan Shah and his successors make any effort to develop Gorkha, their place of origin? No, they did not. The whole of the country stagnated for centuries.

MANGAL
BANGKOK

Correction

- The picture in Kunal Lama's column "Massage Parlors" (August 22) was a mistake. The photo belongs to Foot Fetish, Thamel.
 - Read "Top Bahadur Singh, former Supreme Court justice and head of the high-level committee, in "Damage Control" (Cover Story, September 12). We wrote Top Bahadur Rayamajhi.
- We regret the errors.

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T H E T R U E C O L O R S O F L I F E



EVERY WEEK. EVERY MONDAY.



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WEEKLY

THE NOTION
OF NATIONHOOD



**WHERE DO THE CHILDREN
PLAY:** Eleven-year-old Dhana
Bahadur Bhujel, who lost his
lower limbs in a Maoist
ambush, holds a pigeon at a
peace rally

nation weekly/Sagar Shrestha

The Iraq Trauma

The neglect of the hostages in Iraq tells a bigger story. It shows the callous disregard by the Nepali ruling classes for the lives of common Nepalis.

BY PRAMOD MISHRA

The riot and arson of September 1 has driven a message home. It is, however, not necessarily what the media pundits and politicians have said—antisocial elements, communal forces, the Palace or any other easy theory of national conspiracy or an international hand.

Despite their hard work at home or courage to venture abroad from their blood-stained terraces or exhausted plains, ordinary Nepalis do not matter in the eyes of their rulers. Only when such men take the law into their hands do the rulers hear their sentiments and apply the cosmetics of stock phrases and political jargons.

Ordinary Nepalis have paid with their blood on both sides of the Maoist conflict. Some village youths joined the rebellion out of fear or frustration. Others filled the sudden vacancies in the security forces for economic reasons—positions that in times of normalcy required much “source-and-force,” even then were beyond the reach of many communities, regions and classes. Those needing better money for their family or unwilling to participate in the national gore fled for the towns and cities in Nepal as well as India. Among these, those with wherewithal registered with the manpower agencies, paid them exorbitant fees and followed their leads to go wherever their able bodies and meager skills were needed in the global labor market. Those lacking any resources made do in the streets of Nepali towns, particularly Kathmandu.

The slaughter of hostages in Iraq exposed to these men their government’s culture of neglect and disconnection. It made them feel unwanted both here and abroad. Otherwise, why didn’t the government investigate the exploitative manpower agencies long before people’s anger came to a boil? Certainly, one had heard stories of how many of these agencies demanded high fees and even bribes in order for an overseas passage. And we are talking about a government that claims to represent democracy. On the other hand, the security forces and the Maoists either recruit the youths on their side or else treat them as criminals.

After all, why didn’t the government respond effectively to appeals made by the 12 young men in Iraq? Why did it let so much time lapse? Why didn’t the government send a team of ministers, say, led by Mohammed Mohsin to Iraq, as the Indian government had done? Success or failure wouldn’t have mattered—genuine effort would have evinced good faith and sincerity. Even after the bes-

tial killings, why didn’t the government take measures to safeguard Muslim property and, yes, even the manpower agencies in order to assert rule of law? Doesn’t the government now appear complicit in using the riot and vengeance as a means of channeling people’s shock and anger? Didn’t it think that people would ignore their brethren’s inhuman slaughter in distant lands? Certainly, the 12 hostages were not on its priority list despite the millions of rupees of monthly remittances by migrant workers. The hewing and hawing by the government ministers won’t do; they surely lacked the capacity to feel the frail nerves of the nation already frayed by the blood letting of the past few years.

Thus, the neglect of the hostages in Iraq tells a bigger story than just what the minister of state for foreign affairs or his ambassadors were able or unable to do—make phone calls and appear on television. It shows the callous disregard by the Nepali ruling classes for the lives of common Nepali people, here and abroad. Take-no-prisoner attitude of the security forces and the gruesome death sentences of the Maoist kangaroo courts demonstrate the same cynicism of Nepali rulers, potential or real, for ordinary Nepali lives. Unfortunately, even the media houses have come to be identified not so much with Nepali democracy, as it should be, but with power, privilege and big money by the semi-literate youths.

But this is not to idolize the common Nepali men as saints, for they are not. They are just ordinary Nepali folks with potential virtues and manifest vices. After witnessing the vandalism and arson on the streets of Kathmandu on black Wednesday, especially the bonfire of a Muslim butcher’s household goods in front of his hovel in Sundhara or the destruction of media property, one can only conclude that a crowd of common men can easily turn into a destructive mob—a mass of blind energy and prejudice led by lumps of unwanted, uncared for flesh and blood. After all, in the absence of any productive channeling of their manpower, what could the young men who escaped the security forces and the Maoists in the villages

and came to Kathmandu to remain unemployed, or those who grew up in the streets and remained there, do if not become a rioting mob at the slightest provocation?

And the murder of Nepali hostages in Iraq was not a small provocation; the entire nation identified with their fate. Therefore, better take note of the destructive wrath of the common man on the street, and don’t always lay off the blame on some conspiracy or other for whatever happens in Nepal. **N**



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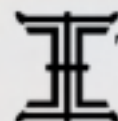
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STAR STUDDED: Actors Srikrishna Shrestha, Melina Manandhar and Shiva Shrestha with copies of Nation Weekly at Beauti and Boutika fair at BICC

Embassy security

Pakistan has tightened security at the Royal Nepal Embassy in Islamabad following reports in the Pakistani media about threats from Islamic groups. Newspapers reported that some extremist groups were planning to target the Nepali embassy in retaliation to the attacks on mosques in Kathmandu. Rioters had also targeted manpower agencies and offices of general sales agents of some international airlines following the execution of 12 Nepali youths by the Islamic extremist group, Ansar al-Sunna, in Iraq. Kantipur daily quoted the Nepali ambassador in Pakistan, Puskarman Singh Rajbhandari, as saying that he had not received any threats in writing or over the telephone. He said some half a dozen members of parliament from the Jamat-e-Islamic party had called on him and inquired about attacks on mosques in Kathmandu. During the week of the riots, the Pakistani government had provided security to the embassy upon the embassy's request.

Closure threat

The All Nepal Trade Union Federation, the trade union affiliated to the Maoists, called for the indefinite closure of 35 more businesses across the country beginning Friday, September 10. The trade union has demanded that the whereabouts of their cadres arrested by the security

forces be made public. Suspected Maoists hurled bombs into the premises of the Hotel Malla, one of the 35 businesses on the Maoist list. Twelve other large businesses, with alleged American or Indian investments, have already pulled down their shutters following a Maoist threat early this month.

CIAA enquiry

Former police chiefs Achyut Krishna Kharel, Pradeep Samsher Rana and Moti Lal Bohara have refuted claims that they were evading the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority. The CIAA never came to arrest them, the IGPs said. The CIAA had filed cases against the former police top guns on charges of corruption on August 13 in the Special Court. It then reported that

they had fled. The three said that the CIAA never approached them or sent any message regarding the filing of the cases.

Maoist casualties

Two central committee members of the CPN-Maoist were among six people killed by the security forces in Lahan, according to the government. The two, Sherman Kunwar, alias Bishal, and Kumar Poudel, were killed in an action at Dhanchhabar, Laxmipur VDC in Siraha. Kunwar was the vice commander of the sixth brigade of Eastern region, and Poudel was in-charge of Ramechhap, Dolakha and Sindhupalchowk. Poudel's six-year-old daughter was also killed in the encounter.

School closure

Graduate-level students in Chitwan, Rupendehi and Pokhara were not able to attend their first year exams after the ANNFSU-R, the Maoist student wing, locked the examination centers. The heads of the examination centers resigned after failing to hold examinations on time. The schools in Gandak region also remained closed after the ANNFSU-R called for an indefinite closure of schools from August 16. They have demanded the release of their cadres from

the Army custody. Meanwhile, the Private Association of Boarding Schools of Nepal has decided to keep their schools in operation despite the Maoist threat.

Load shedding

Load shedding is a clear possibility as the Kali Gandaki A hydropower project, the largest in the country, shuts down later this month for repair and maintenance. The Syanja-based plant is slated to close from the third week of September for two weeks. Kali Gandaki A produces 144 megawatts of electricity out of the just above 600 MW installed capacity of the central grid. The current 10th Five-Year Plan aims to increase the installed capacity to 842 MW.

Burning tires

The local district administrations of Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur have banned the burning of tires during the public protests. The step was taken to reduce air pollution in the Valley, the district administrations said. The ban comes at a time when tire-burning has become a common mode of protest in recent months. The administrations said severe action would be taken against anyone defying the ban.

Team To Gulf

A government team, led by Information and Communication Minister Mohammed Mohsin, is to visit Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan and Kuwait. This comes after protests against the killing of 12 Nepalis in Iraq turned violent and led to random attacks on Muslim establishments and mosques, manpower companies and media houses. It is feared that the attack against Muslims

in Nepal could invite a backlash against Nepalis in the Gulf. The Gulf region is host to more than half a million Nepali workers. The

team is expected to raise the issue of security of Nepalis employed in the region with the officials there.





CALL FOR JUSTICE: New York-based Nepalis converged outside U.N. headquarters to condemn the killings of 12 innocent Nepalis in Iraq

Normalcy returns

Life in Ilam returned to normal as the threat of a major Maoist attack subsided. Security had been beefed up. Hundreds of people who had fled the district headquarters following a Maoist evacuation decree issued a month ago have started returning to their homes. Educational institutions, industries and shops reopened. Vehicle traffic also resumed last week. The Maoists had claimed that they would launch a major raid on September 8. Security forces said that they foiled the attacks by using aerial surveillance and deploying a large number of troops on the ground.

More mobiles

State-owned telecommunications service provider Nepal Telecom has decided to issue an additional 58,000 pre-paid mobile lines before Nepal's national festival, Dashain. Nepal Telecom is also likely to cut the charges for the post-paid mobile services. The company issued 41,500 pre-paid mobile phones in the beginning of July. So far Nepal Telecom has issued about 120,000 pre-paid lines and about 75,000 post-paid lines.

Norwegian offer

The new Norwegian ambassador to Nepal, Tore Toreng, said that Norway was willing to consider mediating between

the government and Maoists if both sides could come to an agreement. Norway is open to any role, Toreng was quoted by Kantipur as saying. Toreng said he was coming to Nepal with a positive outlook and looking forward to making the 31-year-old Nepal-Norway diplomatic relationship more fruitful.

Maoist attack

Maoists attacked a party meeting of their former ally Janamorchha Nepal, injuring 24 members including five central leaders in Dullu village in Dailekh. Party General Secretary and ex-Parliamentarian Navaraj Subedi was among

those injured in the attack by a group of 150 Maoists, reports said, citing sources in Janmorcha Nepal. Janmorcha was once a close ally of the CPN-Maoist. Yamuna Bhushal, central member of the party, sustained injuries and is said to be in critical condition. The Maoists used khukuris, stones, batons and guns while attacking the party workers and also looted the party workers' belongings, the party said.

Chamber call

The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industries called on all concerned for negotiation to resume operations of the 47 businesses that have been closed following the pro-Maoist All Nepal Trade Union Federation threats. The FNCCI said that the country's was losing billions in revenues due to the closure.

Indo-Nepal pipeline

Nepal and India signed a memorandum of understanding on setting up a 35-km petroleum pipeline from Raxaul to Amlekhganj. The estimated cost of laying the pipeline is Rs. 330 million. It is expected to be

complete within 24 months. The Indian Oil Corporation, the IOC, supplies about 60 percent of Nepal's requirement for petroleum products from its Raxaul depot via the Amlekhganj depot of the Nepal Oil Corporation, the NOC. The new pipeline is expected to ensure an uninterrupted supply of petroleum products to Nepal through an environment-friendly mode of transportation, effecting savings in freight besides reduction in stock loss. The two oil corporations have had a relationship going back three decades.

Riots probe

The Cabinet has decided to elevate the status of the committee formed to investigate the loss of property during the riots following the killing of 12 Nepalis in Iraq to that of a "high-level commission." The commission headed by former Supreme Court Justice Top Bahadur Singh has been given a month to submit its findings. The commission's task is to name the culprits behind the riots and recommend actions to be taken against them, and recommend compensation to those who suffered losses in the riots.



BR

SECURITY ALERT: Five members of Industrial Security Group—Britain, France, Germany, India and the United States—held a press meet at the British Embassy to voice concerns about the Maoist closure of businesses

**DEVELOPMENT BANK
OPENS BRANCH**

Annapurna Development Bank has started banking transactions at its head office at Banepa in Kavre district. It has an authorized capital of Rs. 40 million and aims to invest in agriculture, industries, commerce, hire purchase and other fields. The bank will provide up to eight percent interest to depositors and charge borrowers 12-13 percent interest on loans.

NATIONAL HYDRO POWER SHARES

The initial public offering of the National Hydro Power Company has opened for residents of the Kathmandu Valley from September 6. The public offering worth Rs. 140 million is the first hydropower sector IPO in Nepal. Sales of shares will be closed on September 29 at the earliest. The company was established in 1996 by N.B. Group to develop small and medium size hydropower projects. Their Indrawati III plant with a capacity of 7.5 megawatts produces 51 million kilowatt-hours of electricity in a normal year.

GULF AIR AWARDED

Gulf Air, the national carrier of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, Kingdom of Bahrain and Sultanate of Oman, has been announced as the winner of the Middle East and North African Platinum Best Airline Travel Award 2004. Gulf Air has also been awarded Most Improved Airline Award 2004, Best First Class Onboard Food 2004 and Best Business Class Check-in 2004 by independent aviation quality monitor, Skytrax.

**FIRST AND BUSINESS CLASS
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Gulf Air announced a \$10 million investment in new first and business class sky beds, for comfortable seating and sleeping environment in the skies. The configuration offers a private "cabin" space for each passenger, which can transform into a fully functional bed, offering a unique combination of comfort and privacy. Another unique feature to be incorporated in the re-fit will be a dedicated changing room; enabling passengers on night flights to comfortably change into their Gulf Air sleep suits or other attire to further enhance the quality of sleep. The first refurbished aircraft will be in operation from March, serving desti-

nations including London, Frankfurt and Paris. The full refit program will be complete by July 2005.

LUMBINI BANK ALLOTS SHARES

Lumbini Bank distributed shares through a lottery system in the presence of bankers, central bank officials, shareholders and journalists. There were a total of 58,819 applicants who applied for shares of the bank, out of which 30,233 received shares. Issue manager of the LBL's shares are CIT and NIDC Capital Markets.

**BUSINESS ENTREPRENEURS
VISIT INDIA**

Binod Bahadur Shrestha, president of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, is leading the Nepali private sector team during Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's official visit to India. The business entrepreneurs' team consists of people from the banking, insurance and commerce, health, education, garments, real estates, investors, export and import and tourism sectors.

FNCCI POSTPONES AGM

The standing committee meeting held under Binod Bahadur Shrestha, president of Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, has desired to postpone the 38th annual general meeting of the federation. The meeting was scheduled for September 15-16.

LOCALS BUILD POWER PLANT

The residents of Bhaisipankha VDC-5 in Bhojpur district have generated power on their own. Ten houses in the ward will benefit from the power generated by the plant,

which was constructed at a total cost of Rs. 250,000.

GARMENT EXPORTS TO U.S. DOWN

Readymade garment exports to the United States in August dropped by 26 percent compared to the corresponding period last year. This is the eighth straight month that Nepali garment exports to the U.S., which absorbs about 85 percent of the country's total exports, experienced a dip. Unlike the export figure to the U.S., garments exports to Canada, though small by comparison, continues to register growth. According to industry figures, exports to Canada soared by 33 percent in August compared to export figures during the same period in 2003. When the multi-fiber arrangement is phased out starting on January 1, 2005, Nepali exports have to face cutthroat competition in the international market, as quota-free access to the U.S. will be lost.

AIRFARES TO INCREASE

The Airline Operators Association of Nepal decided on September 8 to hike fares on all domestic routes. The operators say that a Rs. 13 per liter increase in the price of aviation fuel in July has put them in the red. They say the increase, which will average Rs. 4.20 per person per minute of flying time is less than their losses due to the fuel cost increase. The fare increase went into effect on September 10.

QATAR AIRWAYS TO SEYCHELLES

Qatar Airways has announced that it will be flying to the Seychelles Islands from December 1. The airline plans to launch four flights a week during the busy periods for holidays. The Seychelles comprise 115 islands scattered over 1 million square kilometers in the Indian Ocean.



Free

He was, many said, destined to be the prime minister one day. But now he is on the frontline of a court battle against corruption charges labeled against him while in office. The Supreme Court last week ruled that Chiranjivi Wagle—former minister, senior NC-D leader and a close friend of Prime Minister Deuba—would remain out of jail until it decides on his application for bail.

On July 22, the Special Court had convicted Wagle and sentenced him to two and half years in prison and also slapped a fine of Rs. 27.2 million on him. It also ordered the confiscation of Rs. 33 million on charges that he had amassed wealth illegally.

But when police reacted days later, Wagle went missing. Last week, Wagle himself appeared at the apex court, seeking a revision of the Special Court verdict. The Special Court's decision was "unnatural, unexpected and prejudiced," Wagle said in his defense.

The Special Court has already acquitted Wagle's son, Devendra, and his daughter-in-law who were also booked for corruption charges. This has been a heavy fall. Wagle spent eight years in jail for his political beliefs; he was released after the restoration of democracy in 1990. In 1991 he ran for a parliamentary seat from Gorkha and won a convincing victory. He was re-elected three times. In 1991, Wagle had just Rs. 90,000 and some land in rural Gorkha, by the turn of century his bank accounts were bulging with millions of rupees. While the court has ordered that his property be confiscated, a group of rioters burned his house on September 1.

Sunder Shrestha



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

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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DELAYED JUSTICE

The government has set up a probe commission to look into the riots. But it's just sorting out its preliminary logistics.

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

IT IS A PITIFUL SIGHT TO WALK BY the Siddhi Bhawan Complex located in the heart of Kathmandu at busy Jamal. A week after life returned to normalcy, the office complex stands out: Its burnt façade and interiors in ruins.

Tattered jute sacks and tin sheets have been placed over shattered windowpanes that once housed busy commercial businesses such as Qatar Airways, Air Sahara, Mani Tara Shopping Center, International Motorcycle Spare Parts, HISEF and seven other corporate offices. All that now remains of the office space built in two ropanis of land is a broken building and burned office furniture.

"The damage will remain as it is until the government committee that could provide us with compensation inspects the building," says Madan Dhan Tuladhar, one of the four sons of Siddhi Dhan Tuladhar who built the complex in 1997. Tuladhar says a total 30 family members depended on the rental revenues from the building. "But the government still hasn't done much to help us rebuild the complex, though we've been regular taxpayers," adds Tuladhar, who estimates the losses on his building at over Rs. 450 million. "The airlines and the manpower agencies have their associations, but who's going to speak for property owners like us?"

Private property owners like Tuladhar are hopeful that the government's high-level commission chaired by former Supreme Court Justice Top Bahadur Singh would give them relief. But that will have to wait. A week after the riots, the commission members were still gathering at the Home Ministry and discussing preliminary logistics. Their task: To complete in a month a probe report that will name the culprits, recommend actions against them and suggest relief work to be initiated by the government.

"A month is such a short time to investigate riots throughout the country," Singh, who heads the commission, told television channels before the government elevated his committee's status to that of a "high-level commission" on September 7 and added to it Hari Uprety and Prakash Raut, representatives from civil society.

There are going to be many claims to investigate and not all of them are going to be easy to verify. Sambhu Limbu's house in the outskirts of Lalitpur got ransacked just because his brother-in-law used to run a manpower agency. "Some people used the riots to vent their personal animosity, even targeting private residences such as mine," says Limbu, whose furniture, lights and air conditioners were broken by the mob that looked to be made up of local goons.

The commission first needs to identify private building owners like Tuladhar and Rai and estimate the losses they have incurred. Then they have to come up with a recommendation for compensation.

Neither step will be easy. Even officials at organizations like the Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies are divided over what exactly do they want from the government. Initially, they called for compensation amounting to Rs. 1 billion to all 325 agencies they claim were vandalized. Some of them are happy that Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba last week verbally assured them that passports taken from their offices would be replaced free of cost.

"None of the agents are talking about the loss of their valuable records in the fire. They are plain scared they would be falling into a deeper crisis," says Dhruva Dev Bhatta, who runs Tripura Employment and emphasizes that the government must make good use of the opportunity to adopt more stringent measures to clean up the mess inside manpower agencies. "But compensating the damages will still be a tough task, while some have incurred losses of half a million rupees and there are others who have lost property worth six million," he adds. "How will

All photos nw/SS



the commission create a yardstick for compensation?”

Most government ministers Nation Weekly contacted wouldn't make comments over possible measures they would adopt to compensate the damages to private property, manpower agencies and media houses. Their common answer: Wait for the Singh Commission report. However, the government did publicly denounce a media report quoting Nepali Congress leaders who claimed that the people who burned the tent of the four agitating parties in Ratna Park during the riots snatched an identity card of a member of the Palace security staff. "The parties have not only expressed their own responsibility for the riots but have also seriously undermined

the trust and confidence of the security forces," Minister Mohammed Moshin told a gathering of foreign correspondents last week. The government spokesman kept just short of saying directly that some of the Congress-aligned Nepal Students' Union and Tarun Dal leaders had been part of the protests against the Iraq killings on the morning of September 1, Wednesday. Police officers tell us they quickly withdrew their party flags and their leaders fled the scene when the protests turned violent.

Meanwhile, the police have launched an investigation within their own mid-level ranks to identify who was responsible for the lethargic policing. They are also interrogating some of the rioters identified as being involved in the attack

on two major private media houses. "The police say three of those who had taken our cameras after vandalizing our offices are involved with the Town Down Restaurant in New Baneshwore," says Bahadur Krishna Tamrakar, chairman of Space Time Publications Pvt. Ltd, whose offices were rampaged, causing damages the company claims are as much as Rs. 40 million. About two weeks ago, thugs from the same restaurant attacked Kantipur Television cameraman Raju Timilsina as he was taking pictures of protestors being beaten during the NC-called Nepal banda on August 29. Kantipur, the other media house that was vandalized on September 1, claims its damages to be around Rs. 35 million.

Channel Nepal Television, the television channel owned by Space Time, is currently airing its news without two plasma screens it once proudly displayed during newscasts. Its sister media house, Space Time Daily, still hasn't resumed publication. In the past two weeks, a number of leaders have visited Space Time and Kantipur to express their solidarity for the media houses and have asked the government to provide proper compensation.

"We are not particularly hoping for government compensation," says Yogesh Upadhaya, executive news director of Channel Nepal Television, who is also the founding editor of Kantipur and The Kathmandu Post. "But we do believe the government should support us at times like these, and compensation is always welcome." Whatever compensation is offered, it is bound to cause controversy, either for being too little or for being overly generous. Word of the government provision of Rs. 1 million as compensation to the families of the 12 Nepalis killed in Iraq hasn't made security forces particularly happy, for example. "It is extremely sad that the killings [in Iraq] took place at all," a senior Army officer told Nation Weekly. "But our security personnel get far less that amount, apart from minimal support from the Welfare Funds when they are killed in their own country by the Maoists." For now, Siddhi Bhawan stands tall as a testimony that the government failed that Black Wednesday and compensation is still far away. **N**



(Clockwise from top) Office equipment on the streets; Yogesh Upadhaya, executive news director at Channel Nepal; Siddhi Bhawan in Jamal; Vandalized house of Sambhu Limbu in Lalitpur



A Royal Mess

With half-a-dozen security installations within earshot of the mob at the mosques, why wasn't it possible to protect them?

BY PURNA BASNET AND LOLITA MAYA MAGAR

Though the government did practically nothing to gain the release of the 12 Nepalis, the Home Ministry and concerned government authorities could have made provisions for the outcome of the failure. That is usual during such crises. Once the news broke, more than a preview was available to the government for 12 hours. Not more than 12 minutes would have been needed to deal with the situation, which was predictable, manageable and within the ability of the security forces in the capital. Two lives did not have to be lost, one, reportedly of an Army captain, at the hands of the security guards outside the Egyptian embassy. Faith could have been kept and peace and order secured. After 2 p.m. on September 1 there was a swift shift of gear. Curfew and shoot-at-sight orders were issued, helicopters whirred above and the Royal Nepal Army, the Armed Police Force and the police took over the streets.

On the evening of August 31, after news of the murders broke, the Rashtrabadi Milan Kendra and the Deshbhakta Sangh met and organized demonstrations at Thamel and Pulchowk. Going by the nature of the demonstrations, which included threatening visits to mosques and manpower agencies, it would seem reasonable for such a policed and armed state to have been ready: Curfew from the night of August 31 would have been an obvious option. Trouble was anticipated.

On September 1, the students unions agitated outside campuses. They burned tires, blocked traffic and chanted slogans. The agitating student unions had decided to link the killings in Iraq with their struggle against regression, and they had planned demonstrations at Ratna Park for the morning of September 1. In Ratna Park, the Nepali Congress *Anshan*, a relay hunger strike, had been going on. The NC flags were flying. A group of men came and asked that the political activists put away the NC flags. The group's demeanor was threatening. During the exchange, one of the "visitors'" cards was taken from him. It belonged to a security person attached to the royal palace.

Then the demonstrations began, and destruction, looting and desecration followed. Different parts of the city witnessed related scenes that seem to defy a pattern and which contribute to the image of mayhem. According to witness' accounts, the student leaders of the agitating

organizations postponed their program and began to send their cadre back. However they did not manage to send off everyone, and some activists from the NC-affiliated National Students' Union and the UML-affiliated All Nepal National Free Students Union reportedly were involved in their individual capacities in the ensuing events, which by then were clearly communal and lumpen. The ANNFSU had scheduled a separate demonstration against the killing from 2 p.m., which they postponed due to the curfew.

How did a planned political program get taken over so easily? The students had not planned on attacking manpower agencies, the mosque or "Muslim" establishments or on looting and arson. Who instigated, who hijacked, who infiltrated, who organized, who mobilized whom and how, and how they took over all require answers.

For now, questions arise from the urban structure of Ratna Park and its vicinity. The area within a two-kilometer radius includes Narayanhiti Palace and Singha Durbar, two symbols of the nation, along with many other important government buildings and offices, including banks, and a concentration of security establishments. There is a police station just across the Jame Masjid. There is the district police office at Hanuman Dhoka; an Army barrack near Shahid Gate; the Mahendra Police Club on Exhibition Road; the Singha Durbar police station plus others at Anamnagar, Durbar Marg and Kamalpokhari; police headquarters at Naxal; armed police force personnel virtually permanently stationed at Ratna Park, the site of demonstrations against regression...so many security posts, so many armed personnel but no decisive action. Wasn't it possible to put at least a minimal security cordon around the area within minutes, even by South Asian efficiency standards? The police were effective not only at dispersing a crowd of 100,000 plus on the opening days of the last stage of the movement against "regression" in April 2004 but also at injuring and damaging them irreparably. Certain areas were declared "riot-prone"; demonstrations were curtailed then. None of this happened. What happened on August 31 and September 1 last week? Why?

Kantipur TV officials are on record saying that it took the authorities one hour and fifty-five minutes to reach their office. The Koteshwore police station is less than a kilometer away. Likewise officials of the

desecrated mosques have testified to the inaction of the security authorities. Manpower agencies are dotted around the urban landscape, but so are police stations. On other occasions, the security has been swift to act. It prowls, parades, pokes its weapons, queries and prods; it sounds its sirens, puts up roadblocks and is relentless in intruding on citizens. What happened on August 31 and September 1? Will we ever know? **N**



PH/SS



FRIENDLY TIES: Prime Minister Deuba with his Indian counterpart, Manmohan Singh

Agencies

CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

Prime Minister Deuba has already termed his Delhi visit a 'huge success.' That will have to wait.

BY SUMAN PRADHAN
IN NEW DELHI

In this age of instant analysis and commentaries, it is tempting to put a moniker of "success" on Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's visit to New Delhi. But as many historians will note, the success or failure of the trip will only be known after the results of the agreements signed and unsigned here will begin to show in the future. However, if Deuba's utterances are any indication, the visit has already been a "huge success."

"I found the Indian leaders very sympathetic. There is tremendous goodwill toward Nepal. The visit has been a success and has strengthened the ties between our two countries," he told Nepali journalists accompanying him on the trip.

But as a veteran journalist pointed out: "We only know what they told us. We don't know what the two sides discussed in private meetings, so it is difficult to gauge the impact of the visit just yet." Based on the agreements the two governments signed, the visit has indeed been a moderate success. Four separate agreements were signed in Delhi, ac-

ording to which India will assist in building a 40-kilometer oil pipeline from Raxaul to Amlekhganj, help in constructing a state-of-the-art weather station capable of utilizing weather data from its INSAT satellite and standardize measurements between the two countries. The fourth was an agreement for expanded cultural and sports cooperation between the two neighbors.

SECURITY ISSUES

While both the governments highlighted the agreements as a measure of success, the media spotlight however fell on those issues on which agreements were not signed. Chief among those were security issues raised by the Maoist rebellion.

Over the last year, India's policy regarding the Maoists has undergone a per-

DIFFICULT TIES

Nepal and India have a long history of friendship; the history of perceived hostilities is just as long

BY AJIT BARAL

When Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba took his flight to New Delhi last Wednesday, he knew he was making the trip at a critical moment. Characteristically, the visit failed to excite the opposition parties at home.

“The weakest prime minister ever to visit India,” claimed Chakra Prasad Bastola, former foreign minister and central committee member of the Nepali Congress. Bastola even suggested that Deuba refrain from negotiating any serious issues that might compromise Nepal’s vital national interests.

Another former foreign minister, RPP’s Prakash Chandra Lohani, took a dig at Deuba for what he called the prime minister’s failure to build a consensus with the political parties before the all-important visit, as has been the traditions. To be fair to Deuba, all this is hardly surprising and much of it even routine.

Nepal’s political parties have a long tradition of India-bashing, and almost all major politicians have tried to make political capital of anti-Indian feelings at one time or another. Nepal-India ties have been an emotive issue, and most Nepali leaders seem happy playing the age-old game. Former Ministers Bastola and Lohani have been on the receiving end themselves when they were in office.

When Bastola visited India as the foreign minister in the Koirala government, the opposition was dismissive of the visit. CPN-UML general secretary and, at that time, leader of the opposition Madhav Kumar Nepal, had said the visit meant little.

Nepal-India relations have been plagued by problems of perception and the understandable fears of a tiny country next to a giant neighbor. Nepal’s own

political instability hasn’t helped matters.

“Understanding between the two countries has not matured enough,” says Hari Sharma, a political analyst and aide to former Prime Minister Girija Prasad

Koirala, referring to the problems of perception in the Nepal-India relationship. Perceptual problems between the countries crop up frequently as much due to the lack of continuing discussions as due to paranoia among Nepali elites. For its part, the Indian media has frequently projected Nepal as a playground for anti-Indian elements, a trend that



WATERSHED: Tanakpur became a major bone of contention in Nepal-India ties in the 90s

became most evident when an Indian Airlines plane was hijacked from Kathmandu and flown to Afghanistan in 1999.

Nepal and India have a long history of bilateral relations, yet that relationship is plagued by perceived hostility between the two countries. Both countries need each other, yet each perceives the other to be working counter to its interests. India believes Nepal is host to anti-Indian elements. Nepal worries that India has an ulterior motive, to bring Nepal under its security umbrella.

In 1989-90 India imposed an economic embargo on Nepal after the trade and transit treaty between the two countries expired. This was the time when the relationship between the two countries hit the lowest point. Such stern and unilateral actions have often made Nepal suspicious of India. And even when New Delhi suggests something with good intent, the ghosts still haunt Nepalis. "India has failed to understand the evolving dynamics of Nepal," says Sharma. And leaders in Kathmandu, for their part, have been only too happy to stoke the latent paranoia without worrying to much about its long-term damage. In 2000, Nepali Congress Minister J. P. Anand added fuel to fire with his remarks against the Indian actor, Hritik Roshan. For the next few days, Kathmandu witnessed disturbing anti-Indian riots.

Analysts say Nepal's biggest foreign policy paradox is that no government can survive without India's help, and yet none wants to be seen as pro-India either. Prime Minister Deuba faces the same problem. It has a lot to do with the asymmetry of the relationship and geopolitics. India is 23 times larger than Nepal and is one of the fastest growing economies in the world: Nepal needs India more than the other way round. **N**

TAKE CARE: Prime Minister Deuba bids adieu to Chief of Army Staff Pyar Jung Thapa



ceptible shift. A hands-off policy initially has turned into active engagement as Indian authorities began to take note of the gravity of the situation. They have, as a result, arrested or deported scores of Maoists back to Nepal and tightened border surveillance to discourage rebel infiltration. These concerns were evident in Delhi, which has termed the Maoist insurgency "a shared threat to both countries" and has promised to do everything to help Nepal combat the insurgency.

"India is committed to providing all possible assistance [to Nepal] in addressing the difficult challenges that it presently faces," Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said during an official luncheon in Deuba's honor. He didn't get into the details, but Indian officials later expanded on the subject.

"Security issues were an important subject of discussion," Indian foreign Secretary Shyam Saran said. "We know that there are linkages which exist between Nepal's Maoists and the MCC and PWG. It's a shared security threat."

The MCC (Maoist Communist Centre) and the PWG (Peoples' War Group) are Maoist groups operating in India. Their links with Nepali Maoists have Indian authorities worried. Another

important but unspoken worry here is that, if India as the regional power fails to assist Nepal in combating the insurgency, then outside powers could step in to do the job. India doesn't like any outsider playing a key role in its own backyard.

The September 10 issue of the Indian Express newspaper articulated those concerns in a front-page story on the Deuba visit saying: "Kathmandu is likely to consult the Indian government on all third-party representatives who seek a role in the Maoist crisis on behalf of their governments."

The paper then noted Indian concerns over the role played by Britain, the United States and the United Nations, and it made particular reference to China's assistance on development projects in Tarai by terming it "a sore point with India."

Such concerns have led India to boost its assistance to Nepal. While India has always provided military assistance in the form of equipment and training to the Royal Nepal Army, more such assistance is planned. Nepal has requested more small arms, body armor, mine protected vehicles and helicopters from India. Additionally, the Indian side has commit-

ted to begin a pilot project to train about 500 Nepali Police officers on counterinsurgency operations.

Moreover, a bilateral consultative group headed by joint secretaries on both sides, which is slated to meet by October-end, aims to finalize a host of other related assistance measures ranging from meeting equipment and training requirements of the Army to greater cooperation on intelligence matters. An extradition treaty between the two neighbors is also expected to be finalized in this meeting.

POLITICAL PROCESS

All these measures, however, will have little impact on the insurgency if matching political gestures do not follow. Indian officials are particularly keen to push for a political process to bring the Maoists to the peace table. But they also made it clear that the political process should not be held "under the shadow of the gun" and that it should conform with the twin pillars of multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy.

"We do not believe that a purely military solution to the conflict is possible," Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran said in a press conference on September 10. "A peaceful solution must be pursued which must be within the parameters of parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy."

This is a message repeatedly hammered home to Deuba by Indian leaders. "In all the one-on-one meetings he has had in Delhi, he was told that a parallel political process must be pursued to resolve the conflict," a senior policy advisor of the Indian government told Nation Weekly.

It was reported in the Indian press that Deuba also sought India's help in restraining his erstwhile mentor-turned-nemesis Girija Prasad Koirala, president of the Nepali Congress, who could play the role of a spoiler in any political process. That couldn't be confirmed with Nepali officials. It, however, is no secret that Deuba and Koirala do not see eye to eye on any issue, and the latter has gone about making his own contacts in the Maoist leadership to begin an independent peace process of his own.

One of Deuba's immediate challenges is to state clearly whether his government intends to hold elections first or pursue the peace process with the Maoists. He failed to articulate his position here. A senior Indian official told Nation Weekly, "We want to know what is the priority. There have to be elections, but there must also be a conducive environment for them."

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Security issues aside, the two countries also discussed a host of economic matters during the visit. India is keenly concerned about the investments made in Nepal by Indian businesses and the threats against them from the Maoists. Consequently, Indian officials sought security guarantees for such investments.

"We assured them that the government will provide adequate security," Deuba said. And for now at least, the Indian business community seems to have taken his word. At a felicitation program organized by Confederation of Indian Industries and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industries, Indian business lead-

LONG DRIVE: The Delhi-bound prime ministerial entourage at the Tribhuvan International Airport



ers went out of their way not to sound unduly concerned, saying they hoped the deterioration in security was a transient phenomenon. There was no talk of scaling down or pulling out Indian investments from Nepal, much to the relief of the Nepali side.

Among other important economic matters that were discussed, the fate of the 6,480MW Pancheswhar project also featured prominently. The mammoth multi-purpose project envisaged by the 1996 Nepal-India Mahakali River Treaty has been in limbo over differences about where to build the high dam that will generate electricity and provide regulated water flow for agriculture. These differences had hampered the finalizing of a joint-Detailed Project Report. But now the Indian side has agreed to take into account Nepal's concerns about the site of the high dam, even indicating that it was willing to consider moving the project site from Purnagiri, which India initially wanted, to Rupaligadh, which Nepal wants.

"The Purnagiri site is not beneficial for Nepal because it will cost us hugely in

Good Press

Deuba's visit this time got enough play in the Indian press to merit some discussion. His arrival on September 8 was noted by most of the Indian television channels the same day, and pictures and reports were splattered across most Indian dailies on September 9.

The September 9 bilateral discussions between Deuba and the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and the courtesy calls on the visiting leader by various Indian ministers found prominent display on TV news and Indian papers. The Indian Express played the story as top news on the front page on its September 10 issue. But even staid old dailies such as the Times of India and Hindustan

Times found enough space inside to give it more than a few column centimeters.

Most of the stories dwelt on the Maoist insurgency and security issues discussed by the two sides, notably Nepal's request for more military assistance. Most papers also noted India's concerns about fugitive Dawood Ibrahim's alleged investments in Nepal, a point which has been repeatedly pressed with the Nepal government by Indian officials.

The Indian press coverage was remarkably devoid of the patronizing tone of the past years. The news reports mostly reflected the close ties between the two countries, and India's concerns about the security situation and what it could do to help a smaller neighbor.

Many observers agree that this is largely because a new crop of Indian writers and editors has come to dominate the Indian news scene. They carry less baggage than their predecessors and have little of the cold-war era zero-sum game mindset.

But there is a general feeling that Nepal could have gotten even better press if the Nepali delegation had been more astute. Indian journalists were perplexed why the Nepali prime minister and other ministers declined to brief Indian journalists on the visit, whereas India's Ministry of External Affairs invited Nepali journalists to one of their briefings. "This was a lost opportunity to the Nepali side to make its case even better," a veteran Indian journalist remarked. **N**

BR

terms of floods and inundation," said Minister of State for Water Resources Thakur Prasad Sharma, who also accompanied Deuba to Delhi. "The Indian side has now showed a willingness to discuss this."

India is also keen to push the Sapta Koshi project to curtail massive flooding in Bihar. Railways Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav, the influential politician from Bihar who is head of the Janata Dal in the central government, said India wanted Nepal to consider building a high dam to regulate the flow in the Koshi, thereby protecting Bihar from flood damage.

But the Koshi high dam project is likely to remain on paper for a long time since there are serious concerns in Nepal about its unwanted effects, such as inundation. Nevertheless, both sides have agreed to look into the matter.

Minister Yadav also floated a proposal to build rail-heads at five major border crossing points between Nepal and India to smooth the cross-border flow of people and goods. Substantive discussions on the subject are to be taken up later.

The visit has provided promising openings in a number of areas. Though much of its success will depend on how the two sides follow up on the promises. **N**



ELUSIVE PEACE

Peace is increasingly becoming elusive. Even the virtual parleys of the actors are confusing and startling.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

WHEN PRIME MINISTER Sher Bahadur Deuba was meeting his Indian counterpart Man Mohan Singh last week, he was fully aware of his mission back home: to restore peace. His India visit in the wake of a national tragedy was necessitated and hurried more out of security concerns than any other agenda. Deuba visited India with an expectant eye for Indian help and cooperation to deal with the eight-year-old insurgency. India as always reciprocated with generous assurance that it would provide military and other support; but much like Kathmandu, New Delhi is aware that such support may do little to keep the guns silent, the prime minister's key mandate from the King.

Deuba's success as prime minister hinges on only one issue: his ability to restore peace. So far there appears to be little progress, no breakthroughs and abject failure in a battle to win the hearts and minds of the Maoists. As the prime minister has said, it takes two to tango. Without the Maoists' cooperation there can be no peace and no way for Deuba to prove his competence. Much to his chagrin, the statement issued by the Maoists early this month has showed how little there is to his much-hyped "discreet peace mission."

We now understand that the government isn't even on speaking terms with the Maoists. Analysts say ever since Deuba came to office on June 2, he has been playing peace pipes but without a tune: He has called the Maoists to the negotiating table but hasn't made any visible peace overtures. He has called on the Maoists to lay down their weapons but refuses to call a unilateral ceasefire. He has called on the Maoists to stop the acts of terrorism but hasn't been willing to remove the terrorist tag slapped on them. He has called on the Maoists to

bring everything to the negotiating table but has wavered in offering the government bottom-line. His biggest problem is discord within his own government.

CPN-UML ministers in the government continue to say everything is negotiable; ministers from Deuba's party contradict that. "When we say utmost flexibility, we mean it within the framework of the 1990 constitution," says a minister of Deuba's party, the NC-D. Peacenicks and critics have alleged that Prime Minister Deuba and his party have turned more rightist and royalist than the previous Thapa and Chand governments. The rightward tilt of this government has raised eyebrows especially within the biggest party in the ruling coalition, the CPN-UML. UML leaders have often threatened to pull out of the government. Even civil society leaders are not happy over the way things are moving with the Deuba government. A senior non-political figure expresses his frustration over what he sees as the government's caving in to pressure from the extreme right.

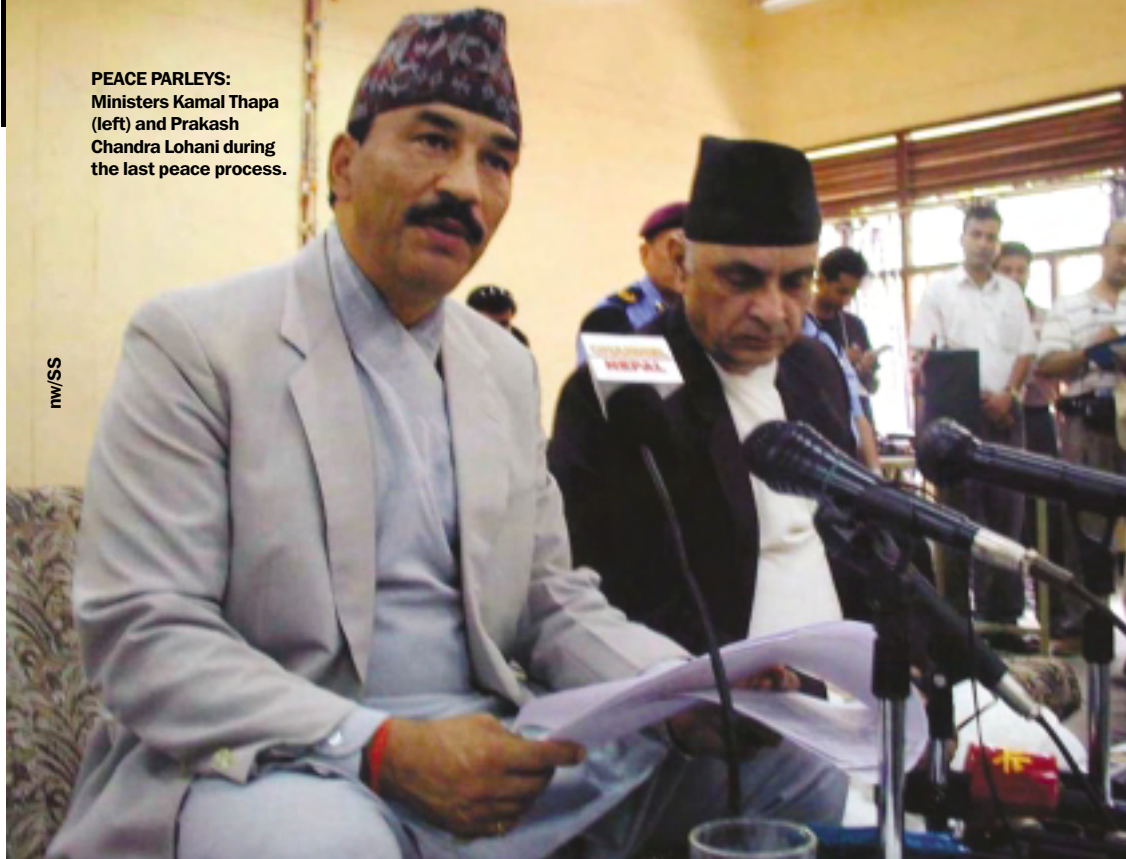
Civil society leaders who are in touch with the Maoists say that peace talks can happen anytime, provided that the government sends more peace feelers and doesn't cow down to pressure from "power centers." The government is said to be under intense pressure to announce a date for elections. The newfound agility of the Election Commission, which remained defunct for more than two years, is an indication of that pressure. On

August 11 the commission announced that it had completed updating the voters' list and was ready to conduct polls, if the government guaranteed adequate security. "Sensing this power-play, the Maoists ordered the election commissioners to resign," says a civil society leader who is in touch with the Maoists. An influential-aide in the Thapa government claims that the Army top brass and certain interest groups are against any kind of peace talks. The aide says, "These people will never allow the peace talks to succeed." Even analysts note that there is strong opposition in the Army leadership



PEACE PARLEYS: Ministers Kamal Thapa (left) and Prakash Chandra Lohani during the last peace process.

mw/SS



to peace talks, while the rank and file is in favor.

“The Army top brass is against any peaceful settlement,” says Hari Rokka, a left-leaning analyst. His reasoning behind their disapproval of the talks: The Army has unhindered access to national coffers in post-insurgency Nepal. Their accounts have not been audited since 1999 by the auditor general’s office. The top brass fear that this privilege will be scrapped once peace is established. If the Army seems nonchalant about peace, even the Maoists seem in no hurry to bring the matter to a close on the negotiating table. They too are divided

internally: The leadership is more interested in peace than the cadres.

The Maoists early this month categorically ruled out the possibility of talking with the Deuba government. Their stance: The government doesn’t have the status to negotiate with them. Instead they say they will talk with the King or his representative. Many say this could be a bargaining tactic to get more last minute concessions. Even if the Maoists mean what they say, the government seems equally firm when it says peace must be a reciprocal gesture. The government hasn’t budged, and the Maoists are stepping up both verbal salvos and attempts to choke the economy by closing businesses. They think that will bring the government to its knees and give them the upper hand in subsequent negotiations.

The government is equally persistent. It seems to believe that despite the apocalyptic rhetoric, the Maoists have no options but to come to the table. “They have no choice,” said the deputy prime minister, Bharat Mohan Adhikari, to a group of students last week. The government assumes that the Maoists are more desperate for a peace than the government itself. Both parties are playing with fire; both risk getting burned by their stubbornness. **N**



MISSED OPPORTUNITY: Maoist leaders Baburam Bhattarai (left) and Krishna Bahadur Mahara



THE WEEK AFTER

There is nervousness among Nepali Muslims after the recent riots. Even though there is anger and pain, their leaders say it was an isolated incident incited by few.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

THE AIR IS STIFF; PEOPLE ARE nervous and even suspicious. The scene at nation's biggest mosque, Nepali Jame Masjid has suddenly changed. It is guarded by a squad of armed security personnel and frequented by leaders and security officials. The site may not look like ground zero after September 11; yet it is the physical scar of a riot that suddenly flared up after the killing 12 Nepalis in Iraq. "Things have changed," says Farad Khan, an electrician at the mosque, as he points to the ransacked building.

"I am not scared," says eighth-grader Mohammad Aslam bravely. "There are not many Muslims in Sitapaila where we live, and they [the mob] didn't come there," adds the boy, scanning this reporter with an uneasy eye. For all his bravado, Aslam probably feels as many other Nepali Muslims do—a little nervous and slightly alienated from the Hindu and Buddhist majority. The psy-

chological impact could be more damaging than the physical ruins.

Four mosques and a *madrassa*, an Islamic school, were ransacked in the capital. The Shahi Jame Masjid, the Nepali Jame Masjid, the Iraq Masjid at Indra Chowk and another mosque in Patan were vandalized, looted and desecrated. "We had never imagined such a thing could happen in Nepal," says Mohammad Ashraf, secretary of Nepali Jame Masjid management committee. And yet he views the September 1 riots largely as a result of "some elements trying to disturb the communal harmony in this country."

For more than 500 years, Nepal's Muslims have enjoyed the religious tolerance and social integration that make Nepal unique. This is the first serious anti-Muslim incident in the country in a very long time and the September 1 attacks were random—against manpower agencies, and even media houses. While the virus of communal violence infected the entire sub-continent—Tamils against

Sinhalese, Muslims against Hindus and caste against caste—Nepal had remained unaffected. Therefore, the incidents last week concern Muslims and non-Muslims equally. The biggest damage from the riots that followed the killings of Nepalis in Iraq is that it has weakened the social fabric, says Nepali Congress leader Chakra Prasad Bastola. There is contemplation everywhere.

Amid tight security outside the periphery of the mosque, the mosque elders were huddled inside their office trying to figure out what could be done next. That the incident took place so close to the third anniversary of September 11 terrorist attacks on America is likely to harden attitudes against Muslims. "Insensitive media coverage has unfairly demonized Islam," says social scientist Sudhindra Sharma, who has done research on Nepali Muslims. In Nepal, too, coverage tends to link Islam with acts of fanatical terrorists; that has had its effect. Observers say the attitudes of non-Muslims have hardened over the 1990s, and, especially post-9/11. "Many

things have happened in Tarai, where the concentration of the Muslim population is higher," says Sharma, he says in reference to the growing influence of Hindu nationalist groups. Indian organizations like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, the RSS, and the Shiv Sena have grown in stature, and, as a consequence, animosity between Muslims and the Hindu majority has increased. The Indian media has often published reports linking foreign militants with the large number of *madrasas* that have emerged in recent years along the Indo-Nepal border. "People have uncritically accepted stereotypes," says Sharma. Acceptance of unverified allegations regarding *madrasas* by non-Muslims has added to this shift in perception.

Nepali Muslims are a heterogeneous group, mainly composed of Sunnis. According to 2001 census, 4.6 percent of Nepalis are Muslim; other informal sources put the figure as high as six percent. Nepali Muslims, who for years have identified themselves with mainstream Nepali society, for once might have felt isolated.



"We are disturbed and nervous," says Taj Miya, a businessman. "This was something we never thought of." Muslim leader say the attacks on the mosques were more than just physical violence. It was an attack on their faith, they say.

As days go by, the incident may be forgotten and forgiven. "The nervousness will subside," says Nepali Jame Masjid's Ashraf. "But the government must show the cour-

age to take actions against those involved." Even the leaders from other religions have joined hands with the Muslim community in a solid display of solidarity during such times. Though there is still some nervousness at this stage, Muslim leaders say that a few "anti-nationals" who don't like to see communal harmony in Nepal incited the attacks and that they trust the secular spirit of fellow Nepalis. **N**

JOINING HANDS: Religious leaders of different faiths showing solidarity with Muslim leaders



IDENTITY CRISIS

Our traditional conceptions of national identity have all but dissolved, and no new ones have emerged. Occasionally submerged tensions are released in the form of mob hysteria, as in the riots early this month.

BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

THE TWO GREAT WARS OF THE past century left distaste for nationalism, connected, as it is, to memories of fascism, in the collective mouth of Europe. In Asia, however, the cultivation of national sentiment, the bringing together of populations under a single banner to confront and engage with the modern world is seen as highly desirable. In countries like China, symbols of national identity are seen as effective means of quelling discontent and providing the impetus for competition with other nations. The problem for leaders now, in China and in India, is to create symbols that are inclusive of the total population so as to avoid sectarian conflict.

The lack of powerful national symbols is in part responsible for Nepal's current frustrations. The traditional conceptions of national identity have all but dissolved in the past few decades and no new ones have emerged to fill that void. The public are dubious of the state and insecure of their identity, and, with the absence of purpose, lethargy of the spirit has set in. Occasionally, submerged tensions are released in the form of mob hysteria, but the release is momentary. The government is without means to create channels for the constructive expenditure of energy, and tensions keep percolating under the surface, waiting for the next opportunity to explode into violence.

DEFINITIONS

Our nation was conceived in the late 18th century in the image of the ideal Hindu state. Prithvi Narayan Shah needed justification for his conquest, and he got it by defining his kingdom as the “*asal Hindustan*,” uncorrupted by British influence, able to take a stand against for-

eign intruders. It did not matter that there were no immediate historical precedents to model the state after or that Hinduism remained alien to many inhabitants of our hills and mountains. Belief alone provided the Hindu faithful of Gorkha with the assurance that the creation of a classical Hindu state as exemplified in the *Dharmastras* was not only possible but also eminently desirable for the health of the nation.

The rulers of the land continued to strengthen the definition laid down by Prithvi Narayan Shah. The Muluki Ain of 1854 attempted to bring all ethnicities under a single caste hierarchy. King Mahendra's Panchayat system, where the person of the King held all executive, legislative and judicial powers and supposedly led his people in the development of the country, was closer to pre-modern notions of statehood than to any modern conception. Like Prithvi Narayan Shah, the Panchayat aimed to restore the order of the Hindu polity, where the nation as agent expressed its genius and its will through the state represented by the institution of the monarchy. The health of the people was desirable insofar as they contributed to the prosperity of the Kingship. It could even be said that the people were expected to find justification for their work as service to the monarchical state, possessor of both temporal and divine sovereignty.

Symbols to consolidate national unity, all revolving around the monarchy, were devised. Efforts were made to impose the language of the Hindu hill tribes, known as Parbatiya or Khas, before being renamed Nepali in the late 1920s, at the expense of other indigenous languages. There were conscious efforts to link Hindu icons such as that of the cow to the Kingly state. History textbooks taught primarily the glory of the Shah dynasty's lineage.

But the mere preservation of the Hindu state that harkened back to ancient ideals was hardly sufficient. The world all around was in flux; to close the nation into a self-sustaining order was impossible. For the symbols of nationalism to gain force in the popular mind, to avoid stag-



nation, the state had to offer channels for the expenditure of energy. Initially, this was attempted by adding the word military to the definition of our polity. To defend *and* expand the “*asal Hindustan*”: This was the impetus for action in the earlier conquests. After the Sugauli Treaty of 1816 effectively curtailed any possibility of future military action, the nation stagnated for a while, and then the Indian Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 came to the rescue. Jung Bahadur paved the way for Nepali participation in the British Empire, thousands of Nepalis went to fight in other people’s wars over the next century and military valor once again became an integral part of our national identity. The British Gurkhas have thus done more to strengthen national sentiment and, consequently, the ruling elite than any idealistic yearnings for a perfect Hindu state.

IDENTITY CRISIS

There is still a conspicuous absence of young men in the villages; parents, wives and children are still left behind. Earnings made through employment in foreign lands still play a major role in the Nepali economy. But the destinations have changed, as have the occupations Nepalis are engaged in. After the decline of the British Army, efforts were made towards participating in U.N. peacekeeping operations. Now that our Army is busy fighting within the nation and does not offer foreign employment and better lives, migrations are to the Middle East. Nepal’s one skill was military: Now it does not have any more skills to offer. The emigrants now do not represent the state and do not possess the dignity the uniforms used to give. But money must be earned, and thousands willingly travel to far off places to perform menial jobs.

The 1990s showed political parties and private interest groups taking full advantage of the public space offered by the new constitution. The King receded from the public eye, and, in an atmosphere where there was a cacophony of voices to take his place, the public barely noticed. Then the continual bickering of the political parties led to weariness.

Saubhagya Shah has pointed out how the influx of NGOs, with their ideologies of “development,” “democracy” and

“civil society,” has resulted in state-like institutions that undermine the state itself. “In terms of organization, power, scale and complexity, the NGO world is an alternative bureaucracy with its own hierarchies. With its enormous power, knowledge claims, resources and global networks, NGOs in the Third World are more a fifth estate than the innocent creatures disarmingly labeled ‘non-governmental.’” Now employment is sought with NGOs rather than with the state bureaucracy: They offer a higher monetary incentive for the *jagiray*.

Textbooks in schools are changing slower than the times and, to a certain degree, still teach what was taught during the Panchayat years: “Nepal as a zone of peace” and “Nepal as the world’s only Hindu Kingdom.” But among the other voices all around, the state’s voice is feeble and its influence minimal. Symbols of reverence have changed: Crowds no longer wait in streets to see the royal family drive past them in expensive cars; ubiquitous INGOs and NGOs have very impressive vehicles too. Narayanhity, with the massive grey edifice of its front elevation, had an aura of historical grandeur and stability until the republican cries of the mid-90s and the Royal Massacre of 2001. Now the one-dimensional discourse on monarchy is filled in with question marks and punctuations.

In a climate where all progress is seen to be imported and where everything modern is foreign, the textbooks of Nepali history seem fraudulent even to the very young.

The Panchayat years managed to create a population with a highly developed national sentiment. The nationalism still exists, but without any of the constructs to hold it up. If Nepalis were looking for Sangina Baidya to make her mark in the Olympics, it is because every nation needs heroes to prop up its confidence: The old values of what makes for a national pride are being redefined.

National pride has survived the dissolution of the symbols responsible for its creation. It is still the glue that holds the population together. But it is now mixed with feelings of insecurity and futility; it has become uncontrollable, and makes its intermittent appearances as a threat, as a menace to the nation. Witness the riots early this month. **N**

ALL PROTESTS, NO

Maoist-ordered business closures are intended to pressure the government and hit rich owners. So far all they have done is hurt poor workers.

at the Soaltee Hotel. Kunwar was coordinating a massive rally of more than 2,000 workers from closed businesses who were protesting the Maoist move on Kathmandu streets on Wednesday.

"Why should we go jobless and our families go hungry, especially when Dashain is approaching?" Kunwar asks. He says that all four major trade union

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

AN HOUR AFTER INFORMATION Minister Mohammed Mohsin announced the government was not talking to "agencies and associates" of the Maoist wings but directly to their central leadership, at least three minor blasts took place at the gates of the Hotel Malla in Lainchaur. The hotel is one of the 35 businesses the Maoist-aligned All Nepal Trade Union Federation identified last week as additional targets. Twelve other businesses have been closed since August 17.

The bombs may have been small, but their effect was big. On September 10, owners told us that most of the 35 businesses were thinking of shutting their doors. Their common voice: The government's assurance of security isn't convincing enough for them to remain open in view of increasing Maoist attacks. The businesses feel threatened, and that's just what the Maoists want. The closures will pressure the government now and strengthen the Maoists' hand when peace talks resume, analysts say.

But the Maoist call is backfiring with the other trade unions. They are publicly denouncing the Maoist move and are mobilizing the now-jobless workers into the streets.

"If it is a political matter, then the Maoists should discuss it with the government," says Surya Bahadur Kunwar, president of the trade union



APPEAL: Rights activists and businessmen fear the economy could be in a tailspin



ON THE STREETS: Trade unions protesting the closure of businesses

WORK

federations stood united and that they were raising issues such as workers' exploitation long before the Maoists called for the shutdown of the businesses. One human rights activist we talked to said the Maoist leadership is facing a lot of heat from within its own ranks. Some within their own trade union admit the closures have given them a bad name.

All of the businesses have American or Indian investments, or investments by members of the Shah or Rana families, say the Maoists. Indian businesses may have been included in order to pressure India to ease their patrols in border areas, to free Maoist leaders in custody and to give Prime Minister Deuba the green light for U.N. assistance during his visit to New Delhi.

The Indian business sector has substantial influence on India's diplomacy. However most businessmen we talked

to were hesitant to speak out openly against the Maoists. Most did say they had been paying Maoist extortion demands and that those demands had "massively increased" in the last few months.

The Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Businesses estimates the government incurs a loss of Rs. 20 million each day with the closure of 12 businesses; last week they said that over 4,000 people were jobless. Closure of the additional 35 businesses will make those figures much worse. "Those who want to run the state should not be crippling the financial sector," says former president of the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Businesses Maheshlal Pradhan, stressing that the Maoists should not close down businesses.

"But it is always up to the government to create the right environment to resolve a crisis such as this," adds Pradhan, who was the minister for industries in the Chand government in 2002. Businessmen and workers are already complaining that the government hasn't done enough to bring things back to normal as the 12

businesses enter their fifth week of closure. As one analyst put it, the government is just helpless, as in all issues concerning the Maoists.

"We can not send out threats as the Maoists have been doing and forcefully open the businesses," said Minister Mohsin during a press conference last week. "All we can do is assure the businesses of protection and security from Maoist attacks."

The minister was quick to add, "If such closures go on, it will not only hit hard on the economy but also the working class whose interests the Maoists claim to advocate." The jobless workers, whose ranks will probably swell in the coming days, know that only too well. They also know what they want: For the government and Maoists to get on with resolving the problem. **N**



BOMB SCARE: The Maoists are increasingly threatening businesses of dire consequences

12 businesses closed since Aug 17

Aqua Minerals; Bottlers Nepal, Kathmandu and Chitwan; Makalu Yatayat;

Norsang Carpet; Pashupati Spinning Mills; Shanghai Plastic; Shraman Appar-

els; Soaltee Crowne Plaza Hotel; Surya Nepal; and Yeti Carpet.

35 more businesses under threat

Agni Yatayat; Amarawoti International, Kathmandu; Ashok Textiles, Morang; Basuling Sugar Mills, Kailali; Baba Jute Mills, Morang; Bhotekosi Power Company; Bhrikuti Pulps and Paper, Nawalparasi; Dabur Nepal Limited, Banepa; Fish-tail Lodge, Pokhara; Gangaram Chaudhary Udhog, Nawalparasi; Ganga Laxmi Resin and Turpentine Com-

pany, Banke; Gorkha Lorry; Harisiddhi Brick Factory, Lalitpur; Himal Gas, Banepa; Himal Group and Jyoti Group; Himal International Power Company; Himalaya Goodricke Tea Garden, Jhapa; Hotel Binayak, Banke; Hotel Malla, Kathmandu; Koshi Metals Crafts, Morang; Lekali and Sathi Noodles Industries; LG Television; Mayos Noodles,

Banepa; N. B. Group; Numanit, Nawalparasi; Panorama Manpower Company, Kathmandu; Shipping Nepal; Sipradi Trading; Sitaram Dairy Milk, Kathmandu; Soktim Tea Nigam, Ilam; Surya Nepal Garments, Morang; Tilganga Yatayat Sewa; Tiger Tops Jungle Resort, Chitwan; Tubels Village Resort, Banke; Wai Wai Noodles, Lalitpur and Chitwan.

Bad Business

The possible shutdown of 35 more businesses, many of them joint ventures, will deal a further blow to investor confidence. Our neighbors India and China, on the other hand, never had it so good.

BY BIPUL NARAYAN

Our rapidly growing neighbors—India and China—are offering us many opportunities to shore up our economy. But events in recent weeks, including the decision of the Maoists to force the shut down of 47 businesses and the inability of the government to protect businesses from rioters, indicate we are on course to muff up what is our best chance to attain economic prosperity in generations.

The world's biggest economic successes haven't just been about hard work, perseverance and intelligence. They have also been about being in the right place at the right time in history. Take for instance, the economic prosperity of the Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, U.A.E. and Kuwait. The Middle East was by all measures one of the most difficult places to live in the world—miles and miles of sand with little land or water for

growing food. But that was until oil happened to them. The world's never-ending appetite for oil as traditional economies transformed into industrial economies was enough to make the region one of the wealthiest places in the world.

When destiny beckons and opportunity knocks on your doors as it does only once in many years, what is needed to make best use of it is not extraordinary intelligence and ability but just plain old common sense, which is exactly what these countries had. They maintained sound law and order, encouraged foreign investments and built relationships with consumer countries, which was enough to put them on course to a prosperity unparalleled in their history.

Nepal, today, stands at a similar crossroad of opportunity. Our two giant neighbors are clocking heady growth rates and are being billed as the drivers of the global economy in the 21st century. China has been growing at 8-10 percent for the last two decades. India joined the race late but it is also well on its way to economic prosperity—clocking 8 percent growth last year to become one of the fastest growing economies in the world. The unshackling of these two giants has opened immense opportunities for Nepal—the scale of which it has rarely ever seen in its history.

To make use of the available opportunities, all Nepal needs to do is build synergies with the two economies. As Indians and Chinese get wealthier, they are increasingly going abroad for holidays and shopping, for example. With immense tourism potential, Nepal could be the ideal destination for the newly wealthy in these countries. As China and India

graduate to manufacturing more sophisticated products such as cars and computers, they will increasingly outsource the manufacturing of body parts to other countries. Nepal could develop into a major supplier of parts to industries in these countries. As India grows, it will need more and more power to fuel its growth. Nepal could endeavor to fill more than 10,000 MW of the projected electricity shortfall in the north Indian market.

What is needed from us is not rocket science but economic pragmatism and the ability to put things in perspective. The policy reforms initiated in the early 1990's mean that Nepal is already one of the most open economies in the region. But the policy reforms were not followed by institutional reforms. Our bureaucracy remains mired in red-tape, inefficiency and corruption, which means

we have been unable to take advantage of our liberal economic regime: foreign direct

investment (FDI) inflow has hit rock bottom, private investment has been sluggish and our economic potential remains unrealized.

We must urgently undertake reforms to make it easier for entrepreneurs to start, operate or close a business; enforce property rights protections; provide access to financial information; increase recovery rates for claimants in insolvency; reduce costs of enforcing a contract through the courts; and take other steps necessary to make Nepal an investor friendly place. We need to take a leaf out of our neighbor's books and invest heavily in education and infrastructure to make full use of the opportunities. Most importantly, we also need to ensure safety for private sector operations in the country.

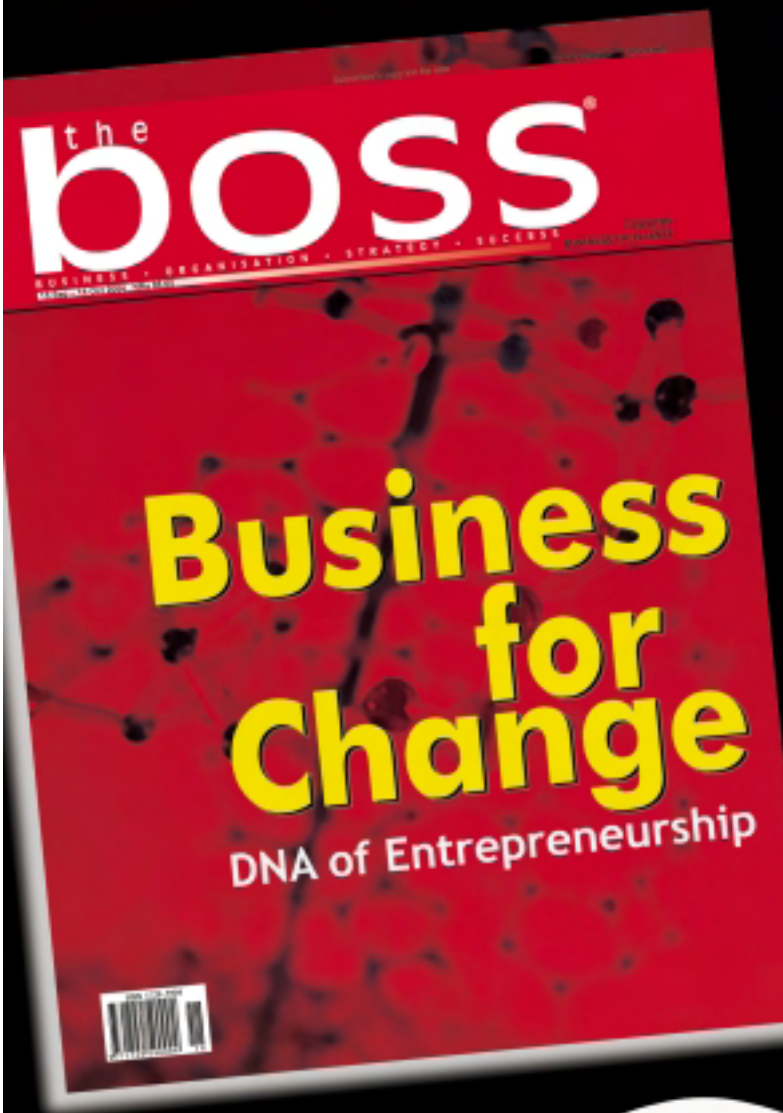
Yet our country seems headed in just the opposite direction. Due in large part to the conflict but also lack of imagination among the country's leadership, we have been unable to make our governance systems friendly and make use of economic opportunities such as in hydropower. As if eight years of conflict and extortion wasn't enough, our economy has been wracked up by blockades and curfew in recent months. The decision of the Maoists to force the shutdown of 47 industries, many of them joint ventures, will deal a further blow to investor confidence in the country.

The government and the Maoist leadership must to do some hard thinking on these issues. For opportunities once gone seldom come back again. **N**



HIGH RISE:
Indian and
Chinese
economies are
booming





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The Nader Factor

The third presidential candidate, Nader, can't win. But he may tip the election in favor of Bush.

BY SUSHMA JOSHI

Ralph Nader is a well-known name in American politics. Some people think of him as that pesky man who made Al Gore lose the American election in 2000. He is perceived to be a whacky, slightly eccentric character whose main concern is the environment and whose main supporters are granola-crunching white kids with trust funds. His party is called the Green Party, which makes it sound like a pot-smoking, hippie fest in northern Oregon. He is considered to be a trouble-maker. So much so that the Nation magazine, that well-respected bastion of the liberal left, even told him not to run this time around. In other words, they told him to shut up and sit down.

The worst thing you can do in America is tell people to shut up. People hate that. They really hate it. They feel it infringes upon their deepest beliefs. People cannot be told not to run for president, even in a year where the margin is so tight that a few indecisive voters taken in by a good Green speech can make all the difference.

In a talk-fest entitled "Can We Do Better Than Anybody But Bush?" speakers of all shades of the Left spoke about the binding dilemma—George Bush may not be their top candidate to run the American economy, but neither is Kerry. Kerry has promised that he will increase troops in Iraq if he gets elected. He did not vote against the Patriot Act, a hastily passed legal behemoth that takes away many of the civil liberties that Americans take for granted. In other words, when the time comes many Americans who are against the war and against the Patriot Act will be voting for somebody who will not represent them.

The progressive movement, made up of people far more concerned about the people, their health and their labor and civil rights (and from which Nader springs) are obviously not going to accept Kerry just because he comes with a blue sticker saying "Democrat." And they're not going to shut up and sit down.

The dilemma is an ancient one, said the old-timers. The "lesser of two evils" argument haunts every election. Jeremy Scahill of Democracy Now! gave a scathing review of Kerry and the Democratic Party, including the contender and party's cozy link with large corporations. The Army was guarding the streets of Boston during the Democratic National Convention, Scahill said. It is illegal to request army presence during election-related events. The Democrats, who were originally pro-slavery, also have a long history of invading and bombing other countries, including Clinton's 78 days of unsanctioned bombing in the former Yugoslavia. Children in a low-income black neighborhood burnt an effigy that had Bush's face on one side and Kerry's on another. Both of them represent corporate welfare and cronyism, Scahill said.

JoAnn Wypijewski, writer of Counterpunch, took a more moderate view. The vote, she joked, is elevated to a holy height, almost like virginity in the Middle Ages. It will be carefully guarded and given to the appropriate suitor, nobody else. Instead of thinking of the vote as sacred, why not think of it as a purchase: "Buying Starbucks in the airport when nothing else is available? Why not think about it as replacing a

faulty appliance?" The vote is elevated to the realm of faith, but we need to bring it down to the business of everyday and not expect a perfect candidate, she argued.

Naomi Klein, best-selling author of "No Logo: Taking aim at the Brand Bullies," had a similar take. If Bush won, she said, there would be outrage all over the world. People would wonder how Americans could allow this to happen.

Peter Camejo, Nader's running mate who originally came from Venezuela, gave an impassioned speech with the power to change people's minds. Nothing is further from the truth than the public misconceptions of Nader, he said. Nader's base is made up of African-Americans and Hispanics. In San Francisco, Matt Gonzalez, a Green Party candidate and a Hispanic man, was leading the mayoral race over a Democratic candidate—and was only defeated by 5 points after incredulous Democrats rushed in Clinton and Gore for emergency aid.

"This election is going to be dominated by fear," says Nader's website. "The Republicans play on the fear of terrorism and the Democrats play on the fear of Bush. One of the goals of this campaign is to free voters from fear so they can vote their conscience, their interests and their dreams." Would you vote for Mussolini because he was running against Hitler, asks Camejo, clearly challenging the audience to rethink their assumptions.

"There can be no daily democracy without daily citizenship," says Ralph Nader. With Kerry supporting the repressive Patriot Act, he might find out rather unpleasantly that the Nader factor is more than history. **N**



CURSE OF THE DEMOCRATS: Nader

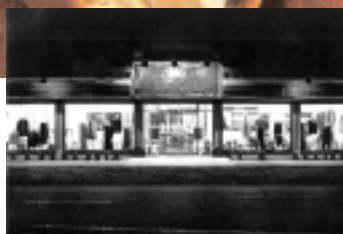
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Voices Of Nepal

Suskera.com, founded by four Nepalis in the United States, provides a platform for the literary and artistic expressions of Nepalis around the world

BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

In the past few years many Nepali websites were started, many died out and only a few managed to create a name for themselves. Suskera.com is one of the survivors. It occupies a unique position in the world of Nepali Internet media. As there are no other outlets in Nepal for literary work, suskera.com is a critical resource for aspiring writers. Founded by four Nepalis in the United States—Tika Rai, Soham Dhakal, Pujan Roka and Amina Singh—its purpose is to provide a platform for the literary and artistic expressions of Nepalis the world over. Initially all the submissions were from the four creators. Over the years the monthly Internet magazine has established a small but solid circle of contributors and readers. Well-known writers like Samrat Upadhyay and Manjushree Thapa have contributed.

The format is much looser than publications in the print media. Besides a feature of a prominent artist or writer, there are no regular columns. The content depends on the submissions offered: poems, essays and stories in Nepali and English, cartoons and paintings. The contributors are generally in their early 20s, and therefore many writings are expressions of the yearnings and struggles of youth. “We get a lot of submissions from what I call ‘overnight-poets,’” says Tika Rai, “young people who feel the need to create when faced with heart-break or a similar crisis.” And it is from the young that suskera.com gets its energy. Though many of the writings are highly self-conscious, a stylistic problem common to young writers, they are full of the characteristic enthusiasm of youth for newly discovered ideas.

Freedom of expression is encouraged; the editors don’t modify the writer’s style, and the quality of writing from issue to issue is highly uneven.

About 20 percent of the submissions are not published, usually on grounds of obscurity. “We have had problems with people whose writings we didn’t publish,” says Rai. “They get very angry, and many have sent us highly abusive emails.”

Suskera.com is still run by its four creators, who put much work into it every month. There is no profit, and the founders fund it with their own resources. “We had considered taking advertisements,” says Rai. “But we decided that they would disfigure the format of the magazine.” Besides running suskera.com, the four are also involved in many other activities for the promotion of arts and literature. In August 2002 they helped organize Bichalit Bartaman, a program that brought together artists and writers to speak out through their works against the “disillusioned present.” In 2003, exhibitions of works by seven Nepali artists, three of them already established and four emerging, were held in the United States, first at the annual ANA convention in Denver and then at the Flat Files Gallery in Chicago. Many works were sold. One of the highlights of the exhibition was the work of Purnima Yadav. Her works were widely appreciated and were a sellout.

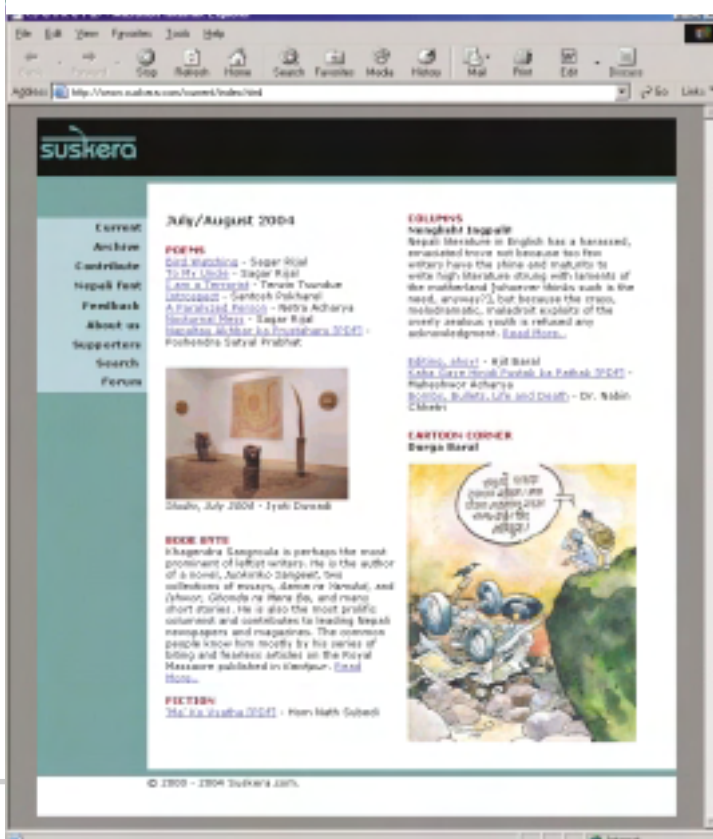
That is not to say that all went well during the exhibitions. “Most Nepalis living in the United States, even though they make a comfortable living, were not willing to invest in art,” says Rai. “Though many came to see the exhibition, there was little active participation from the audience in appreciating the art. Things were much better in Chicago where the audience was mostly Americans.”

The people behind suskera.com, using their own funds, play an active role in disseminating the works of emerging artists and writers. In the process they change the attitudes of audiences as well: It is evident that continual exposure of talent slowly increases audience’s appreciation of art.

The ethic behind the venture is the idea of social work where knowledge is accumulated instead of money. “What I would like to stress,” says Rai, “is the importance of spreading skills we have learned. Many Nepalis living abroad send money to Nepal for various charities, but that is not enough. There has to be a conscious effort on the part of the educated to spread their skills and knowledge to people all over Nepal.”



CONNECTOR: Tika Rai, one of the four founders of suskera.com



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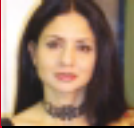
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To The Spirit Of Us

A culturally and geographically displaced refugee is still smarting over the recent tragic murder of the 12 Nepali youths in Iraq

BY KARUNA CHETRI

As part of the Nepali diaspora, cut off from our roots and slowly drifting through the multicolored haze of news seen on TV and read on the Internet, I feel desperate as we grasp at bits of traditions, festivals and Romanized Nepali. We strive to teach our children to speak Nepali while we ignore the Devanagari script; endeavor to instill the values of “Hami Nepali” and “Hamro Nepal” while we eke out a living that sustains a once-in-a-blue-moon ticket to visit “home.” “Home” is where the heart is; our heart lies in Nepal where we left it for safekeeping, safe from the thugs of “democracy,” protected from the “freedom fighters” and away from the vilifiers of religious harmony. Some of us are still struggling with our studies, others with our identities and yet others tenaciously picking up the threads of a “normal” life. Some have been fortunate to have found the balance and foresight we need to continue in search of a higher meaning to life, while others are in search of reasons to declare war...verbal war, vandalism, use of force, disparaging language and literature; looking, just looking for something to blame, someone to accuse and, of course, a reason to vent! All this is a heartrending attempt at self-identification...in search of attention, any kind; negative and/or positive. Ours is a self-image so riddled with holes that we demitize our own!

“Graphic!” ranted an outraged Nepali acquaintance. “How dare the Muslims kill innocent Nepalis? Death to all Muslims in Nepal!” It first started as an outraged statement that caught fire and, in a blaze, swept through the cyber-Nepali communities while we watched stupefied at the outrageous acts of vandalism demolishing so-called Muslim owned properties, instigating hate and atrocities against our own people. Their

only crime: Islam, their religion that had seldom come to public notice before the abominations in Iraq.

A murder is a murder, no matter who commits it! And yet the countless murders by the Maoists and the RNA never caused such an uprising. As I devour news from and of Nepal, I am impotent in my inability to articulate my un-drowned sorrows. I recall the two bomb blasts while I was in Kathmandu in July; one, a stone’s throw away from where I was standing. “Oh it must have been a bomb!” commented a passerby matter-of-factly. I stood rooted, shell-shocked at the reactions of the people. It then dawned on me the steady yet subtle rise of tolerance for violence in Kathmandu. “Oh yes, a bomb-blast is not a novel occurrence these days!” Business as usual as Maoists raised the number of deaths while RNA raised their number of “fighting casualties.” The horrors of the “people’s war” were part of the landscape of the everyday news; dismemberment and assassinations no longer created an uproar, perhaps an occasional reverberation in the distant hills and mountains.

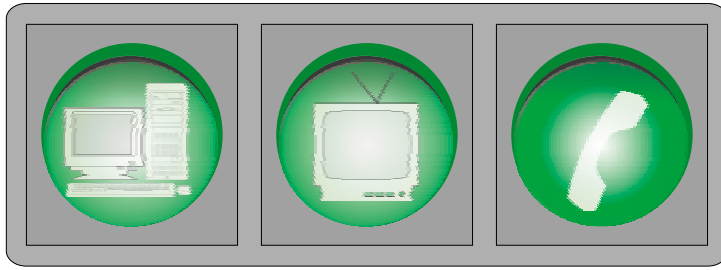
The Islamic militant group, Ansar al-Sunna, and their graphic video of the beheading came as a rude awakening. Unfortunately, the “awakening” was misplaced: The “awakened” fixated on Nepali Muslims and their alleged crimes for being in cohorts with the Iraqi militants! Some sort of a “divine” partnership in crime! The righteous crowd of volatile, grieving protestors contracted partial amnesia as they conveniently forgot the Maoist murders, the sporadic bombings and the political squabbles and went in search of Muslim scapegoats, sparing no thought for property, religion or people. What was the difference between the deaths in Iraq and those within Nepal? The difference, I believe, was the audiovisual horror caused by the video of the beheading of the Nepali youth trussed up like a “Dashain bali,” a sacrificial goat at the altar of Islamic militants!

And like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, it only took a handful of self-righteous, ignorant people to lead a frenzied mob into a dance of orgiastic madness that left a trail of destruction in its wake. Plus the economic losses incurred by the curfew and more damages from suspension of Gulf Air and Qatar Airways flights for a week. Passports and properties were destroyed at manpower offices while the victimized looked on in fear.

That which started as a protest against the killings in Iraq metamorphosed into a series of random acts of violence. Anything, anything at all could ignite the highly combustible environment of a populace frustrated by a crumbling infrastructure, betrayed by political promises, stagnant and yet restless. And while Kathmandu burned, we watched in mute silence the desecration of places of worship, death and rioting. I am ashamed to hear many justify the ugly actions of the mob while many more continue to condemn Muslims as deserving of any or all punishments regardless of their innocence. As I sink into a fathomless pit of depression, I wonder who will replace the passports of those poor people who, because of their circumstances, have been forced to look elsewhere for jobs. Who will compensate for the loss of property and life? Haven’t we, the suffering, surviving people of Nepal, learned that a religious war is the last provocation we need, during these volatile times? **N**

(Chetri lives in Washington D.C.)





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Dream A Little Dream

Confined by curfews, our resident funny man considers conspiracies, Coke and Chitwan

BY KUNAL LAMA

Out of the frying pan into the fire; and from the fire to the bottom of the burning stove. The insidious descent into an inexorable disaster is firmly in motion. The citizens of Kathmandu must now hope for the best and fear the worst. Destroying the stove won't help.

Oh dear, what a positively gruesome, muddling start. I'm beginning to sound like all the esteemed socio-political intellectuals and commentators who love to hug the oval—sometimes round—tables of talkshows on TV, or rule the reams of journalistic print. And do they love to talk up the "failed state" status of our kingdom, with uncontrolled and highly unpatriotic cheerfulness and zeal. Obfuscatory connections to "9/11" have already been attempted: in big, black, bold letters "9/1" amongst others. These feel tenuous at best but certainly sound catchy. "Communalism" is on the tip of everyone's wagging tongue. Was it really communalism, though, which drove the rioters to the wanton destruction of not only mosques but also airline offices, manpower agencies, media houses and poor Mr. Wagle's residence? I think opportunism on the part of agencies and parties with vested interests and their unadulterated aim to destabilize everything that was established, functioning and standing were more the motivating factors. Ok, time to shut up and stop talking like a wannabe Mr. Dixit, Mr. Giri, Mr. Ghimire or, for the matter, Mr. Pandey. Mr. Lama, focus, and begin to blather your usual blithe bleatings.

Five days of intermittent curfew. Nothing much to do but to feed on wilted greens, stare at a fuzzy TV screen and cogitate over conspiracy theories, most of which had nothing much to do with the stop-and-start curfews. My mind, however, had other ideas. It spread its wings and soared over the sooty streets and skies and dreamed and desired like it never had.

Lustful thoughts of mostly gustatory delights were the first to tease my incarcerated senses. My lips smacked droolingly at the taste of "sikandari raan" of the Bukhara. Visions of succulent, slightly charred strips of lamb disappearing willingly into my greedy mouth almost caused a total sensory blackout. Alas, the Soaltee has been closed for the last 3 weeks and the "raan" will remain but a dream.

The "raan" got me thinking of a Long Island iced tea. I had the gin, rum, vodka, lemon juice and ice, but where was the cola? The Coke

factory had closed too, at the same time as the Soaltee. This was getting a bit tedious so, to be on the safe side, I let my mind wander back to last year.

Last year, in early July, I had the unexpected pleasure to be in the monsoon-fed jungles (of Chitwan) surrounding Tiger Tops. The lush grass-land, tall and thick and impenetrable; the gigantic trees, leafy and lusty and lustrous. The atmosphere was ineffably mysterious and primeval. Then over the verdant canopy of the tree line, super-white and super-surprising high Himalayas, glistening in the evening sun! Heat and humidity got reduced to middling irritations, especially when a picnic by the Dhakre Khola got transformed into a playful, Mowgli-esque adventure: swinging by the vines; swimming around the bulking heaps of river-cooling elephants; diving off huge boulders into the depths of limpid pools. Away with this urban jungle! Then the second ANTUF-released list cited Tiger Tops amongst the 35 business houses they want closed from September 10th. There goes another dream.

Now we cannot cook Mayos Chow-Chow with Himal Gas; switch on our LG TVs with electricity from Himal International or Bhote Koshi Powers; drink Saktim Tea with a splash of Sitaram Dairy Milk and a spoonful of Basulin Mill Sugar; get on Agni or Tilganga Yatayat Sewa buses to visit Fishtail Lodge in Pokhara or Binayak Hotel in Banke; or look forward to Dabur Vatika Face-Packed Miss Nepal beauty queens next year. Pray, tell me comrades, what would you like us to do?

I know what I'd like to. I'd like to trundle over a few spare tires to the middle of the road and set them alight. Watch them burning bright with my frustrations. But now I can't do that either. A common public statement has been released by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the chief district officers of Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur barring the burning of tires and other pollutants as per Clause 6 (Sub-clause 3A) of Local

Administration Act in the name of protest or otherwise in the Kathmandu Valley. Apparently, burning tires contain toxic and harmful heavy metal and chemical compounds that could poison the valley air. (Pity the government didn't realize that the mobs gathering on the night of Tuesday contained harmful elements carrying heavy metal and toxic intentions.) Fancy a ride in a Tata Indica or life in a Harisiddhi brick house? Dream on, baby. **N**



TIRE BURNING:
'But now I can't do that either'

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Call Me Mother

BY DHRITI BHATTA

She's going strong. No signs of giving up, not weathered by life's aches and pains. Never bitter. In her late 30s, she has now gathered the missing pieces of the puzzle. Though by her own admission she's still incomplete in many respects, she has found peace with herself. Sumi Devkota is a rare breed: She is among a small group of

Nepali women who dare to go for artificial insemination despite the attendant stigma. Rarer still, this woman makes no qualms about admitting that her need to be a mother was far greater than the social taboo attached to birth outside the wedlock. "The new generation of Nepalis need more individual space," she says. "They feel that their needs are far more important than the social norms that often wear them down." This is said in a matter-of-fact tone, a commonsense statement.

"Motherhood is that special stage of life that no woman wants to be deprived of. I desperately longed to hear someone call me Mom," she says, as her two-and-a-half-year-old son plays on her lap.

He is her second child. When she separated from her husband, she lost custody of her first child to him. "I wanted a reason to come back home every evening.

I wanted someone waiting for me to arrive. Not being able to keep my elder son, I had no other choice than to give birth to a child through artificial insemination," she says as her son Bardan, or Baru as she calls him, plays around the apartment.

The apartment is well festooned and cozy. Mounted pictures of Bardan and her first son hang on a wall. Framed photos and a small Nepali flag on a cupboard fill a corner, and just besides them on a wooden chair sits the bubbly and talkative Sumi. There is nothing pretentious about her.

A single mother with a single child, she grew up with an intense connection to her mother, who was a single mother herself. Sumi's father died when she was only nine. She had a firsthand glimpse of the problems a single woman faces in our society. Her survival instincts were honed by her mother's experience. She has always been determined and headstrong.

Obviously, then, when she decided to opt for artificial insemination, her only worry was how her Mom would react to the news. She didn't tell her about the pregnancy until five months into it. By then her mother, a beautician, had been complaining to all her friends about the weight that her daughter had put on. When Sumi finally broke the news to her, her reaction was typical: "After all," she told her daughter, "I only want what makes you happy."

Sumi is happy, and she loves to describe herself simply as "a mother." She is not prone to philosophizing. Though one would expect her to expound on the problems women face and how society needs to change, no such words come out from her mouth. For her motherhood is simply the most essential role that a woman plays, without which she would remain incomplete. There was no desire to prove anything in her decision to have a second child without a father; she was only fulfilling a need within herself.

Her other driving need is work. "I think I am a workaholic. The first year or two of every project I've worked for are the hardest. After that the work starts getting lighter, and I start looking for something else, just as intense again," says Sumi with a lively laugh. Reaching out to the

marginalized section of the community comes naturally to her, for she considers herself one of them.

Even as a married woman, she felt an affinity to "pariahs." On a project under the Home Ministry, she became the first woman to enter Nakkhu Jail to counsel the prisoners, mostly drug users and sex workers. As an outreach worker, she engaged in needle-exchange programs while working with HIV/AIDS victims from Dhadhing to Baglung to Kailali. Recently she attended the 15th International AIDS Conference in Bangkok as a local program officer for Policy Project, a Wash-



OUTSIDER:
She has a
natural affinity
for marginalized
people



ington-based NGO that lobbies for policy reforms in favor of vulnerable groups.

Sumi's work on behalf of others has helped her overcome personal problems. "I rather believed he [her elder son] loved me, then I met him and found out about his rejection," says Sumi. She is hopeful that time will heal the coldness between them, and she wishes that someday both her sons will unite.

She worries too about how Bardan will get his citizenship without a father. The district office still hasn't registered his birth. When Sumi wanted a dependent passport for him, she was hounded with a single question: Who is the father? "If I have survived all this, it is because of my economic independence and nothing else. Otherwise this society would have torn me to pieces by now," says Sumi. She remembers what her former colleague at UNICEF, Wing Sie Cheng, told her when she was pregnant: "Sumi, whatever you do, always hold your head high."

Sumi's situation has made her more empathetic towards the marginalized, and her pride has made her want to do even more. "I'd someday love to start up a support group for single mothers. I guess I always avoided the media because I didn't want anyone to misuse my story," says Sumi. "But now I think that if my voice works as a fair contribution for single mothers, then why not?" In her own way, Sumi is changing societal attitudes by refusing to bow down before the constraints that society attempts to impose on her. She says that the positive attitude that the new generation carries gives her hope. It works both ways, as there would be no change from generation to generation if it weren't for people like her. **N**

CITY ThisWeek

EVENTS



Films @ Lazimpat Café Gallery

French Kiss

Kate hates flying, but her husband to be is in Paris with another woman, and she's determined to win him back. On the flight to Paris, she is seated next to an obnoxious French criminal named Luc. Kate's introduction to Paris is a disaster. Luc pretends to be a gentleman, but he's in real out to recover some stolen jewels. The results border on farce as Kate tries to win back her man and Luc his loot. Together, Kate and Luc embark on an adventure which takes them across France and into an unexpected romance. Starring: Meg Ryan, Kevin Kline, Timothy Hutton, Jean Reno, Francois Cluzet.

About a Boy

Based on Nick Hornby's popular British novel, "About a Boy" is a comedy-drama. Will, a rich, single and irresponsible Londoner in his thirties who, in search of available women, invents an imaginary son and starts attending single parent meetings. As a result of one of his liaisons, he meets Marcus, an odd 12-year-old boy with problems at school. Gradually, Will and Marcus become friends, and as Will teaches Marcus how to be a cool kid, Marcus helps Will to finally grow up. Starring: Hugh Grant, Toni Collette, Nicholas Hoult.

Suskera Show

ART EXHIBITIONS

Suskera.com (Nepal), a non-profit organization, is organizing an art exhibition, "Helping The Stars Of Tomorrow," for the benefit of Light For Nepal Children Home. The Home has 27 children, aged six to 14. None of these children deserves to be orphaned. The Home has been sending these children to school with the generous help from various donor groups. From next year, however, the children won't have a school to attend to because the Home cannot afford their tuition fees. These children, therefore, need financial assistance for their education urgently.

Artists David Douglas, Shivani Rana Timilsinha and Rosie Marihowes have kindly consented to put their works on sale to help these kids in needs. This art exhibition is also organized to underscore the need to improve the lives of the underprivileged, minorities communities and groups. Venue: Gallery Nine, Lazimpat. Opening on September 17, 5:30 p.m. Date: September 17-19, Gallery hours: 11 a.m.- 6 p.m. For inquiries call at 4428694.



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This Week at Martin Chautari

SEPTEMBER 14
MANGALBARE
DISCUSSION

Topic: Open discussion on Martin Chautari, Time: 5 pm

SEPTEMBER 16
MEDIA DISCUSSION

Topic: Book publication on Nepali media: Situation and challenges.
Pundits: P. Kharel and Dev Raj Humagain, Time: 3 pm

SEPTEMBER 19
POLITICAL DISCUSSION

Topic: Current politics, Time: 3 pm

Cine Club

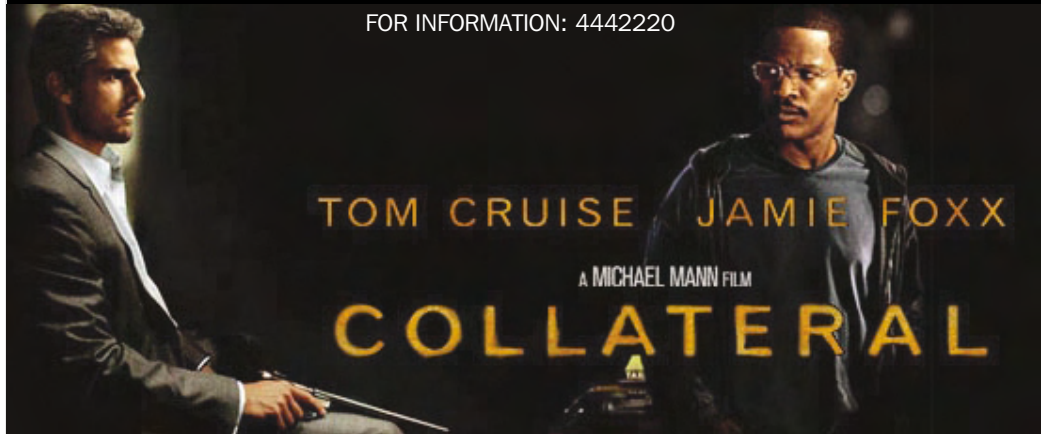
Movie: "Les nuits fauves st/ang" (1992), Directed by : Cyril COLLARD, Starring: Corine BLUE. At Alliance francaise, Tripureshwor. Free admission. Date: September 19. Time: 2 p.m.

Play @ Gurukul

Gurukul is showing "Jaat Sodhnu Jogiko," a play directed by Anup Baral, produced by "Arohan" and written by Vijay Tendulkar. For information: 4466956

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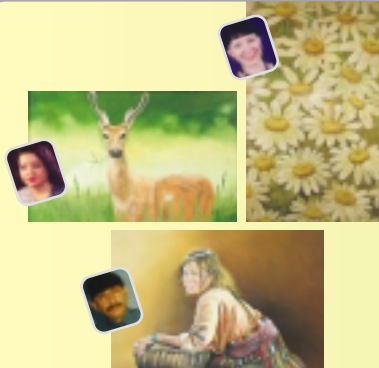
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for details, please, visit <http://www.suskera.com/current/exhibition.html>

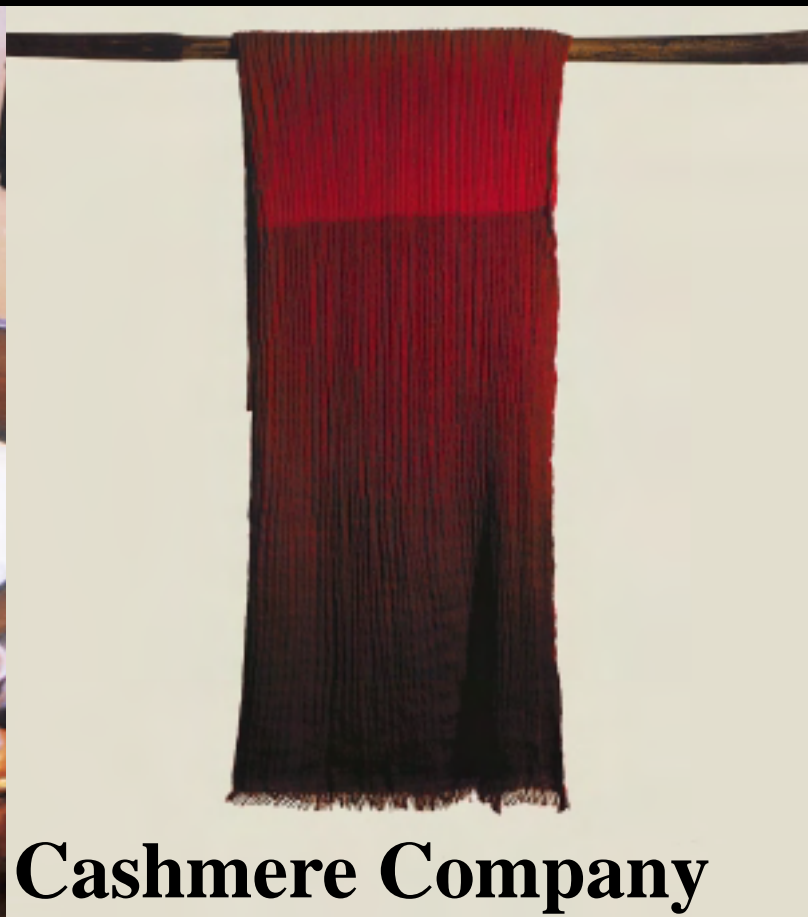


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Second-hand PROSE

Books are still a luxury for most Nepalis. Marketing used books could change that.

BY AJIT BARAL

The other day a former CDO of Baglung, who was kidnapped by the Maoists and then released, came to the Educational Bookshop in Jamal with his sweet-looking young daughter.

She browsed through shelves, picked up a Harry Potter and showed it to her father, with an I-have-read-this-book excitement writ large on her face. She then took out another book, perhaps a Jeffery Archer title. She wanted to buy it. The father took it from her, came to the

counter and inquired about the price. He made a face when he heard the price. His daughter knew what the expression meant, but she couldn't help pestering him. The best her father could say was, "Next time." After walking up and down the aisles lined with shelves of expensive books, they went out, visibly disappointed.

This is hardly an isolated incident. Many parents who want the best for their children cannot afford good books for the simple reason that there are more pressing needs for their limited funds.

Secondhand bookstores could be a possible solution. But there are only a few such bookstores, and they stock mostly textbooks. There are some used bookstores in Thamel and in Lakeside in Pokhara, but those stores cater exclusively to tourists. The books there are too expensive for most Nepalis. Pushpa Acharya, a Master's student of English at Tribhuvan University, has bitter memories of buying used classics like "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina" at more than their original prices in Lakeside, Pokhara. The owner of Good Books, a second-hand bookstore in Thamel, concedes that books in Thamel are usually more expensive than elsewhere.

Secondhand bookshops date back to the early 1960s. Literary historian and book collector Shiva Regmi remembers frequenting Harek Pustak Bhandar in Bhotahiti around 1963. "It was all textbook stuff," Regmi says, "but now and then good books would pop up, and people like the late critic Ishwor Baral would quickly lift them off the shelf." There were a few other used bookstores in Jhanchhe and Thamel, he says, but they were expensive even then.

EASY PICK: RNAC pavements

nv/ss





nw/ss

noon when the booksellers set up their shops."

The supply of used books comes from book collectors who want to clear some books from their groaning shelves, publishers and booksellers who want to clear their old stock at cheap prices and libraries that are shutting down. But our used booksellers don't hire

people to scout books. Nor do they seek out libraries that are closing down or try to make relationships with pub-

lishers or first-hand booksellers. Booksellers in the west and India sell excess stock to secondhand booksellers because they find it unprofitable to hold on to unsold books. Madhav Dangol of Mandala Bookshop says that Nepali booksellers don't understand that space is money and don't get rid of books that are not selling well.

With secondhand booksellers making no effort to find books, no wonder their selection is thin. "Until this trend changes," says Dangol, "many Nepalis will have to forgo the pleasure of reading books." ■

More than 40 years on, not much has changed, especially if you happen to be looking for books in Nepali. The only used bookstores with many Nepali titles are clustered around Bhrikuti Mandap—two near the Red-Cross Building and one inside the Bhrikuti Mandap premises. All sell textbooks. Booksellers who cannot afford to have a shop of their own occupy the pavement in front of the RNAC headquarters building on New Road.

One can find books at fairly good prices in these places, but what they have are still mostly textbooks. That's because textbooks are easier to procure and are always in demand. Students often resell their texts, but serious readers like to keep their books. There is prestige in collecting them and pleasure in rereading them. Moreover, book lovers are hesitant to sell books that they have cherished, fearing they may land up in some dusty pavement stall.

As Chet Narayan Poudel was scanning books in front of the RNAC building, he lamented the lack of fiction, classics and collectable books. "One doesn't find Indra Bahadur Rai's stories and novels, or Chudamani Bandu's books on Bhasa Bigyan here," he says. But, he adds, "One can get textbooks in relatively good condition at 40 percent off the cover price." He bought a book on banking for his brother.

At times, however, interesting books do pop up on the RNAC pavement. Harsha Man Maharjan, a journalism student, says, "I bought Umberto Eco's 'Foucault's Pendulum,' H. W. Fowler's 'English Usage' and Paulo Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' at seemingly throwaway prices. Just a few days back I got a Pierre Bourdieu." He adds, "The trick is to check the books regularly and early in the after-



nw/ss

NO GO: Used bookstores are way too expensive

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THREE CHEERS

It's obviously unusual for a teetotaler to open a bar. But **GAGAN PRADHAN**, the owner of J-Bar, the newest bar in town, is an exception. J-Bar in Thamel is Pradhan's idea for a place to socialize. The major attractions: professional barmen from India, complete with their special juggling abilities. On offer: more than 80 varieties of cocktails. "After I saw there was no bar of international standards in Nepal, I thought of coming out with one," says Pradhan. "With some market research, I've tried to blend Nepali with the international." With mind-blowing décor of the "Lights on Steel" concept and local Nepali vodkas plus other international brands, he has certainly found the right mix. Let's raise a glass and say cheers.



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Design Savvy

A dress made from maize husks? Highly imaginative, but is it wearable? Ask **PRATISTHA SHAH**. She won the I.E.C. Designer Contest 2004, with her remarkable green dress, made of, what else, maize husks. But why maize? "I wanted something different, and, as far as I can remember, maize husks have never been used before," says Shah. "That's not all. There's maize everywhere now, and I thought using it would be fun." It was indeed. No wonder Shah cruised above 149 young I.E.C. design students from Kathmandu and Pokhara. The school offers courses for aspiring fashion designers. What next for Shah? "I want to make it big by establishing myself as a well-known designer," says Shah. With such creativity, she should make it.



nm/SS

Dateline Delhi

The past few years have been pretty exciting in the life of **SURENDRA PHUYAL**. Last year, he worked for the American newspaper Pittsburg Post Gazette as an Alfred Friendly Fellow. Now he becomes the first Nepali journalist to hold a permanent station in New Delhi post-1990. "It's not a big deal, just a little different," says the newly appointed special correspondent for Kantipur of his "one-man Delhi bureau." India can be overwhelming, even to a seasoned correspondent. But Phuyal, 28, seems to have gotten his game plan ready: Approach it as just another job. "We tend to look at India perhaps with overt suspicion instead of setting our own records straight," he says. Phuyal's stint with the Gazette was an eye opener. "When I came back from the U.S., I felt like approaching my journalism a little differently," says Phuyal. "And the Delhi offer came my way."



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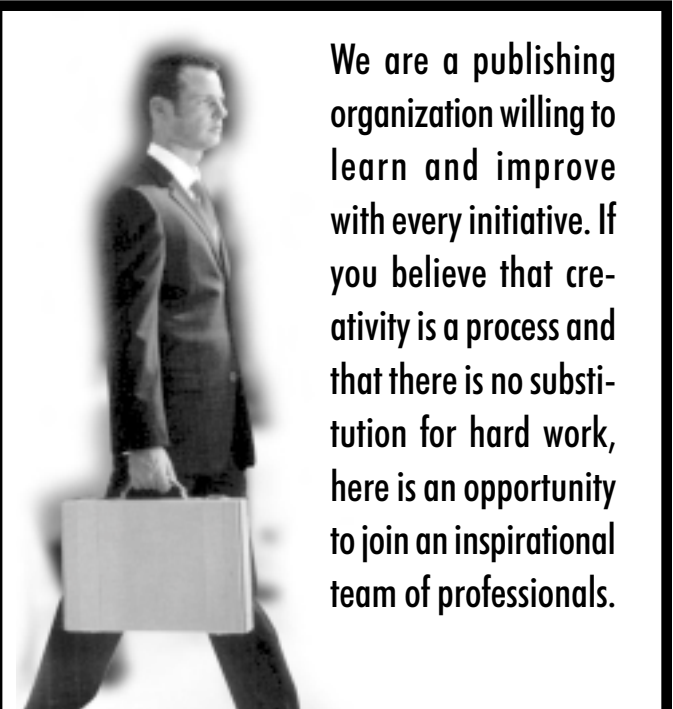
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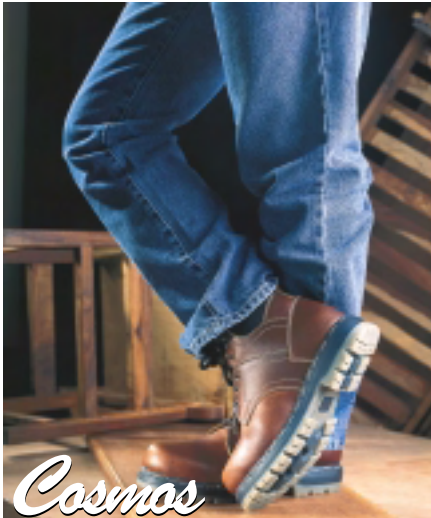
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nm/ss

Play Out The Play

Sunil Pokhrel stands like the Rock of Gibraltar of the Nepali theater scene. He has been an active member of the Aarohan Theater Group for the last two decades and is the Kul Guru at Gurukul, Nepal's first theater school. Over the years he has seen Nepali theater pass through many phases, from the large number of plays performed in the late 70s and the early 80s to the

lean years of the 90s and on to today, as the theater slowly begins to find its own voice. Yashas Vaidya talked to Pokhrel about his long career, his future plans and his recent trip to Norway to take part in an international theater festival.

How did you get involved in theater?

My classmate, Ramesh Budhathoki, the film director, was active in the field, and I got dragged into it. This was about the time I was in grade 10 in Biratnagar. To look back, the plays provided expression for energy pent up inside me. Theater was a happy outlet for a middle-class boy.

What are the differences in the theater scene between when you started out and now?

There is a big difference between now and say the 2030s (late 1970s) when there were a lot of theater groups around. The biggest difference is in terms of quantity and quality. Then there were a lot of plays staged, but not much in terms of the quality of theater as a creative medium. Today it is quite the opposite. There aren't too many plays, but the quality has definitely gone up. Now, Nepali theater has discovered its own language and found that its power lies in the diversity of our culture.

What is the change that has come about in Nepali theater over the years?

We no longer try to compete with cinema. Earlier, much like in the movies, there used to be song-and-dance routines; plays would forcefully try to be comic. We now realize theater has its

own possibilities as well as boundaries. The boundaries may be that plays cannot be as realistic as movies, and they may be limited by space. But plays can use imagination with the space and actor. When you place that actor within that space, the magic of theater is created.

Do you think acting, which is so personal, can be developed through studies?

You can be good at acting when you follow your instinct. But I feel studies give you an idea of what you are doing. Knowledge of what you are doing lets you know what the rules or boundaries are, be it writing a poem or acting.

Now, Nepali theater has discovered its own language

But can you confine yourself to rule books either while writing poems or acting?

No. At the drama school in Delhi they told us before they taught us the rules and at the end of the course again, 'The golden rule is that there isn't one.' But there is a big difference between breaking the rules without knowing what they are and [doing it while] knowing those rules.

Tell us about your involvement with Aarohan and Gurukul.

Aarohan was established in 1982, and I am one of its founders. We didn't get to do the kind of plays that we wanted, so we founded Aarohan. Gurukul is one of Aarohan's projects and it was started in 2002. Gurukul is Nepal's first theater school. Here the students live at the school and manage the center themselves. Our aim is not to create actors, but theater workers.

What is your focus right now and your plans for the future?

Our aim is to increase the audience by staging plays regularly and by bringing different kinds of people to watch these plays. Right now, a major focus though is giving continuation to Gurukul. Our efforts are directed toward giving permanence to the infrastructure we already have. We have also entered into a three-year partnership with the Norway National Theater, under which we will have exchange programs, joint collaborations and productions.

You presented an adapted version of "A Doll's House" by Ibsen in Norway...

We had gone to Norway to participate in the Ibsen festival. Six groups including ours presented their version of "A Doll's House." We got a very good response, and I think the reason behind it was our production's simplicity. In fact we didn't have to adapt the play too much; it was more of a translation. The play about women's empowerment, written some 130 years ago, is well suited to the Nepali context now. **N**

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KISHOR KAYASTHA

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Man In A Hurry

No sooner had he arrived in New Delhi than Prime Minister Deuba started to tell Nepalis that his India visit was a “huge success.” Four bilateral agreements were signed—the most notable one was the construction of a 40-km oil pipeline connecting the Indian border town of Raxaul with Amlekhgunj. The prime minister looked anxious to point out that he had found a groundswell of goodwill for Nepal among Indian leaders. That they were deeply concerned about Nepal's poor security situation. And that New Delhi now had openly acknowledged that the Maoists are “a shared threat to both countries.”

That's a success enough. Yet the major problem in Nepal-India ties has never been one of substance. For hundreds of years, peoples of the two countries have been bound by deep bonds of cultures, languages and family ties. As for official ties, New Delhi and Kathmandu have generally been sensitive to each other's interests. The last time the two neighbors were openly hostile to each other was during the economic impasse of 1989-90, when India's non-renewal of a transit treaty led to severe hardships in Nepal.

But even during the normal times the problem has been one of perception. Many Nepalis regard India as a big bully, which is insensitive to the needs of its small neighbor, its intent far from benign. We say there are serious problems on this side of Das Gaja and that very little has been done to change that traditional mindset. And we blame the country's leadership—in politics, civil society and media—for not letting go of the stereotype.

On more than one occasion, our political leadership has been guilty of grand inconsistencies about its expectations of New Delhi. It twists, turns and twitches and often goes on complete reverses,

depending on the political climate in Kathmandu. Expediency has always been the name of the game. The CPN-UML position on the Nepal-India Mahakali Treaty is a classic case in point. The party flip-flipped its position so many times before voting in favor of the treaty in September 1996 that many of its leaders now don't even remember what they said on the emotive issue.

Deuba's one important, if far less noticed, achievement in New Delhi this



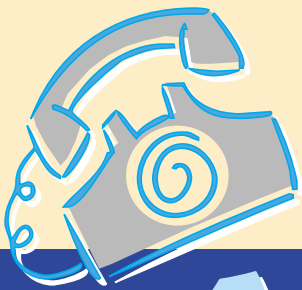
time round is India's commitment to train 500 Nepali police personnel on counterinsurgency. Given Nepali sensitivities on security cooperation, this could turn out to be a very controversial move. This is where Deuba's leadership will be tested. He has already been accused of being secretive about his agenda for the New Delhi visit; it is now important that he tries to secure broader support for the bilateral agreements instead of going into reverse gear.

Nepali democracy has always been about running after the push and pull of populist ideas. It has never been about standing up for your convictions and rallying support for them. Granted, it will be unrealistic to expect one single visit to Delhi to change the age-old habit. But one's got to begin somewhere.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor

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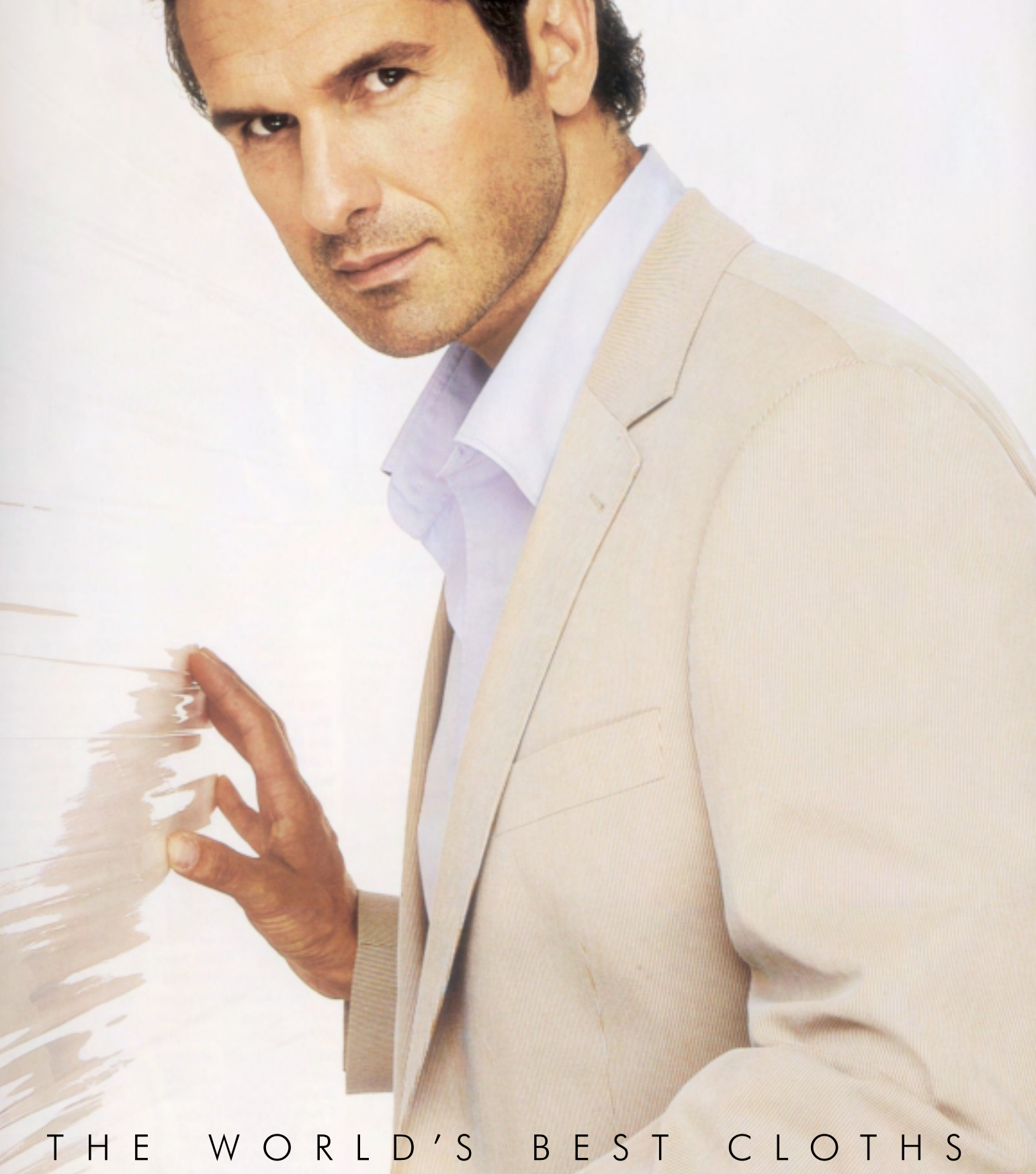
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