

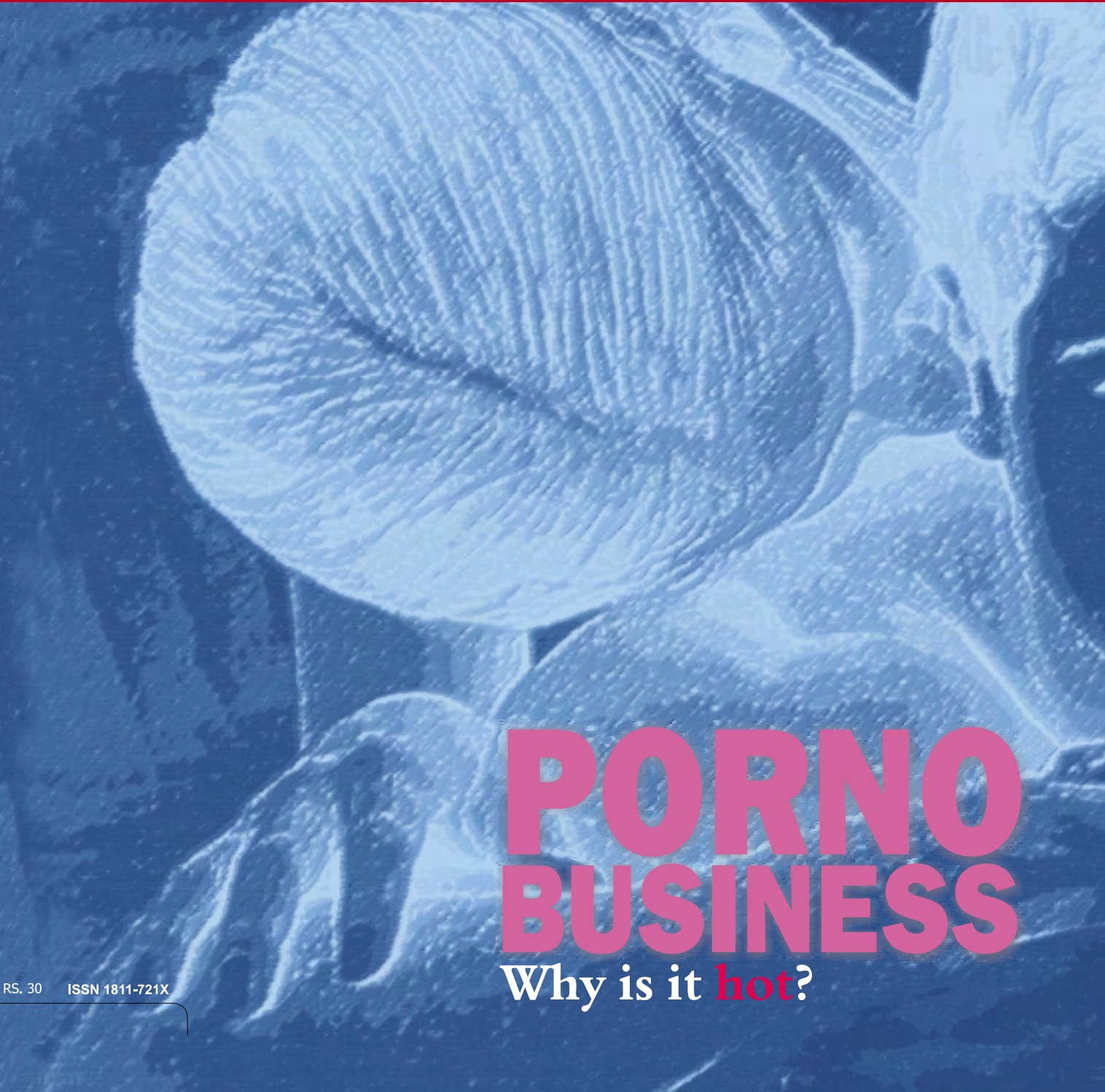
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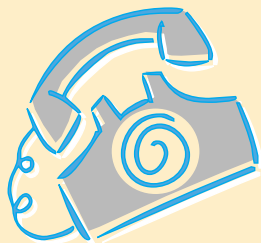
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COVER STORY

20 Porn Business

By Indra Adhikari and John Narayan Parajuli

In early November, officials raided seven movie theaters and recovered one of the biggest hauls of pornographic films so far. Although officials say they are doing everything possible to beat the sleaze, the laws are inadequate.

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A major attack in the district headquarters often precipitates a sudden exodus, but the trickle of people leaving a way of life has become commonplace

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By John Narayan Parajuli

Global warming is affecting even the Everest. UNESCO is being asked to put the mountain and two other sites on its danger list. But how much can it do?

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By Aditya Adhikari

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Nepali cricket is on the throes of getting its biggest prize. But there are still some hiccups.

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36 Coming Online, Slowly

By Indra Adhikari

The use of technology in banks is on the rise, but it will take another decade before ATMs and online banking are available to all Nepalis

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Letters



“The mass is in no mood to capitulate to the political rightwing predators”

BISWO NATH POUDEL

Religion without reason

KUDOS TO NATION WEEKLY AND Aditya Adhikari for the brilliant essay “Religion Without Reason” (November 28). Much like Adhikari, I have long wondered why few of us publicly question our countless Hindu rituals and the sorry state of temples and shrines. Why do we blindly follow our forefathers (or grandmothers and mothers when it comes to visiting temples) in accepting that our temples should be coated with thick coats of grime, that pilgrims to the Pashupatinath should endure the smell of burning pyres at Aryaghat? (Can’t we at least have a more hygienic crematorium now that Nepal’s population is no more what it used to be when Aryaghat was a quiet place next to the Bagmati?) Science tells us that the holy cow dung is in fact a serious hazard to health, but then why the passive acceptance of a

preaching pundit who delivers lengthy lectures on its hygienic value? Why the long patient lines, the pushing and the shoving, and finally just a hurried bow in the inner sanctum? Like the Christian world that saw reform-minded Protestants turn the rituals and the act of worship upside down many, many years ago, is it time for Hindus to reflect if all’s well with our religion, particularly the tedious and expensive rituals? Is it time to redefine our religiosity and bring some reason to it?

PRAKASH SHARMA
KATHMANDU

ADHIKARI HAS WORKED MIGHTY hard on the essay and made his case pretty well too. But my question to him is very simple: Can you really find the rationale behind one’s religiosity? Either you have it or you don’t. People who throng to the



temples and then just leave after a quick look at the *linga* are happy to do just that. It satisfies a certain urge within them to link to a higher being, regardless of the material surroundings around them.

BHUPESH MALLA
VIA EMAIL

Report lacks details

I AM A BIT DISMAYED BY THE inadequacy of your report on Mohammed Mohsin's remarks ("Back To Panchayat?" by John Narayan Parajuli, November 28). As a person who resorts mainly to Nation Weekly for recent news from Nepal, I found the report lacking in details about what the minister actually said, riddled instead with some platitudinous observations and the beliefs of certain "analysts." However, I elicited from your report that Mohsin somehow thought that the word "autocracy" was acceptable to the Nepali press and its readers. It turned out that even though bereft of its suffrage rights and a representative government, the mass enjoys whatever right there is for them and is in no mood to capitulate those rights to the political rightwing predators.

Other media from Kathmandu reported that Mohsin alluded to the early 19th century politics of Germany and France to remind the publishing industry giants gathered in his court how dictatorship was a natural development from the chaos of limited democratic practices. I have been an admirer of Mohsin for his uncanny ability to scan history and philosophy to justify the rise of autocratic regime in Nepal, but not the manner he has come to power. He is among the very few persons in Nepal who owe their present position of power to both anti-democracy extremists: The Maoists made elections impossible to propel people like him to power, and the Palace appointed him to the council of ministers.

But a little historical fact would probably be relevant here. Indeed, as it turned out, a bright young man who finished his doctorate when he was only 23 in the early 1840's Germany realized that his dream of being a professor was not possible after the inauguration of a new king, Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Hanover. The King was more autocratic in his tendency than his predecessor and had purged seven liberal professors from the University of

Gottingen. Disenchanted, the young man left for Paris to start a revolutionary paper, but would soon be forced to leave France for Brussels and later head to London. He would in the meantime write damning, consequential, insightful articles, challenging the value system of the ruling elite, the society around him and the fledgling capitalism of his era. His books, his ideas and his followers, though illogical and wrong they were a lot of times, later shook the world, forced kings and tsars out of their throne, showing that if a democratic anarchy gives a chance to an autocratic strongman to rule a country, the autocracy itself becomes a transient phenomenon. The young man was Karl Marx.

BISWO NATH POUDEL
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
BERKELEY

Moshin's threat

I HAVE JUST READ SUMAN PRADHAN's piece on Minister Mohammed Mohsin's tantrums and I am now worried ("Stop This Nonsense," Meanwhile, November 21). I am an engineer based in Australia and was planning to return home this year and begin work in my own country. Now I am not sure. Why does Prime Minister Deuba tolerate ministers like Mohsin, though? If Nepal is a democracy, which I believed for a long time, why is Mohsin not being held accountable for his dangerous statements?

LAVA ACHARYA
SYDNEY

Funny liberals

KUNAL LAMA, IF YOU WERE OFFENDED by someone calling Kerry a pig, you clearly were too busy writing quasi-funny articles to follow the U.S. election campaign ("On Bended Knee," No Laughing Matter, November 21). Rather prudish, are you? I just find it funny how American liberals (and their worldwide supporters) think that the majority of the American population who voted for Bush are nuts. Conservative or not, stout Christians or not, anti-gay or not—they are bona fide U.S. citizens and they legitimately elected their leader. They were voting for themselves, not to appease the French. And oh, they probably won't care whether you fill out the DV form or not!

PJ SHRESTHA
KATHMANDU

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By the age of nine, Kisbor Kayastha was already lugging around a camera and shooting pictures wherever he went. At fifteen, he was possessed by a fiery passion for photography. Since then, he has dedicated his life to art photography.

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1. MELODIES: Namaste band perform at the inauguration of an art exhibition at the Nepal Art Council

2. THAI FOOD: Press meet to announce the Thai Food festival in Kathmandu on the occasion of the Thai king's birthday

3. AGRO-EXPO: Products displayed at the Birendra International Convention Centre

4. CALL FOR PEACE: Intellectuals at the Reporters' club discussing a possible ceasefire during the peace summit to be held in Lumbini

5. BRAND AMBASSADOR: Nima Rumba performs at a program organized by Sakalaka Boom at Chabahil

6. & 7. WE WANT PEACE: Children take part in a peace rally organized in Kathmandu on the occasion of International Children's day. Foreigners participated as well.

Photos: B Rai



4



5



BREAKING NEWS, NOT QUITE: The Royal Nepal Army flew more than three dozen print, radio and television journalists to Paandyun, Kailali, four days after a major Army offensive against the Maoists



Ultimatum Season

The government is uncertain about the prospects of polls. But pride and the Palace are getting in its way to admit as much.

BY SUMAN PRADHAN

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba last week again issued an ultimatum (or was it an invitation?) to the Maoists to sit at the negotiating table by mid-January, or else... The Maoists are probably asking: Or else, what?

As the prime minister said, if the Maoists don't come for talks by the deadline then—hold your breath—“We will start preparations to hold parliamentary elections.” No, he did not threaten an all-out war or promise to go after the rebel leadership, or even threaten to appeal for more international military aid to crush the rebellion. By refraining from such options, the prime minister implicitly acknowledged the futility of a military solution to the Maoist problem. That's well and good because this insurgency cannot be solved militarily.

But the prime minister's approach—threatening elections—is rather novel. The Maoists could yet do the unimaginable and come for talks, cowering with fear at the prospect of elections. But I seriously doubt it. Anyone who understands a little bit of diplomacy or how power equations work knows that for any ultimatum to be taken seriously, it must be backed by a credible threat of force. By that reckoning, the prime minister's ultimatum (or invitation, whatever you call it) hardly carries any weight with the Maoists.

The Maoists know that their greatest strength comes from their ability, real or perceived, to turn any parliamentary elections into a blood bath. Last week, a Maoist central committee member was quoted in the press as saying as much. If the Maoists just sit tight and let the deadline pass, the most the government can do is continue its security operations in a regular manner and prepare for the polls. The entire country knows that elections cannot be held at a single go. The government will have to try for phase-wise elections in different regions in a bid to shore up security for the polls.

Assuming that the rebels also know this (which they of course do), they too will concentrate their firepower phase-wise. Which means, the political parties, their candidates, and polling officers and voters, all will be at the mercy of the security forces and the Maoists in the run up to, during, and after the elections. Think about the legitimacy of such an election. In reality, the Deuba government too is uncertain about the prospects of new polls. But pride and the Palace are getting in its way to admit as much. Pride because Deuba can't allow himself to agree to the revival of the Parliament that he himself recommended be dissolved in May 2002. And the Palace because King Gyanendra's order to hold elections by April 2005 hangs like a Damocles' sword over his head. The prime minister knows that if he can't strike a peace deal by then and also fails to hold elections, his government will be swept aside just like his predecessors'. Therefore, the new ultimatum to the Maoists.

But the Maoists have the initiative in this war of nerves. They have held the initiative for a long time, ever since Deuba dissolved the Parliament and later advised the King to postpone elections slated for November 2002. One way to seize back the initiative is to get a functioning Parliament up and running again. But new elections are not only dangerous, but its results could also lack in legitimacy.

So, are we stuck in this Catch 22 situation? Not necessarily, if only the prime minister cares to listen. Deuba should listen to all those who favor a revival of the dissolved Parliament. Restoring the 1999 Parliament would neutralize the Maoist threat of violence as well as bring all the political forces back on a single forum to debate, discuss and to pose a united front against the rebels. Only then would the rebels be interested in talks. The prime minister can do this by getting his Cabinet to decide on reviving the Parliament and forwarding the recommendation to the Palace for formal announcement. The onus will then lie on the Palace to demonstrate its democratic credentials.

The problem with the Parliament revival option is that, it is being pushed by Deuba's archenemy Girija Prasad Koirala. Even if this is the best option, Koirala's association with it immediately takes away its legitimacy in the prime minister's eyes. Advice to Koirala: Tone down your



rhetoric and let others, especially civil society groups, argue for revival of the 1999 Parliament. That will make the pill less bitter for Deuba to swallow.

We are already seeing encouraging signs on this front. The Nepal Bar Association has pushed for the revival of the Parliament and has indeed asked the Supreme Court to expedite a hearing on a related writ. Now a large trade union associated with Deuba's own party has also come around to accepting it as the most viable option. If more such groups—from environmentalists, journalists, doctors, teachers to students and peace activists—continue to clamor, it will be difficult for the prime minister and the Palace to ignore such voices.

So countrymen, let us all unite and issue our own ultimatum to the government: Revive Parliament by December end, or else... or else, we will just stay home and continue eating dal bhat. **N**

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PROTEST: An employee of the Nepal Oil Corporation at the Nepalgunj airport wears a black armband to demand an increase in the price of petroleum products

Anti-Maoist sentiment

Thousands from 13 VDCs in Dailekh took part in an anti-Maoist demonstration on Monday, November 22. They were demonstrating against violent Maoist responses to an earlier demonstration on November 18. That day the villagers had protested against Maoist attempts to force them to join the CPN-Maoist party. The rebels responded by attacking the demonstrators and killed three villagers, including a child, and abducted over two dozen villagers. The Maoists, in response to the recent protests, have formed a three-man probe committee to investigate the killings and punish those responsible, said Diwakar, a Maoist leader.

Mass resignation

Sixty-two VDC secretaries in Parsa handed in their resignations to the district development committee citing security reasons. The Maoists had issued a 15-day ultimatum to VDC officials in the district to quit their jobs or face serious consequences.

Pressure on UML

The All Nepal National Free Students Union has intensified its pressure on the CPN-UML,

its parent party, to pull out of the coalition government. The student wing asked that the party make public its reasons for continuing in the government even after it had failed to restore peace. It blamed the party for not fulfilling the promises it made when it joined the government. The ANNFSU is on a month-long campaign to pressure the UML to pull out of the coalition.

Missing villagers

Forty-two villagers of Handi Khola in Makwanpur have gone missing after a raid by security forces in the Royal Chitwan National Park. A total of 48 villagers had gone to the park to collect vegetables, said reports. Only six of them returned. Park officials said that 17 villagers had been arrested. The family members of those missing have demanded information on their whereabouts from the local security officials.

Passing away

Nepali Congress leader and former parliamentarian Dr. Dhruba Prasad Sharma Dhakal, passed away at Om Hospital. He was 57. Sharma, a surgeon, was suffering from lung cancer. A personal doctor of the late BP

Koirala, Sharma was elected twice to the Pratinidhi Sabha from of Sindhuli. He was the head of the BP Koirala Cancer Hospital in Chitwan.

Petition to SC

The Nepal Bar Association has requested the Supreme Court to respond to a writ petition filed for the reinstatement of the Pratinidhi Sabha. A delegation, led by the bar President Sambhu Thapa, met Chief Justice Govinda Bahadur Shrestha to call for urgent action to end the current constitutional crisis. The apex court had upheld the decision of Prime Minister Deuba to dissolve the Pratinidhi Sabha in August



2002. The writ petition asking the court to review the decision was filed by advocate Dhruba Koirala in October 2002.

Fund crunch

Those displaced from the Karnali region due to the conflict and now living in Rajhena, Banke, are unlikely to get any relief from the government. The reason: lack of funds. The Home Ministry had been asked to allocate funds for the purpose, but the local administration said that it had not received a response yet. Hundreds of families from Mugu, Humla, Jumla and Dolpa have flocked to Banke after the Maoists began a forced recruitment drive. From the third week of September, 87 families have arrived in Banke from Mugu alone, reported Kantipur.

TU graduates

More than 15,000 students graduated from the Tribhuvan University in the last academic year. The results for the university exams-2060 showed that 13,209 students had passed their Bachelors-level exams; 2,674 students had passed their Masters-level exams; and 26 students got doctorate degrees.

Military hardware

India will supply a third Advanced Light Helicopter to the Royal Nepal Army after one of the two helicopters it delivered earlier crashed in Lumbini on October 28. India donated the two Advanced Light Helicopters to Nepal in June.

Amnesty extension

Malaysia extended its November 14 deadline for foreigners working illegally in the country to leave. The new deadline will be the end of December. Amnesty will be given to those who leave before the deadline. The extension came at the request of countries that have their citizens working illegally in Malaysia. Malaysia is host to illegal workers from Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines and Vietnam, among others. Nepali officials say that at least 15,000 Nepalis are working illegally in Malaysia.

Bus accident

Six people died and 32 more were injured when a bus and a truck collided at Jayasingh, Makwanpur. The bus, which was heading towards Mahendranagar from Birgunj, collided with the truck, which was going to Hetauda from Narayangarh. Twelve of those injured underwent treatment at Bharatpur Hospital and Bharatpur Medical College, while four were brought to Kathmandu.

Deaths in Iraq

Four former Gurkhas working at Global Risk Strategies, a British security firm, were killed in a mortar attack in Baghdad, reported London's The Independent. The British foreign ministry confirmed the deaths. The attack took place in the Green Zone, the heavily fortified headquarters for the United States and the Iraqi interim government. The identities of those killed will not be disclosed presently, said the firm. The families of the deceased are to be notified first.

Landmine deaths

Four park officials at the Parsa Wildlife Reserve were killed in a landmine explosion at Beluwa VDC. The Maoists in recent months have targeted forest offices and security guards. The recent attacks have come in the wake of efforts by Forest Department officials in Bara and Makwanpur, districts bordering the wildlife reserve, to prevent the Maoists from smuggling timber to India.

School closure

Temporary schoolteachers in public schools have increased the pressure on the government to grant them permanent status. They ordered the indefinite closure of the more than 26,000 community schools throughout the country. The

move will affect an estimated 4.4 million students. The dissenting teachers have demanded that permanent status be given to all those who have taught an academic session and that those displaced by the ongoing conflict be rehabilitated. There are over 40,000 temporary teachers working in public schools across the country. The government previously granted permanent status to schoolteachers working since or prior to February 7, 2002 (Magh 25, 2058).

Corruption charges

Three city officials of Biratnagar were arrested by the Morang district administration on corruption charges. The trio of Hem Bahadur Rai, Baburam Bhattarai and Ashok Gupta were accused of irregularities of more than Rs. 1.1 million. The officials were reported to have used fake stamps and signatures to draw money from the Nepal Bank.

Linguist meet

Linguists from more than 10 countries attended the 25th annual conference of the Nepal Bhasabigyan Samaj in Kathmandu. The development of local dialect was the subject of discussion.

Shobraj in cell

Charles Sobhraj, serving a life sentence at Central Jail, has been in a high-security cell for more than the 15 days permitted by the law. The Supreme Court notified the government of the overstay and ordered it to respond within 15 days. Sobhraj was shifted to the cell after a recent foiled escape attempt.

Delhi visit

The Chief of Army Staff General Pyar Jung Thapa was slated to leave for a three-day visit to New Delhi on Sunday, November 28. During the visit



Thapa is to attend the passing out parade at the National Defense Academy of India. The Army chief said that he would not discuss security issues with New Delhi during the visit. The Press Trust of India, however, said that Thapa would "hold high level military talks to chalk out joint measures" to deal with "the threat of Maoist violence growing in Nepal and spilling over to India." This will be the focus of the talks that General Thapa will hold with his Indian counterpart Gen N C Vij, according to the PTI. This is the third visit of the Army top brass to India.

Buddhist Summit

The World Buddhist Summit gets underway in Lumbini this

week on November 30. Over 150 delegates from over three dozen countries, including Australia, Bhutan, China, France, Germany, India, South Korea and the United States, have confirmed their participation. King Gyanendra opens the three-day summit.

More security

India will set up 15 additional Border Security Force checkpoints along the Nepal-India border in view of increasing Maoist activities and the threat it poses to India's security, according to a UNI news report. Union Minister of State for Home Sriprakash Jaiswal said that there were 15 Border Security Force battalions deployed along the sensitive border and that the force would soon be increased. Police posts had been set up every 10 kilometers along the border. Now on, there will be a post for every five kilometers.

Judicial reform

The Supreme Court has introduced a five-year plan to reform the judiciary. The overhaul will cost Rs. 6 billion. DANIDA, the Danish aid agency, will provide support to the Supreme Court plan. The planned reforms cover financial and administrative changes as well as the development of judicial infrastructure.



FOLK TUNES: Kutumba release their album "Folk Roots"

5 dead in Qatar

Five Nepalis died in an accident in Qatar, while one had a close shave. The six were employees of the Al Sewadi paper factory in the Sanaiya industrial area of Qatar. The incident occurred while they were cleaning a water-processing tank at the factory. The five died from inhaling poisonous gases inside the tank that was two and a half meters deep. The gases were meant for processing the water.

According to reports, Balkrishna Simkhada was the first to enter the tank. He lost consciousness inside the tank due to the toxic gases. Seeing him lay unconscious, Ram Bahadur entered the tank to rescue him. Likewise, four more Nepalis followed one another in the tank. By the time the managers at the factory called the police and the emergency services, it was already too late for five of the six workers.

Those dead have been identified as Balkrishna Simkhada, 37, of Chitwan; Bed Bahadur Tharu, 28, of Nawalparasi; Ram Bahadur Pandey, 31, of Tanahu; Naseer



Photos: Courtesy Annapurna Post

Mansuri of Sunsari; and Salamsingh Moktan, 41, of Nawalparasi. The injured has been identified as Deepak Khadka. Khadka is undergoing treatment at Hamid Hospital in Doha. "He is unable to speak," Shyamnanda Suman, the Nepali ambassador to Qatar, was quoted as saying. Reports have however cited hospital sources as claiming that Khadka is out of danger. Nepali diplomats in the region say the bodies of the dead are being kept in the same hospital and efforts are now underway to bring them to home. All of the deceased had been working at the factory for three years. Of 125 people employed in the factory, most are said to be Nepalis. According to reports, a Qatar official said that the Nepalis entered the tank "at their own will" to clean it after it started smelling foul.



CHIMNEY RESTAURANT BACK

The Chimney Restaurant at Yak & Yeti was relaunched on November 20, on an evening that revived many of the Chimney's original dishes. The evening was aimed at recreating "the feeling of the Chimney that was." Also on show were memorabilia from the days of Boris Lissanevitch, the restaurant's founder. The Chimney was lit again in mid-November bringing back a ritual that was part of the Yak & Yeti every year.

Boris Lissanevitch who is considered a pioneer in tourism in Nepal is the founder of the Chimney restaurant. Boris's fame as a Russian ballet dancer, an entrepreneur and a connoisseur of good taste lives on at Chimney Restaurant. His original recipes will be recreated at the Chimney afresh, as his famous Borscht and Smoked Bektı reappears on the Chimney menu. Also back are the Chicken a la Kiev and the flaming baked Alaska Sagarmatha.

NEW AGRICULTURAL POLICY

The government has put into effect the Agriculture Policy-2004. The aim of the new policy is to encourage commercial production among farmers. It aims to increase the productivity rate and also protect and promote natural resources while still utilizing them in the interest of farmers.

The policy divides farmers into two groups—small and big. Those owning less than four hectares of land will be classified as "small" farmers and will be supported by the government to boost their productivity. Also on the cards is the establishment of the Land Bank to

provide long-term loans for farmers to purchase lands. The new policy also pays special attention to nurturing investments in the private sector on contract and leasehold farming.

WIPRO LAUNCHES SANTOOR SOAP

Wipro Consumer Care and Lighting, a division of Wipro, has launched the Santoor brand of soap in the Nepali market. The newly launched Santoor is available in 100g packs. Wipro says the soap, with sandalwood and turmeric as its ingredients, will "enrich the skin with natural softness." It hopes the fragrance and the packaging will also draw customers to its new product.

TEN YEARS OF EVEREST INSURANCE

Everest Insurance has completed 10 years of operation. Everest Insurance has been providing various kinds of general insurance services, including bankers' blanket insurance, occupational accident trekking insurance and trekking insurance—to its customers. According to the insurance company, it holds 16 percent of the market share in general insurance and collected Rs. 280 million as insurance premium last year.

AGRICULTURE EXHIBITION

The Agro-Expo 2004 got underway at the Birendra International Convention Centre from November 25. The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry organized the Agro-Expo 2004. The agricultural fair was held with the belief that the nation's future lies in the commercialization of agriculture. Thus the

main objective of the agricultural fair: to promote the agricultural sector by helping farmers adopt agriculture in a more commercial and professional way, and also explore international markets. The five-day exposition was inaugurated by Queen Komal. The expo has about 150 stalls, displaying and selling agricultural products, paddy, silk, condiments and also books on agriculture.

NIC CARD

The Nepal Industrial and Commercial Bank has introduced its NIC Cash Card. The debit card being introduced by NIC Bank enables customers to draw amounts up to Rs. 25,000 from 26 ATMs under the Smart Choice Technology network.

MOBILE BANKING THROUGH BOK

The Bank of Kathmandu, the BOK, has introduced mobile banking services. The aim of the new service, according to the bank, is to make life easier for its customers. The BOK says that its "Mobile Banking" service is a cost and time effective channel to deliver banking services in an easier, faster and convenient manner. The service includes account balance inquiry and mobile phone bill payments through SMS—the first of its kind according to the BOK. Account enquiry through the service allows customers to access the end of day balance of the preceding day and a "mini statement," a record on the last three transactions of the previous day.

The BOK is providing its new facility to all its customers without any additional service cost. Customers using this new service will be provided with specific-client PIN code to ensure high security. BOK says it plans to come out with more specialized products and services to keep its services to customers up to date with modern banking technologies.



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STRATEGIC VICTORY?

The Army says that the battle at Paandyun was a major victory, and it later flew in dozens of journalists to the battlefield to ensure massive media coverage

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI
IN PAANDYUN

THE BATTLE AT PAANDYUN called for wide press coverage. And so it got. On Wednesday, November 24, the Royal Nepal Army flew 64 journalists to observe the steep, forested hills in northern Kailali, the site of a major offensive against the Maoists.

“This is a huge success,” Brigadier General Rajendra B. Thapa, former RNA spokesman who now heads the Army’s Farwestern division in Dipayal, told the press that had been ferried to Paandyun four days after the Army claimed to have won a major victory against the Maoists in the rebels’ Farwest hub. At hand were 42 print, radio and TV journalists from the capital and the rest from Dipayal and Dhangadi.

Since the Dashain truce ended, the Maoists have renewed their military campaign aggressively. Everyday, the news is dominated by deaths of security personnel, abductions of villagers, bandas crippling life right across the country and ambushes along major highways. The

most recent ambush on the Prithvi Highway in Dhading on November 16 that left five security personnel dead got wide coverage in the press. Nepal 1 television stunned the whole nation when it aired a chilling footage of hundreds of Maoists crossing over to Gurkha after the attack on security forces.

At Paandyun, Nepal 1 was conspicuously absent. The Army spokesman Brigadier General Deepak Gurung even admitted during a recent press meet that the Army had asked Space Time Network, the leading cable operator, to take Nepal 1 off the air.

Something had to be done immediately to restore order. And so Paandyun happened, say analysts. It does push the Maoists on the back foot in the region where they have largely operated without resistance.

And the Army wasn’t about let go the tactical advantage it had gained without others, including the Maoists, noticing it. The media duly reported that the Army had penetrated into a Maoist stronghold. And unlike the past, where it was said to have avoided casualties,

the Army had been aggressive about pinning down and attacking the Maoists.

“We were in a position with our helicopters to cause more casualties on the Maoist side. But our aim was to mentally disrupt the Maoists rather than finish them off,” said Brigadier General Thapa while briefing the media. He was accompanied by two other commanders who had been behind the battle in Paandyun, termed Operation Prarambha, meaning beginning, by the Army.

Paandyun also showed that the former RNA spokesman still shares a good rapport with the media, and he was keen to make most of it. Interestingly, Operation Prarambha started barely five



days after he took over the Farwest command in Dipayal.

Locals said the Maoists had in the last few months converted Paandyun into their administrative headquarters for the Farwest and also their training center in the region. Water was carried from a nearby well as the pipeline, the soldiers said, had been cut by the Maoists during their retreat. Most soldiers described the region as extremely rural with rough and steep terrain—a two-day walk away from the district headquarters and the nearest road.

The battle took place in mostly forested hills that also had small flat plains where the Maoists were said to have conducted their drills.

“We were in a much inferior position, as we were attacking from a lower position while they were stationed on the hill. We were also outnumbered, as we didn’t expect them to be over 1,400 strong. We had only 200 men,” a soldier who had fought the battle said. “In some places we even resorted to fistfights when they came to grab our weapons. Some of them also hurled socket bombs from the treetops.”

The battle began around 6 p.m. and lasted until 1:30 a.m. the next day. The Army took the Maoists by surprise when it took a steep and much tougher approach route to the hill: The Maoists had set up strong defensive positions and laid ambushes across two ridges on the main trail. Even so, at one point the Maoists were said to have broken the Army’s lines and infiltrated between the assault group and the fire support group.

An Army colonel escorting the reporters estimated that the Army could have lost at least two companies (around 180 soldiers) if it had taken the regular route uphill, where the Maoists were waiting. “No one ran away. We fought as a unified force until the end,” said Brigadier

General Thapa, referring to the forces that included Armed Police Force personnel. Ten security personnel died in the nighttime encounter; 18 others were injured.

Along the jungle trail there were stonewalls where the Maoists had taken up defensive positions. The battlefield was strewn with cartridges, unexploded ordinance, bloodstains and medicines—mostly Soframycin ointment that is applied to wounds—scattered about and apparently used by the Maoists. The journalists were told watch out for socket bombs lying by the side of the trail.

The Army was clearly in control of the site, but the overall effect of the battle was hard to judge. The Army claimed that the Maoist toll was as high as 300. The Maoists said that they had killed 19 soldiers and suffered only nine casualties, including their company commissar Amar.

During the guided tour through the forest and across steep terrain in Paandyun, Nation Weekly came across more than a dozen dead bodies of Maoists that gave off an acrid smell. Soldiers said they had discovered a total of 26 bodies, including one with a saline IV on his arm.

Paandyun, the Army says, had been a key transit point for the Maoists to move essential supplies from Tarai to hill centers. “It was also being used as a training center,” Brigadier General Thapa said. Though there were no signs of tents or other locations where the Maoists could have sheltered the 1,500 cadres that the Army claimed had been present, journalists did find torn pieces of paper in the forest that bore descriptions of military tactics.

When the government set its January 13 deadline for the Maoists to come sit for peace talks, the implicit message was that its patience was running out. The Army clearly wants to portray Paandyun as a major defeat for the Maoists.

But the local people aren’t so sure. They say that most of the Maoists in Paandyun left as the Army approached and are now in Kolkadi in Surkhet and in other villages of Bajedi, Gaganpani, Sim and Katunje in Kailali. Many think Paandyun will once again fall into Maoist hands once the Army heads back to Dipayal. **N**

PORN BUSINESS



In early November, officials raided seven movie theaters and recovered one of the biggest hauls of pornographic films so far. Although officials say they are doing everything possible to beat the sleaze, the laws are inadequate.

BY INDRA ADHIKARI AND JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI



Pornography has always been here, but it used to be a hidden scourge. Raids in early November in which officials seized more than 40 pornographic films from seven theaters in the Kathmandu Valley demonstrate just how widespread it has become. Porn can be rented at video shops, and porn films are shown in public theaters, under the very noses of law enforcement authorities in the heart of the capital.

The raid was not the first of its kind, but it was the biggest yet. Authorities at the Film Development Board have been trying hard to clamp down on the sleaze. The newly appointed officers of the board are pleased with the raid's success. After several days of investigation they submitted their report to the chief district officer of Kathmandu, Baman Prasad Neupane. Nation Weekly asked members of the board just how widespread this trade is.

The board members privately said that this raid was just the tip of the iceberg. Many cinema operators take porn casually, laments one officer with the film board. This is partly because law enforcement officials rarely initiate legal proceedings against those guilty. "The culprits are forgotten and forgiven after a while," says a board official who insisted on anonymity.

Porn has spread widely and become available much more openly over the last five years. India is the major source: The open border between the two countries makes smuggling the films easy. The films confiscated by the Film Development Board recently are mostly dubbed in Hindi, but only a few feature Indian actors, says a Film Development Board officer who has seen many of the films during the investigation. According to general secretary of the board, Ashok Sharma, porn films screened in Nepal are not the originals. Instead bits of hardcore movies are inserted into C-grade Hindi films.

The teams who made the simultaneous raids found the same Hindi movies with different hardcore scenes added at different places. Officials say the worst offender is the Jyoti Cinema Hall at Lazimpat, whose owner, Bikas Pradhan, coordinates the smuggling of such films into Nepal. They say his distribution

company rarely brings any other movie apart from C-grade Hindi movies and porn clippings. Films were also seized from Nischal Cinema in Thamel, Biswa Cinema in Samakhushi, Puspanjali Hall in Koteswor, Kantipur Cinema in Sitapaila, Ajima in Swoyambhu and Ganesh Cinema Hall in Bhaktapur, according to officials.

The business certainly seems profitable. Distribution rights for an A-grade Hindi film can cost more than Rs. 2.6 million, but a C-grade film can be smuggled into Nepal for less than Rs. 100,000 and hardcore porn clips inserted for less than Rs. 5,000. Theaters charge the same ticket rates for the cheap sleaze as for first-run films. Cinema owners

have been facing declining revenues in recent years; some have made up for it by screening porn. Customers are mostly men between the ages of 15 and 40.

Pornography maybe a social taboo, but there seems no shortage of people who want to watch it: Viewership is increasing each year. The market is growing partly due to exposure to such material on the Internet and on cable TV. November's raid on the seven theaters is unlikely to slow the growth of the porn business. There's just too much money to be made—more than \$10 billion in sales of videos, rentals and other fees worldwide. There are no statistics for Nepal, but the trade here certainly amounts to millions of rupees.

- Twelve of the 30 films confiscated were English; 18 were Hindi.
- Most were C-grade Indian movies with hardcore clips inserted.
- The Press Publication and Distribution Act 2026 bans pornography.
- The Film Development Board, the FDB, raided theaters after locals provide tip-offs: Six teams comprising one official from the board and one from the District Administration Office raided all six halls simultaneously. The theaters had been warned by the FDB in the past. They had all agreed previously to stop the screenings.
- Porn movies were shown in the daytime as well as at night.
- Most viewers are men between 15-40 years of age, according to officials.
- The system: two films for a ticket.

LOCAL BONANZA:
Soft porno does good business in theaters



Cinema owners like those figures, but their neighbors hate the business.

People living near some of the theaters that were raided had repeatedly asked the Film Development Board to take action. The pressure worked. "Public initiative is a must for banning such flagrant breach of law," says the film board's Sharma. "We cannot enforce the ban on such activities effectively without a helping hand from the public." But public pressure and the board's raids are not enough.

This is not the first time the board has raided theaters and confiscated similar caches of smut. But for all their efforts, the police failed to prosecute the cinema operators. Take for instance the



A Complete Ban Is Difficult

endra Adhikari spoke with **Ashok Sharma**, general secretary of the Nepal Film Development Board, whose office raided the movie theaters and recovered pornographic movies in late November.

Who informed you about the pornographic movies?

The board had reports and tip-offs that some movie theaters were regularly screening such films. Though the board had raided theaters previously and recovered the contraband, no action was taken against the offenders. After we were appointed to the Film Development Board, we received more tip-offs. Nearby residents of the film halls called and informed us. So we sent two of our officials to see if it was true. They took four months and finally found out that a few theaters had been screening such movies. Now we are taking action against them.

Do you think banning pornography has helped?

We call it a social evil. When sex has not been so open [as

in Nepal], porn films certainly disturb social activities. They would make our children more prone to such activities. And they are all illegally transported to Nepal. Any film that enters Nepal without registration with the revenue department is not permitted for screenings.

When there is unhindered access to Internet porn sites, will banning the material in theaters deter people?

Of course, it's true that a complete ban on pornography is difficult, but at least we can stop the public shows. Viewing such stuff through Internet is a personal [choice] and is not exposing the public. We cannot stop that, and it is confined to the interested person. What we do is follow the sentiment of large a section of the society who do not want such stuff [shown]. The posters in public places have made it difficult for a family to walk together. This is what we are trying to stop.

Where does the porn come from?



Mostly the films are smuggled from India. There is no mention of the name or the producer of the films, so we cannot contact the producers to find out how they are sold into Nepal. But our investigation has shown that these films have not been registered at checkpoints and custom offices. Neither have the distributors asked for permission. A few of the films are in English, but we suspect them to be made in Hong Kong. The characters in the movies are all Chinese.

What are the movies like?

I cannot describe the scenes, but I can say they are hardcore; not all though. There is a lot of cut and paste. Hardcore scenes are pasted into C-grade Indian movies. In some cases the same scene is inserted into different films. **N**



lack of coordination between the FDB officials and the police that bought time for Ganesh Hall to hide porn reels. That has only added to the confidence of the smugglers and operators—they have grown more fearless and conspicuously more defiant. Some in the public have even blamed the board, but the fault is hardly confined to one administrative body.

An effective ban on pornographic materials is probably impossible. Worldwide, the business thrives under repression and freedom alike, and pornographers take advantage of every technology. Video parlors here are flooded with

smutty films, and the rental and sales volume of pornographic CDs has shot up with the advent of cheap Chinese VCD players. “Men in their 30s and 40s come to hire such CDs; also teenagers,” says Bishnu Shrestha, who asked us not to name his video shop. “Even girls come for such CDs, but mostly they buy them rather than take them on rent.”

Not everyone thinks this is a terrible thing. Some are in favor of regulating and controlling porn rather than trying to outlaw it. “It’s better to have a control mechanism,” says Janak Bhandari, an advocate, “than to take draconian measures at once.” Some say people will always be

able to get it no matter what the law says, and that it would do less harm if it were open and combined with comprehensive sex education. Some experts say that chief appeal of pornography stems from the fact that it is forbidden. Philosopher Bertrand Russell once said, “Nearly every fairly well-to-do man has in adolescence seen indecent photographs and has been very proud of obtaining them because they were difficult to procure.” He argued decades ago that suppressors of pornography were guilty of producing in others, and of expressing, a prurient attitude towards sex.

Such arguments carry little weight in Nepal; most people want a clampdown on porn. But law enforcement and film board officials say that the law is inadequate. After last week’s raids, the board filed cases at the District Administration Office. If found guilty, the theater owners could be fined Rs. 5,000 or see their licenses cancelled or both, apart from the seizure of the porn materials. The relevant law, the Press Publication and Distribution Act 2026, has no provision for a prison term. And there are no cyber laws or mechanisms to control the free flow of porn materials from the Internet.

Law enforcement agencies armed with only slap-on-the-wrist laws are calling for help. Kathmandu Chief District Officer Neupane says clearly: “Our laws need updating.” But even that is unlikely to eliminate pornography. Violators will circumvent their way through the meshes of law, no matter how stringent they are made. “As long as there is demand in the market,” says Bhandari, the advocate, “the business is here to stay.” **N**



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छहड खरीद कदा पञ्चकन्या अङ्कित लेखी छहड्डी प्रयोग नह्री। नृणिकले सम्बन्धमा रहनु।

INTERNALLY DISPLACED

A major attack in the district headquarters often precipitates a sudden exodus, but the trickle of people leaving a way of life has become commonplace

BY SUSHMA JOSHI
IN KOHALPUR, BANKE

THE TEARS ARE STILL FRESH for Bachu Rokaya. She fled Mugu three months ago after her husband was killed by the Maoists. He was held in detention for four months and then killed. They tied his feet and hands and threw him into the Karnali, says a fellow villager who also fled down to Nepalgunj. Villagers suspect the man was taken because he was a state employee working for the government's post office system and was also active in his community.

Bachu says: "I have nobody here, nobody." Although there are nine other families from Shera VDC, her parents' home, Bachu has to survive by herself in these temporary shelters. With two sons and four daughters to take care of and no source of income, her desperation is all too real.

Gayarudra Buda has a different story. The 39-year-old is also a single parent, although his burden is a different one: He takes care of his two-year-old daughter himself. His wife Bidara Buda, 26, was grinding flour in her village when the Maoists who had laid an ambush by the irrigation canal detonated it too early. The security forces for whom the ambush was meant escaped unscathed. About 60 security personnel came charging down the jungle firing their guns. Bidara was gunned down in the crossfire. The Army took the body to the barracks and told the husband that he would be given compensation. This hasn't happened yet. Gayarudra Buda, who is now in Nepaljung, shakes his head when asked about compensation. He has yet to follow it up with the state agencies.

Gayarudra clutches his two-year-old daughter Nanda Buda who cries unceasingly as he talks. There is no milk in the

camp. The baby has been eating roti and rice along with the adults. The children are showing signs of malnutrition.

Chandu Buda's sense of loss is palpable as he talks about how he left the village. Also of Sera VDC, Mugu, he says: "We left with only the clothes on our backs. We took nothing. We had to let all the cattle—goats and cows—loose in the jungle to graze. We had to leave the fields full of crops."

The camp residents are known as IDPs in development jargon—the internally displaced people—and refer to the hundreds of people who are forced to move from their homes to become refugees inside their own country.



MAYHEM: Paandyun, Kailali saw a major encounter late last month



All photos: npr/S

The camp residents say that life in Mugu's district headquarters is expensive. A kilogram of rice costs Rs. 32, forcing displaced people to move to areas where food is cheaper.

The numbers of internally displaced people have been rising steadily in the last 10 years. A major attack in the district headquarters, as the recent one in Gamgadi, often precipitates a sudden exodus, but the trickle of people leaving a way of life has become commonplace. The profitable salt trade between Tibet and the Midwest has become less so, now that Indian salt is cheaply available. But more damaging to this local economy is the Maoist tax that has been recently imposed. The tax makes it unprofitable to transport any goods, including potatoes and sheep. This is leading to a slow but steady decline in local trade.

There are currently 115 people in the makeshift camp here on the side of the

road. They are displaced from various mid-western districts—including Humla, Jumla, Kalikot, Mugu and Jajarkot. The central district officer allocated 30 *kathas*, about one hectare, of government land for them to pitch camp on temporarily. The Red Cross has provided plastic for shelter; BASE and SAFE (both NGOs) have provided about 15 quintals of rice and three quintals of dal, Rs. 500 worth of spices and 10 kilograms of oil.

SAFE also distributed children's clothes and put in a water pump. The Rara Club, a local organization made up of former Mugu residents now living in the Nepalgunj area, has donated firewood. Bigger INGOs working in conflict zones, including those who provide educational support, have not yet arrived on the scene.

For Bhairav Bahadur Shahi, 50, who left Humla one night without informing even his children, the reason behind his departure was very clear. "They always wanted me to attend their programs," says the man as he squats on the dusty ground. "You can't travel from one village to another without travel papers,

and we have to give the reason why we want to go where we do. I finally had to leave." He thinks his children are living in Simikot, but he is not sure.

The lack of freedom to travel made Sriba Chanda lose his right leg. Sriba, 11, was felling a tree when it fell on top of him. The Maoists told his father to patch it up in the village and that there was no need to go to the hospital. Then the snow fell, and blockades took place. By the time Sriba made it to the hospital, his leg had to be amputated. The boy, who has four siblings and no mother, hobbles around the camp in his crutches donated by the United Mission to Nepal. Although he used to go to school while in the village, he has now stopped.

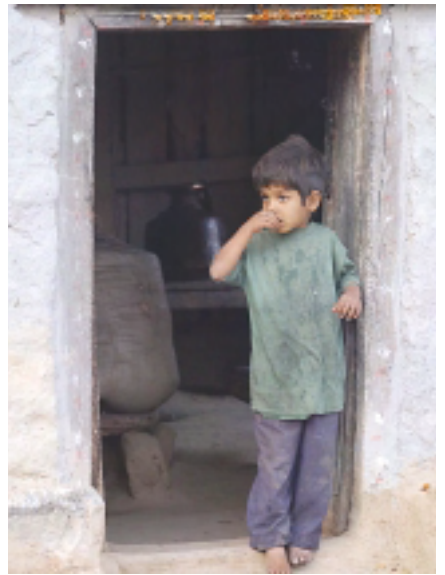
The lack of freedom, say recent observers who have traveled in Humla, is one reason why people are choosing to abandon their villages and their way of life. Even though the collective pilot farms set up by the Maoists in the region have brought some opportunities of equality for women and lower caste groups, this is not enough to stop the mass migration. Many of the ethnic *Bhotay* villages in Mugu are abandoned, leading to the extinction of a way of life, observers say.

The heap of rice is slowly disappearing as family after family comes to collect it in their plastic buckets. The food is a meager replacement for a subsistence way of life that is now inexorably over.

Chandu Buda looks over the fields of stubble and says: "We used to have fields of apples that we didn't know what to do with. Now we have nothing." **N**



EXODUS: People fleeing the Kamali region





ON THIN ICE

Global warming is affecting even the Everest. UNESCO is being asked to put the mountain and two other sites on its danger list. But how much can it do?

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

IN THE FACE OF INCREASING dangers to the Himalayan region from the human-induced menace of global warming, a group of activists and organizations from Nepal and around the world have been urging UNESCO, the United Nations' educational, scientific and cultural body, to at least assess the magnitude of the danger.

Campaigners believe that putting the Sagarmatha National Park on the World Heritage in Danger list would force UNESCO to assess Nepal's glacial lakes and stabilize those most at risk. The group known as Friends of the Earth has petitioned the U.N. body to include the park, Belize's barrier reef and Peru's Huascarán National Park on the list. The problem is getting some attention now, but it is not new.

"This is an old phenomenon," says Ang Karma, a mountaineer and the general secretary of Nepal Mountaineering Federation, who is a frequent visitor to the Everest region. "For decades now the Khumbu glacier has been shrinking." Though many in the mountaineering community are in favor of asking UNESCO to monitor the situation, they also fear that U.N. involvement could bring severe re-

strictions for the mountaineering community and hurt the Sherpas, for whom Everest has been a source of livelihood for years.

But even the Sherpas are divided. There are fears that global warming, un-studied and unchecked, will make it impossible to preserve Everest's natural heritage for future generations.

"It's my livelihood as a tour guide and climber," says Pemba Dorjee Sherpa, one of the petitioners, who holds the record for the fastest ascent of Everest. "If we lose it, there will be nothing for our children." Pemba recounts legendary mountaineer Edmund Hillary's concern about the retreating snowline. "Last year when Sir Edmund came to Nepal, he told me that a lot of snow had melted in the 50 years since he first climbed Everest."

To people like Pemba, the Everest region is fast losing its natural beauty. In a 54-page report, the petitioners ask for the "immediate and urgent addition" of the Sagarmatha National Park to UNESCO's World Heritage in Danger list, on the basis of serious effects caused by climate change. They also ask UNESCO to develop and adopt a program of corrective measures.

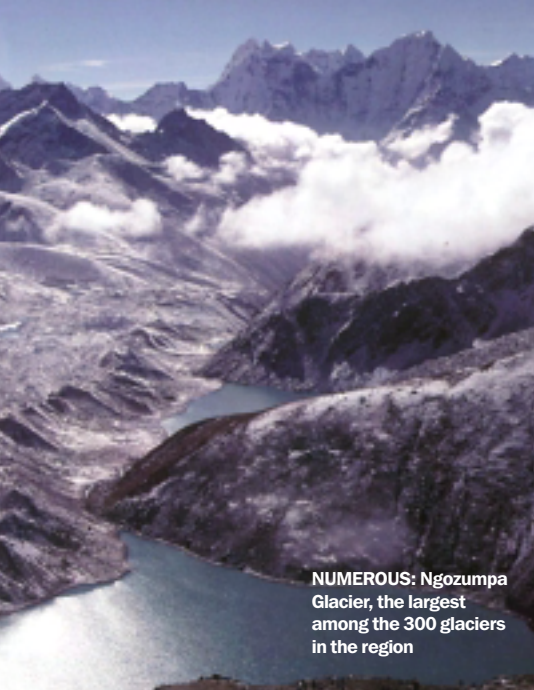
"Mount Everest is a powerful symbol of the natural world," says Prakash

Sharma, director of Pro Public, a public advocacy group and one of the leading campaigners from Nepal. "If these mountains are threatened by climate change, then the situation is already dead serious. If we fail to act now, we will be failing future generations and denying them the opportunity to enjoy the beauty of Mother Earth."

There are more than 300 glaciers in the Sagarmatha National Park that is home to Everest, including the Ngozumpa Glacier, which is almost 20 kilometers long.

According to the 1972 UNESCO convention, any site can be placed on the danger list if it faces specific and serious threats that are amenable to correction by human action. Nepal, which became party to the convention in 1978, immediately included the Sagarmatha National Park in its inventory of sites worthy of inclusion on the World Heritage List. Subsequently, UNESCO declared the park the 120th World Heritage Site in 1979. But back then the dangers posed by climate change were still not an issue.

The United Nations Environment Program's 2002 report says that climate change is "the biggest threat facing humankind, with extreme weather events, droughts and rises in disease forecast for many parts of the globe over the coming decade." According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's report on Asia, almost 67 percent of the glaciers in the Himalayan and Tien Shan mountain ranges have retreated during the past decade. The resulting long-term



NUMEROUS: Ngozumpa Glacier, the largest among the 300 glaciers in the region



All Photos Copyright: Reynolds Geo-Sciences

loss of natural fresh water storage could have devastating downstream effects, warns a report by the Kathmandu-based ICIMOD, the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development.

In Nepal's Himalaya, data from 49 monitoring stations show a clear increase in temperature since the 1970s; the greatest increases are found at higher altitudes. On average, air temperatures have risen by

one degree centigrade in that time. The petition also cites an unspecified government report that says that Nepal's overall temperature is increasing by 0.41 degrees per decade. The petition warns that the rising temperature is causing glacial retreat, which in turn causes the formation of lakes beyond newly exposed terminal moraines.

"There is little doubt that most glaciers are retreating at a rapid rate," says John Gerrard, a geomorphologist and incoming chairman of the U.K.-based Mount Everest Foundation. "This will have repercussions for medium-term water supply but may have more imme-

Dig Tsho lake burst through its moraine, destroyed 14 bridges and caused a loss of more than \$1.5 million in damages to the almost-completed hydroelectric station in Namche Bazaar.

Experts have said that flood disasters are not confined to glacial lakes alone. Melting snow coinciding with monsoon rain can also cause flood disasters in the Himalayan region. There's also the danger of running short of water.

If the glaciers continue to retreat at the rates being seen in the places like the Himalaya, experts say that many rivers and freshwater systems could run dry, threatening drinking water supplies as well as fisheries and wildlife.

"Climate change is irreversibly taking away priceless heritages," says Lalanath de Silva, a Geneva-based lawyer with International Public Interest Defenders and one of the petitioners. "Present and future generations are entitled to expect UNESCO to act immediately to prevent such a catastrophe." But is UNESCO in a position to do that?

UNESCO certainly can't slow the pace of the climatic changes unless developed countries fulfill their responsibilities under either the 1999 Kyoto protocol on climate change or the 1972 convention on World Heritage Sites, which binds all parties to the convention to protect sites in danger. Without U.S. cooperation—the country has resolutely refused to ratify the Kyoto protocol—worldwide emission of greenhouse gases is likely to grow.

Clearly, the solution to glacial retreat in the Everest region and elsewhere lies beyond Nepal's borders. The petitioners hope, perhaps unreasonably, that UNESCO's intervention will make a difference. **N**

s(WITH INPUTS FROM KATHERINE STIPALA IN THE UNITED KINGDOM)



BREACH: A moraine breach by the Sabai Tsho in 1998. The village at the bottom of the Mera Peak is Tagnag.

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In Defense Of Mohsin

No matter how unpopular, all ideas and expressions should find a place in the marketplace of ideas. Isn't that what democracy is all about?

BY JOGENDRA GHIMIRE

Information and Communications Minister Mohammed Mohsin stirred a hornet's nest two weeks ago. And the controversy just doesn't seem to go away. Here's a recap. Addressing a small group of media leaders in his residence, the government spokesman reportedly (mind you, it was reported to us by those present there) said that the alternative to the current government would be something that none of the media persons present could bear. While there are slight variations in the exact wording he used (whether he was offering a hypothesis or pronouncing what he knew was in the offing), the press coverage was uniform: He had hinted at the imminent danger of authoritarianism should the present government fail.

The objective of this piece is not to defend or criticize the government's principal publicity official for what he told the media that day. For all we know, the ideologue in Dr. Mohsin could have been thinking aloud, or the government's principal press secretary could have been issuing the press a veiled threat to be more pliant or else face a less tolerant government. Those in the government presumably feel that they have been accorded less than fair treatment by the media from the word go—with questions on such issues as its very legitimacy and its ability to vindicate the twin mandate of holding elections and bringing the Maoists to the negotiating table.

The minister deserves the benefit of the doubt, something most commentators and editors seem to have denied him. One needs to question the way his assertion was first presented to the public and then interpreted in the marketplace of ideas. While the commentators do enjoy their rights to free expression, to criticize a sitting minister for allegedly harboring authoritarian ambitions and to criticize the establishment for testing the waters by throwing the gauntlet of dictatorship at the media elite, it is unwise not to look into the merits—however little—of the opinion or the hypothesis that the minister put forward.

The problem with the way Mohsin's assertion was covered and condemned is this: In Mohsin, the media seems to have found the perfect whipping boy of Nepali politics. A royal nominee in the Cabinet—the *de facto* Prime Minister to some—and an ideologue of the Panchayat, Mohsin has always been identified with the right of center. Media professionals with different political persuasions have never been too happy about his elevation as a key figure in the current government. Perhaps for the same reason, without bothering to trash or support the content of his assertions, or to analyze it in detail, the entire pack of writers decided

to pounce at the messenger. His assertion, in fact, deserves greater attention and a dispassionate consideration.

Societies in turmoil have the capacity to throw off strange outcomes, and one of the likely ones is an intolerant government of a different variety. When the population is tired of, and feels hopeless about, the constant infighting, or there are fears for the very unity of the country, you cannot completely rule out the possibility of the emergence of a Pol Pot or a dictatorship of the Pinochet version. Even in free societies, when the fear of terrorist attacks by aliens is overwhelming, you can end up with the Patriot Act. Civil liberties can be clamped down and minorities can find themselves at the receiving end of the law and order machinery.

Closer to home, terrorism in the Indian state of Punjab provided justification for the president's rule for years, draconian laws like TADA and its repressive implementation. It was only after the political process was restored in Punjab that the worst forms of human rights violations came to light and the heroes led by KPS Gill began to look far less heroic. The objective here is not to club together the different versions of intolerance among governments or to suggest that one is similar to the other. It is obvious they are not.

What must be disconcerting to commentators in Nepal is perhaps the ready acceptance of the possibility of sweeping clampdowns on fundamental rights that the insecurity of a more disorderly future fuels.

For a country that has seen six short-lived governments in the five years since the 1999 elections and thousands of deaths on a yearly basis, where speculations are already rife about the imminent fall of yet another government (all primarily because the successive governments were unable to engage the Maoists in any meaningful manner), people can't be blamed for desiring for peace, and law and order.

And, whether one likes it or not, it is less likely to come about unless the Maoists sincerely oblige.

If, under such a situation, all the public discourse is preoccupied with shooting the messenger who delivers news that you don't want to hear, it doesn't really help the dialogue. The opinion makers can surely help by getting rid of their pack mentality and by going beyond the easy option of shooting the messenger. To me, commentaries and opeds that trash the underlying message in Dr. Mohsin's remarks—the possible rise of authoritarianism—themselves smack of authoritarianism. For no matter how unpopular, all ideas and expressions should find a place in the marketplace of ideas. **N**



A CLOSER LOOK

To try to change the characteristic of our media debates on the life of NGOs, the mainstream media needs to examine the work of NGOs with probing eyes

BY PRATYOUSH ONTA

Mainstream media debates about the life of NGOs in Nepal almost always happen in polemical or accusatory tones. Media write-ups on the subject, more often than not, are bereft of good research and ethnographic content. The repetitious nature of such writings in the mainstream press indicates that the media falls easy prey to routine and unimaginative production sequences. To try to change the characteristic of our media debates on the life of NGOs in Nepal, I would like to suggest that the mainstream media take a closer look at NGO work with more probing eyes. Any sector of work in which Nepali NGOs are involved could be chosen for this purpose. Here I want to highlight the participation of NGOs in the production of print media content in Nepal. I do so by referring to three studies published by my colleagues from Martin Chautari in 2003.

The first them deals with the life of magazines produced by NGOs in post-1990 Nepal. This theme has been researched by Purna Basnet who is himself the former editor of the magazine Bikas produced by the NGO Atmanirbhar Bikas Manch (ABM). Basnet looks at the life of four magazines produced by Nepali NGOs: Himal, Asmita, Bikas and Haka Haki. The first three have ceased publication as NGO entities, and Haka Haki has resumed regular publication after a hiatus of almost a year. These magazines were produced by Himal Association, Asmita Mahila Prakashan Griha, ABM, and the Centre for Development Communica-

tion and Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (jointly) respectively. After carefully describing the publication trajectories of these four magazines Basnet concludes that they have contributed significantly to the genre of responsible and thoughtful journalism in Nepal. These magazines contributed to the widening of the domain of Nepali journalism in terms of its subject matter. According to Basnet, they also contributed to the making of a critical genre of journalistic writing and showed how the Nepali language could be used to dis-

KhoPaKe fellowships, most of which have been published in various mainstream Nepali language publications. Until that time, KhoPaKe had also prepared and published five books, and this number has increased since Bhatta did his research. Two of these books are handbooks regarding how to do investigative journalism, including one in the sub-field of reporting the judiciary. The other three books are compilations of investigative writings commissioned by the Centre. These three books provide useful examples of some of the best investigative pieces produced by Nepali print journalists.

What has been the contribution of KhoPaKe to Nepali journalism? Bhatta answers this question by looking at both

what the published stories of KhoPaKe have succeeded in doing and at the enhancement of skills of journalists who have worked under KhoPaKe fellowships. On the first point, he notes two kinds of successes. One—the relatively more successful aspect—is simply the extension of the domain of the journalistic field and, by implica-

tion, the sphere of public debates in Nepal. A good example of this would be journalist Sangeeta Lama's long exposé of how gifts, both cash and kind, offered to Pashupatinath were not accruing to the public accounts of any properly constituted institution but were being used by the Mul Bhatta of the temple who held absolute control over such offerings. In an article published in the Himal bimonthly in 1997, Lama argued that the Mul Bhatta and his associates had earned many crores of rupees whereas the money could



cuss and analyze complex social issues facing the society.

The second study deals with the work of the Centre for Investigative Journalism, Khoj Patrakarita Kendra in Nepali—KhoPaKe for short. It was written by Komal Bhatta, who had earlier published an excellent article on the life of evening newspapers produced in Kathmandu. KhoPaKe provides fellowships to journalists to do in-depth and investigative stories on different subjects, including corruption. According to Bhatta, by early 2003, more than 50 journalists had done about 60 stories under

have been used to do many necessary repairs in the temple complex. The status quo of fund management at Pashupati has not changed due to this article in the seven years since it was published, but its details and arguments have given birth to many other articles on the same subject in the press. The subject, erstwhile considered outside the domain of public scrutiny, has now come under the journalistic gaze.

The same could be said of Shiva Gaunle's and Hari Thapa's reporting on various aspects of the judiciary. More recently, after the imposition of emergency in the country in late 2001, Mohan Mainali's story on the workers of Dhading who had been killed by the state's security forces in an airport construction site in Kalikot—their only crime was that the security forces considered them to be Maoists—showed that good investigative journalism was still possible at a time when some of the fundamental constitutional guarantees were suspended. The second success of the KhoPaKe stories is that, in some cases, they have managed to make Nepali society better to a certain extent, although it might not be easy to quantify the magnitude of such changes. Bhatta provides

several examples of this by describing KhoPaKe's stories on fuel adulteration, pesticide storage and driving license racket, and the processes of change these stories generated.

With respect to the second aspect of KhoPaKe's contribution to Nepali journalism, Bhatta looks at the skill enhancement of the journalists who have been awarded its fellowships. Having done stories that were significantly longer than average stories in print journalism in Nepal and more investigative in nature, and having undergone the necessary process of theme identification, research, writing, re-writing and editing, many of the skills necessary to become a good journalist were honed in the process of executing the story during the fellowships. As the more than 50 journalists who have worked with KhoPaKe fellowships carry on with their work in the field, skill enhancement of practitioners might be the most important and long-lasting contribution of KhoPaKe to journalism.

The third study I discuss here deals with feature services produced, in the main, by NGOs. This article was researched and written by Krishna Adhikari and its first version was published in the

journal "Studies in Nepali History and Society." A slightly revised version has been published in the book "Media Utpadan ra Antarvastu" (Martin Chautari, 2003) edited by Ramesh Parajuli and myself (this book also contains the two articles discussed above). Adhikari provides details about much print content providing services run by several institutions, both related and not related to the media. The institutions include those who want to popularize the themes they work on—for example, the science feature service of RONAST and the biodiversity feature service of NEFEJ. They also include others who want to advocate particular subjects as a part of social activism—for example, the women's feature services of Sancharika Samuha or the pro-dalit feature services of Jagaran Media Centre. More than 15 feature services have been in operation in the last decade and a half, and about eight were in existence when Adhikari completed his research in late 2002. While most services are reliant on donor support for existence—this in part explains the short life of some feature services—Adhikari concludes that these services have filled the lacuna in a diverse range of subjects in the print media. Adhikari's research revealed that Kathmandu's weekly newspapers and newspapers produced from outside of Kathmandu published the articles from feature services in greater numbers.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

To conclude, it must be recognized that NGO involvement in the Nepali print media in recent years has been anything but insignificant. The above analysis just introduces some brief details about three aspects of NGO involvement in the content of print media, and, to be sure, there are more examples that could have been discussed here. Readers are urged to read the three original essays summarized above for further details and critical reflections on the connection between NGOs and print media production. However, even this brief introduction should be enough to suggest that the life and contributions of NGOs in Nepal deserve a more sophisticated treatment in mainstream media than has been the case thus far. **N**

TRAINING GROUND: The Centre for Investigative Journalism at Himal Association



BY INDRA ADHIKARI

BANKING IS GOING THROUGH a period of rapid change, thanks to increasing competition and sophisticated and well-informed customers who are looking for new and convenient services. The challenge facing banks today is to attract customers by improving services and adding new facilities, while cutting costs too. It won't be easy.

Efficient utilization of information systems and the latest technology available in the market can help, but the equipment and the software are expen-

sive. Even so, private banks have started to implement the systems, at least in the urban areas. But it's just a beginning, and customers, increasingly, are demanding more.

To meet the demand, banks have deployed automatic teller machines, software-based data management systems, and mobile and online banking services. These facilities are new to many customers but have been quickly adopted. However, all of them are not available from any one bank, and they are available only in urban areas. And despite the demand from some customers, the banks face a challenge of convincing other custom-

ers that the new technology is safe and reliable.

Narayan Prakash Bhujju, senior IT officer at the Kumari Bank, says that customer concerns are a major hurdle to adding services and expanding their availability. Information technology is new to many Nepalis; trusting their money to it feels risky.

Even so, Bhujju says customers are interested. More than 700 of the bank's customers are now paying their telephone bills from their office or home. The service is also available for other payments, but both payer and payee must have accounts at the Kumari Bank. One of the service's regular users, Rajan Rajbhandari, a trekking guide and videographer, says online banking saves time. He wishes the service wasn't limited only to Kumari Bank customers: He wants to manage all his finances from his computer. The problem is that there isn't a network among the banks. Experts say that could take years.

Mobile banking is another service introduced recently by the Kumari Bank and the Bank of Kathmandu. Customers can check their balance and review recent transactions from their mobile phone. Bankers expect that many customers will use this facility. If it could also be used to make payments, it would sweep the market, they say. Credit and debit cards are the most-used banking technology in Nepal. Young and old alike use the cards to access ATMs and are starting to use their cards to pay bills at stores, instead of carrying cash. It's easy and efficient.

But it is not always easy for the banks. The costs of the new technology are so high that it may take years for banks to reap the profits. The Bank of Kathmandu, for example, spends almost Rs. 8 million every year on information technology. Recouping such investments is also slowed by the lack of common systems between banks and because some banks still haven't adopted modern systems. Information provided by one bank is not easily transferable to others.

The degree of technology penetration in Nepal's banking sector is still low, and it will take another decade or more for both banks and their customers to become familiar with the systems and their advantages. **N**



COMING ONLINE, SLOWLY

The use of technology in banks is on the rise, but it will take another decade before ATMs and online banking are available to all Nepalis



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The Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival is here again. Beginning December 9, there will be four continuous days of shows at the Russian Cultural Center.

These are a few movies on show:

Starkiss (Netherlands)

STARKISS OFFERS A GLIMPSE into the lives of young girls who perform in the Great Rayman Circus, India's oldest circus. Most of the girls interviewed are from Nepal and are all between eight and 24 years old. They perform acrobatics, stunts on bicycles and even dangerous stunts on motorbikes. We also see other people and animals involved in the circus: the proprietors who talk about how much the girls are paid (between Rs. 300 and Rs. 1000 a month), agents who speak of the difficulties of bringing girls from Nepal, clowns and dwarves who complain about the paradox between their unhappiness and the funny faces they put on for their audience. The filmmakers are careful not to pass any overt judgments on these people. We are guided through their lives with subtlety and sensitivity and get to observe not only

their pains and joys, but also their hopes and dreams and the banalities of daily routine.

The girls live a very cloistered life. They are not allowed to meet or talk to men, even those who work in the circus. Their lives revolve around practice and performance. All their entertainment comes from the television. Seventeen-year-old Anita Das is the most articulate among the group of girls and so is at the center of the film. She has been working at the Great Rayman for the past nine years and finds it difficult to imagine a life outside the circus. She says she's scared of the life outside, that she has heard many bad things happening to girls who leave. When we first meet her she says that she wants to marry a man within the circus, men outside would not understand the lifestyle and pains of a circus performer. Later we meet her boyfriend, the man she wants

to marry. He is a clown at the same circus. They used to pass each other by and fell in love without exchanging any words. Anita says they exchange letters, as talking to people of the opposite sex is forbidden in the circus. The man says that the last time he talked to her was five months before the time we meet him in the movie. It was then Anita told him that she would marry him and could not even imagine marrying somebody else.

The title, Starkiss, is the name of an act some girls perform. This involves biting onto the end of a rope that sways through the air. The girls perform dance routines while thus dangling. The Starkiss act is a poignant metaphor for life in the circus: The girls are in precarious positions; their lives involve much mental and physical pain; yet, to the spectator, the sight of these girls dancing in the air conjures up images of daredevilry and romance.

Into the Thunder Dragon (Canada)

KRS HCM FROM Vancouver and Nathan Hoover from California are

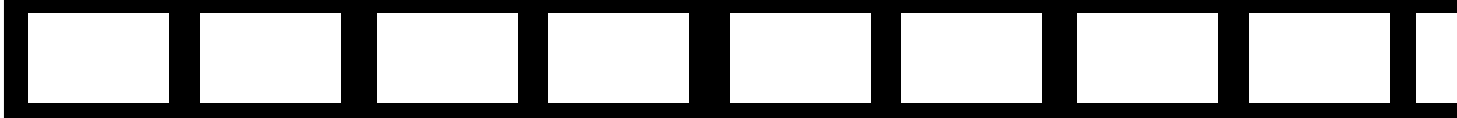
Mountain Pa



Starkiss: Circus Girls in India
(77 minutes; in Hindi, Nepali and English with Dutch subtitles)
Netherlands, 2002
Chris Relleke / Jascha De Wilde



Into the Thunder Dragon
(47 minutes; in English)
Canada, 2002
Sean White



friends who are obsessed with a sport many will not have heard of: mountain unicycling. They have been riding on their one-wheeled contraptions for many years and especially love pushing their skills on rough terrain. Once they hear about “the last Himalayan Shangrila on the planet,” they head off to Bhutan with their unicycles. Their objective: to ride throughout the country, get a glimpse of the culture and “have the ultimate adventure practicing a rare sport in a rare land.”

After flying into Bhutan’s only airport in Paro, in the west of the country, they begin cycling immediately. Their strange riding machines attract the interest of many children in this isolated Himalayan kingdom. They then hire a van to take them through the country’s only highway that goes from west to east. Their ultimate destination is Tashi Yangste, a remote Buddhist spiritual center in the northeast of the kingdom. The place is only reachable on foot; they have to trek for 10 days after they abandon their van at the town closest to Tashi Yangste with drivable roads.

Besides unicycling at every place they go to, they meet various people

who fascinate them and also take part in various cultural events. A historian they meet tells them that though the yeti is very rarely seen, they may be able to attract its attention because it has never seen a unicycle. They get involved in an archery competition, play a game of dice with villagers and observe a religious festival. But the greatest thrills they find are through their obsession: They ride their unicycles through orchards and streets; down steep hills and stone steps; in wind, rain and snow. Much of the terrain is dangerous and they do fall a number of times, but they reach their destination intact and in high spirits.

This film offers a unique view of a strange and extreme sport, made exciting by an upbeat soundtrack. The insights into Bhutanese culture, however, are superficial and forgettable.

Marriage (China)

IN THE PREDOMINANTLY AGRICULTURAL society in the Qinling Mountains of southwest China, changes are slow. Many people there still wear the blue suits and hats of Mao’s

time, and marriage rituals are still very traditional. The filmmakers happen upon four neighboring families preparing for the marriages of their children. Jiang, a 22-year-old man is to marry Qiong, 22; and Zhao, 23, is to marry Yu, 20. A local matchmaker plays an important role in bringing these two couples together.

The film opens with a written introduction that states that traditional marriages are family affairs where the children getting married have little say in their choice of bride or groom. The negotiations that take place, we are told, are a combination of “haggle, hypocrisy and squander.” From the very beginning the focus of the film is to show that the truth of these words. One of the first scenes of the film shows negotiations between Zhao’s and Yu’s families: Yu’s father offers Zhao’s father 50kg of wheat, 50kg of rice, 20kg of wine, 20kg meat as well as six pairs of clothes, shoes and socks. Zhao’s father is pleasantly surprised.

Negotiations however, are not always as easy. At a ceremony during Jiang’s and Qiong’s marriage, Qiong’s father has accepted a monetary offer that his wife is unsatisfied with. She pushes her weight around when the groom’s party offers the money they have agreed on before. Qiong’s mother refuses to open any of the presents unless she is offered more money, so causing considerable embarrassment to her daughter and future son-in-law. We then witness a remarkably captured scene where Jiang gets upset at Qiong and then a mortified Qiong gets upset with her mother.

The best parts of this film are scenes of this kind: where the camera catches different people off guard, in moments they would perhaps not like to be seen. The absence of any soundtrack music gives the film an even, slow pace throughout, perhaps to capture the pace of life in these hills where big events rarely happen. The different stages of the complicated negotiations and marriage process are not explained, and it is easy to get confused about what exactly is taking place. The subtitles are of below average quality, often difficult to make sense of as well. **N**

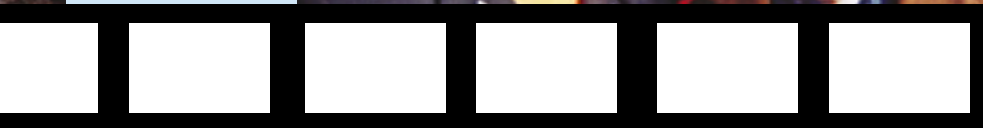
REVIEWED BY: ADITYA ADHIKARI

norama



Marriage

(80 minutes; in a local Chinese dialect with English subtitles)
China, 1999
Bibo Liang



KISHOR

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	Lukla	YA 105	Daily	0715	0750	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Lukla	YA107	Daily	0840	0915	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Lukla	YA113	Daily	0845	0920	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Lukla	YA109	Daily	0850	0925	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Lukla	YA 115	Daily	0855	0930	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Lukla	YA117	Daily	1020	1055	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Lukla	YA119	1,2,4,5,6,7	1025	1100	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
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	Bharatpur	YA 173	Daily	1200	1225	1160	61	DHC-6/300	
	Bharatpur	YA 175	Daily	1400	1425	1160	61	DHC-6/300	
	Simara	YA 141	Daily	1330	1355	970	55	DHC-6/300	
	Simara	YA 143	Daily	1500	1525	970	55	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	Kathmandu	YA 301	Daily	0700	0800	4800	109	SAAB 340B
Kathmandu		YA 302	Daily	0705	0805	4800	109	SAAB 340B	
Kathmandu		YA 303	Daily	0820	0920	4800	109	SAAB 340B	
Biratnagar		YA 151	Daily	0945	1025	2585	85	SAAB 340B	
Biratnagar		YA 153	Daily	1430	1510	2585	85	SAAB 340B	
Biratnagar		YA 155	Daily	1640	1720	2585	85	SAAB 340B	
Pokhara		YA 131	Daily	0815	0840	1710	67	SAAB 340B	
Pokhara		YA 137	Daily	0955	1020	1710	67	SAAB 340B	
Pokhara		YA 135	Daily	1415	1440	1710	67	SAAB 340B	
Bhairahawa		YA 163	Daily	1555	1630	2220	79	SAAB 340B	
Bhadrapur		YA 121	Daily	1135	1225	2950	109	SAAB 340B	
Nepalgunj		YA 177	Daily	1155	1250	3500	109	SAAB 340B	
Biratnagar		Kathmandu	YA 152	Daily	1050	1130	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar		Kathmandu	YA 154	Daily	1535	1615	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 156	Daily	1745	1825	2585	85	SAAB 340B	
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 132	Daily	0905	0930	1710	67	SAAB 340B	
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 138	Daily	1045	1110	1710	67	SAAB 340B	
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 136	Daily	1505	1530	1710	67	SAAB 340B	
Bhairahawa	Kathmandu	YA 164	Daily	1655	1730	2220	79	SAAB 340B	
Bhadrapur	Kathmandu	YA 122	Daily	1250	1340	2950	109	SAAB 340B	
Nepalgunj	Kathmandu	YA 178	Daily	1315	1405	3500	109	SAAB 340B	
Lukla	Kathmandu	YA 112	Daily	0750	0825	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 102	Daily	0755	0830	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 104	Daily	0800	0835	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 106	Daily	0805	0840	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 108	Daily	0930	1005	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 114	Daily	0935	1010	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 110	Daily	0940	1020	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 116	Daily	0945	1025	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 118	Daily	1110	1145	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 120	1,2,4,5,6,7	1115	1150	1665	91	DHC-6/300	
Phaplu	Kathmandu	YA182	1,3,5	1120	1155	1480	85	DHC-6/300	
Meghauly	Kathmandu	YA172	Daily	1120	1155	1340	79	DHC-6/300	
Rumjatar	Kathmandu	YA 222	2,4,7	1250	1325	1245	79	DHC-6/300	
Manang	Kathmandu	YA 602	6	1145	1245	2995	122	DHC-6/300	
Taplejung	Kathmandu	YA 902	3	1150	1300	2695	164	DHC-6/300	
Bharatpur	Kathmandu	YA 174	Daily	1240	1305	1160	61	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA 176	Daily	1440	1505	1160	61	DHC-6/300	
Simara	Kathmandu	YA142	Daily	1410	1435	970	55	DHC-6/300	
	Kathmandu	YA144	Daily	1540	1605	970	55	DHC-6/300	

■ Subject to change without prior notice.

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■ Subject to CAAN Approval

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Shooting Karma

Tsering Rhitar is a perfectionist who works his scenes meticulously, getting take after take until he's ready to move to the next scene

BY SUSHMA JOSHI

Tsering Rhitar stands by the reception area in the Sherpa Hotel, directing his film. The film, titled "Karma," is a story about a nun who walks down from Mustang to Pokhara to Kathmandu to track down a man who owes money to the monastery. The nuns need the money to do a puja. The film, says Rhitar, is about the paradox of the co-existence of materialism and spirituality.

"Use your own language," Rhitar urges his actor. The director is wearing a brightly colored Nepali *topi* as he directs his multinational crew—his cameraman Ranjan Pallit is from India, his actors are Nepali, and he himself has a partial Tibetan background. His shooting script is written in English, with scribbled notes in Tibetan. Little storyboards have been drawn in stick figures next to the script. The dialogue is being translated from the only shooting script.

"We don't have to be politically correct," says the director, as a discussion about the usage of the word "aimai" ensues. "We want to speak like people speak." The actor finally decides to use the colloquial word.

The actor, who has worked with the director before, translates the gist of the dialogue into his own words. The crew waits patiently for the director to finish. Then the grip and gaffer move in with lights and translucent paper that act as filters

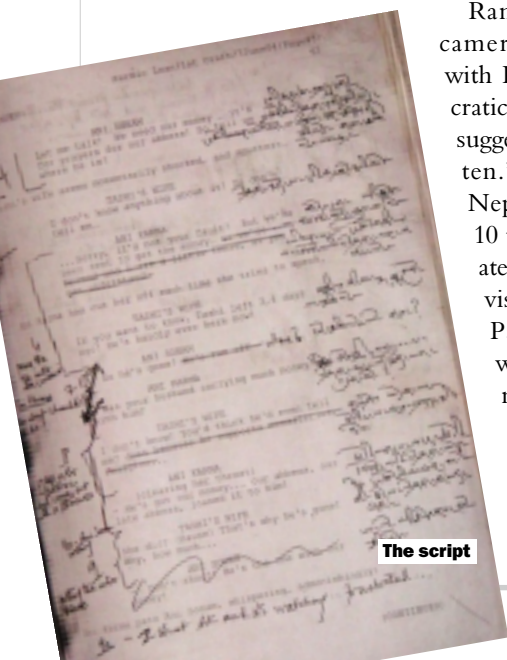
for the low-budget film.

Ranjan Pallit, the cameraman, says working with Rhitar is: "Very democratic. We can always make suggestions, and he will listen." Pallit says he loves Nepal and has been here 10 times already. A graduate of the Film and Television Institute of Pune, Pallit has also worked with other Nepali filmmakers.

The clapboard says: "scene 73, shot 12, take 1." By the end of the hour, the take will have increased to 7.



MAN AT WORK: Fimmaker Rhitar (right)



The script

The sign of a good director is perfection. Rhitar is a perfectionist who works his scenes meticulously, getting take after take until he's ready to move to the next scene. Pratap, the actor, is working on a comic scene where he leers at the nun and asks her for some Mustang apples. The line is said over and over again until the director is satisfied. In-between takes are long moments of lag-time as actors try their lines, check their postures and gestures, and listen to the feedback from the assistant director. The process could try the patience of a saint, but the crew, remarkably, seems to hold up well. "And by the way, give me some Mustang apples," the actor says, leering at the nun. The crew bursts out laughing—the line, finally, has punch. "Don't cut me!" the actor jokes as the director finally says: "Cut."

"Karma" is being shot in digital video—which allows for the flexibility of multiple re-takes. Unlike 35mm film, video is cheap to shoot. Film scripts have to be more tightly re-



PERFECTIONIST: Rhitar works his scenes meticulously

hearsed in order to get maximum mileage out of the budget. For Rhitar's working process, which involves a lot of impromptu directing and rehearsing on the set, video allows the flexibility of making mistakes and correcting them on location, without a lot of expensive re-shooting. Digital video is becoming the medium of choice for many indie filmmakers who don't want to be tied down by commercial constraints and who can experiment without having to lug expensive and heavy equipment around in remote places.

Padam Subba, brother of Nabin Subba, who directed "Numafung," is assisting on the set of "Karma." "Tsering helped us a lot during 'Numafung,'" he says. This reciprocity between the small and tight-knit film community has worked to its advantage—people share resources and networks, and this has allowed for better working relationships between the different directors.

Rhitar has been shooting for 25 days in Mustang. The crew lived and worked closely with the nuns at the Tharpa Cheling nunnery. The process, said Rhitar, was very moving, and the nuns made good friends with the crew. The nuns cried when the crew departed.

Like many independent films produced internationally, Rhitar's film is being personally funded by the filmmaker. The Rs. 3 million just covers the production and post-production costs. The rest of the funds, including the telecine transfer process, will be raised by the filmmaker later.

"I am not thinking about distribution at the moment," says Rhitar. "I want to make it first, and then think about it." He says he would like to have it widely distributed in the Nepali

market, but he also wants it to be available to the international market. Rhitar is a rare breed—an indie filmmaker who follows his artistic vision and avoids the dictates of the market. Unlike many of his compatriots who spend their days hashing out virtual photocopies of Bollywood hits, Rhitar spins stories out of his own experiences and his community. This integrity has brought him international recognition.

Rhitar's previous films include "The Spirits do not Come Anymore," about the dying tradition of shamanism, which won an award at Film South Asia. "Mukundo," shot in 35mm by the same crew as the one shooting "Karma," won international recognition in film festivals in Japan, France, Sweden, India and the United States. It also won an award for the script from the Producers Association of Nepal. Shown at such well-known festivals as the San Francisco film festival, the film garnered respect, although it was never formally distributed on a commercial scale.

In the Sherpa Hotel, the phone rings, a group of German tourists enter with huge backpacks, but the actor remains on his job. "Okay, another take!" he says enthusiastically. "Nice. Lights off," says the tired cameraman. "Get into emotion, Pratap-ji," says the director. "Don't talk, anybody," the actor says as he closes his eyes for a few seconds and allows the noise to fade out as he enters his private world. A few seconds later, he opens his eyes and nods. He is ready. "Rolling, and action," says the director. The actor says his line flawlessly. The last take goes fabulously well. The entire room of expectant spectators bursts into applause. A small miracle of filmmaking has just taken place. But there is no time for rest—it's time for the next scene. **N**

CITY ThisWeek

EVENTS



The Sizzling Stone Cooking Experience

Hot stone is a unique dining concept with quick, delicious, and healthy meals. The volcanic stones are heated six to eight hours in a wood char oven and retain heat for 45 minutes on stoneware plates specially designed to withstand the intense heat. Fresh ingredients are placed directly onto the hot stones, which cook and seal in the nutrients, juices and flavor of the delicacies.

Rox dining combines the ancient art of volcanic stone

cooking with modern day technology for the preparation of sizzling tender steaks, chicken and fresh seafood. The Signature Restaurant, with both indoor- and outdoor-seating arrangements, makes the experience even richer. Enjoy the beautiful view of the garden, fresh air and a succulent steak prepared on the hot stone. Time: 6 p.m. Till December 30. At the Hyatt Regency. For information: 4491234.

From The Mountain Near Wild Heaven, Voice

PHOTO EXHIBITIONS



Born in Tokyo, Japan, Yuko Akiba studied photography and then worked as a commercial photographer in Tokyo itself. She started working as a freelance photographer in England and Japan from 1985. She arrived in Kathmandu in 1990. Yuko is fascinated by the splendid landscapes, ethnic diversity and rich culture. Her eye for nature and culture comes across in visual images that echo from the mountains—the real wild heaven. Visit the Park Gallery to see a range of photographs from Akiba's collection. Date: Till December 15. For information: 5522307.

Photo Session

Photo Concern announces it offer for the festive season. Take along the Photo Concern Free Photo Shoot advertisement cutting from daily newspapers



and get a free photo shoot during Dashain and Tihar. Valid up to November 30. For information: 4223275.

Novem Bowl

Hotel Shahanshah presents "Novem Bowl." Bowl and win prizes worth Rs. 5000 and more. The package includes one game free for every two games paid, two games free for every one hour game paid, one bottle of wine for six continuous strikes, Rs. 5000 worth of carpet for scores

P U B L I S H E D

District Development PROFILE of NEPAL 2004

COVERAGE
Divided mainly on three parts,
the publication covers
i. National ii. Districts iii. Municipalities

1130 Pages

District Section includes-
District Maps /Development Indicators of Each District /VDC data on Population & Infrastructure /District wise database on Topography, Demography, Household Characteristics, Economic Activities, Social Characteristics, Agriculture, Irrigation, Forest, Co-operatives, NGO's, Transportation, Communication, Energy System, Education, Health, Drinking Water, Gender, Children and many more
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above 280 and finally the top scorer of the month gets lunch for two at the Revolving Restaurant and three months of free subscription from Nation weekly magazine. Till November 30.

Cine Club

Movie: Leviatha(1989). Director: Georges Pan Cosmatos. Starring: Daniel Stern. At the Alliance Francaise, Tripureshwore. Date: December 12. Time: 2 p.m. For information: 4241163.

Jazz at Boudha

The McTwisters and other guest stars jam up at the Rox Bar to give you a jazz-y evening. Also dance to the beats of D.J Raju after 10:30 p.m. Date: December 5. Time: 7 p.m. Price: Rs. 600. Proceeds from the event will be donated to the Bhaktapur Cancer Hospital.



ONGOING

All That Jazz

Presenting "Abhaya and the Steam Injuns" and the best of jazz in Nepal at the Fusion Bar, Dwarika's Hotel, 7 p.m. onwards, every Friday. Entry fee: Rs. 555, including BBQ dinner, and a can of beer/soft drinks. For information: 4479488.



Cadenza Live

The only happening live jazz in town. Enjoy every Wednesday and Saturday at the Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpat. Time: 7:45 p.m. onwards.

Charcoalz

This festive season Yak and Yeti brings to you "Charcoalz" at the

poolside. The piping hot grills are guaranteed to drive away your autumn chills with an array of Indian, western and Mongolian barbecued delights to tempt your appetites. Time: 6-10 p.m. For information: 4248999.

Rock@Belle Momo

Enjoy combo meals at Belle Momo every Fridays 6:30 p.m. onwards as the rock 'n roll band Steel Wheels performs live. For information: 4230890.

Fusion Night

The Rox Bar welcomes everyone to be a part of the Fusion Night. The rhythmic and harmonic beats of the eastern and the western instruments—a treat for the senses. Enjoy the sarangi played by Bharat Nepali with a well-blended mix of western tunes played by The Cloud Walkers. Every Wednesday. Time: 6 p.m. onwards. For information: 4491234.

Nepali Platter & Unlimited Drinks In Splash

At the Radisson Hotel every Wednesday, Friday, Saturday & Sunday. Come and enjoy this spe-



cial moment in the festive season. The scheme applies to Royal Stag, Ultimate Gin & Ruslan Vodka. Time: 6-8 p.m. For information: 4411818.

Tickling Taste buds

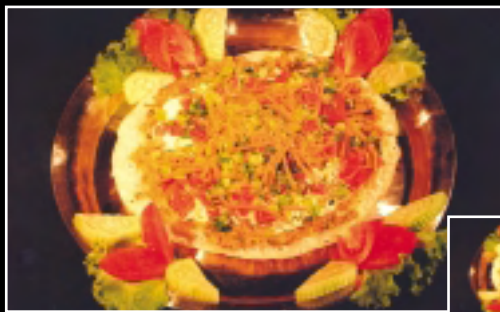
Barbeque every Friday Evening. At The Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-la Hotel. Time: 7 p.m. onwards. For information: 4412999.

SHOWING AT JAINEPAL CINEMA

FOR INFORMATION: 4442220



VEER ZAARA

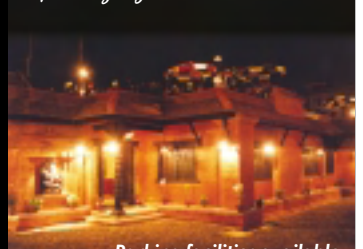


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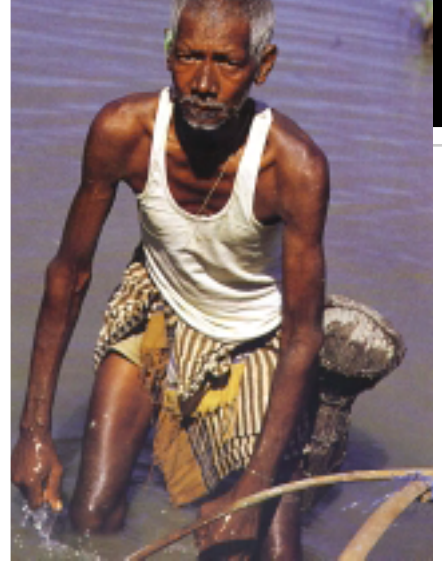
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Two foreign photographers show us why they have fallen in love with Nepal over the last decade

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

Nepal's beauty and her people have called the Japanese photographer duo of 74-year-old Kazuo Saita and 66-year-old Yoshikazu Hayashi back again and again since their first visit in 1993. Saita has come to Nepal 11 times, Hayashi 10 times.

It took them that long before they finally decided to show the Nepali people, who have always been the duo's main subjects, their own pictures right here in Kathmandu. Saita gathered 50 of his best and named the collection "Life in Nature"; Hayashi gathered 70 pictures under the title "People's Life in the Kingdom of Nepal." All 120 photos are on display at the Nepal Art Council Hall in Babar Mahal until November 29.

"First it was the mountains and the hills. Then it was the ethnic people, the village lifestyle and the people that moved us," says Hayashi in Japanese, describing his last visit in June with the help of an interpreter. "Our similar exhibitions in Japan have received wonderful responses."

Saita and Hayashi's pictures do win the hearts of many foreigners. They are perfect images that depict the beauty of the places the two have visited. Most of the photos were taken in well-known tourist spots such as Baglung, Bhaktapur, Dhunche, Janakpur, Langtang, Lumbini and Pokhara. For a Nepali, it is fun to look at one's own country through the eyes of a foreigner. Apart from that, the pictures have opened up discussions among pho-



MADE IN JAPAN

tojournalists here over the propriety of using software like Photoshop to manipulate digital pictures.

Many of Hayashi's pictures were marked as digital photography; some show digital manipulation that gives them a distinctly Japanese look. For example, a picture of a rhododendron tree in full bloom on Phulchoki has the air of a Japanese painting. In other cases the manipulation adds to the impact of the image: A picture of butter lamps at Swayambhu merged with soldiers in battle fatigues in the background is quite striking. It gives a whole new meaning to the strife that envelops the country today.

"[Digital photography] is okay if you mention it on the photo caption," says photojournalist Chandra Shekhar Karki

of Kantipur, to the disapproval of most of his photographer friends. "It is new technology and a completely acceptable form of photography that is being practiced worldwide."

The photo exhibition opened on November 23 and was inaugurated by the Japanese ambassador. "An initiative such as this photography exhibition can provide a big boost to tourism," says Ganesh Man Lama of Lama Trans Service, who organized the exhibition. "Not only have the photographer duo helped publicize Nepal in their homeland, they even brought a lot of their friends on a visit to see their Kathmandu exhibition." Almost 40 of the Japanese photographers' friends came all the way from Japan to see the

exhibition in Kathmandu. The tourism sector needs the boost; tourists are concerned about the ongoing Maoist insurgency. Even Saito has been affected.

"The last time a few of my junior photography students were charged 200,000 yen as protection money by the Maoists when they were on an assignment in Nepal," says Saito again in Japanese that is interpreted by his translator. "But I am still assured that the Maoists will not attack tourists, and [I] would like to keep coming back for photography."

Saito first came to Nepal to participate in a program at Tribhuvan University. He says his friends back home liked the pictures of Nepal he took then but thought there were too few. That led him to come back for more; he now takes 80 to 100 rolls of film each time he visits Nepal. We hope he and Hayashi keep clicking. **N**



Photos Courtesy: Saito and Hayashi





SO CLOSE, YET SO FAR

Nepali cricket is on the throes of getting its biggest prize. But there are still some hiccups.

BY SUDESH SHRESTHA

After an agonizing wait, officials with the Cricket Association of Nepal, CAN, and cricket enthusiasts breathed a sigh of relief early this month. The National Sports Council had formally allocated 246 ropanis, over 12 hectares, of land for the development of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) Central Cricket Academy. It's a step in the right direction; if all goes well Nepal will host a regional cricket academy where former cricketers of international renown will train young talents from the Asian region.

"At long last our request for the land has been granted," said Jai Kumar Nath Shah, the president of CAN upon receiving the letter from sports council's Member Secretary Kishor Bahadur Singh.

In 2002, the ACC gave Nepal the nod for the central academy, primarily as a reward for the tremendous potential

shown by the country's cricketers at the international level. Malaysia and the U.A.E. were chosen for the setting up of satellite academies.

The ACC has pledged an initial investment to the tune of \$1 million for the academy, aimed at improving the standard of the game in non-Test playing countries of the region. It has envisaged running the academy along the line of world-renowned Australian Cricket Academy, which has produced a number of cricketers currently in the world-beating team, including captain Ricky Pointing.

Apart from top-notch indoor and outdoor training facilities, the academy will also have two playing grounds, a gymnasium, a dorm for 25 trainees and a swimming pool. Also planned is an administrative building with an auditorium and conference rooms.

If all this may sound picture-perfect, it's not quite the case. Construction work was

to start as early as August 2002. But things got bogged down thanks to strong disagreements over the choice of venue among international and local cricket authorities. A panel of ACC inspectors rejected Nepal's initial offer to develop Pokhara as the venue. They instead asked Nepali officials to find a suitable site in the capital or risk an ACC pullout. Soon, the differences drove a wedge within the CAN.

Finally, it seems everything's beginning to fall into place. At least that's what the CAN president would like us to believe. He claims all three Australian inspectors from the ACC—Ross Turner, Peter Hanlon and Graham Watson who were on hand at an official function early this month in Kathmandu—are satisfied with the developments.

"The Sports Council has provided us land on a 30-year lease in keeping with the ACC demand. We can start initial work as early as March next year," Shah says.

But, sources within CAN say, that may still not be possible. The soil test for the land allotted in Mulpani, formerly a dumping site for Kathmandu's

garbage, has not yet been conducted. The plot needs leveling, which is estimated to cost over Rs. 1 million. Nobody knows who will foot the bill. The CAN or the ACC?

An official told Nation Weekly that the association was having some difficulty in managing the monthly expense of Rs. 100,000 for ground maintenance at the Tribhuvan University, the country's premier cricket venue. "The sooner we find out who is going to foot the initial bill, the better. It is, after all, a great opportunity for Nepal. Otherwise it could cause further delays in the project," warns the official.

And recent developments have been far from promising. Because of the official intransigence, the regional cricket bigwigs are losing confidence in Nepal. Which was all too apparent during the ACC annual meeting held last June in London. One of the issues taken up during the London meet: How wise is it to invest in a cricket academy in Nepal given its poor security situation?

The minutes of that meeting reveal more disturbing facts: "With the ICC negotiation with the organizers of the Sports City in Dubai in an advanced stage, will it not be a duplication to create a separate ACC infrastructure of a similar nature there?"

It seems now Nepal has a battle on its hands. Sadly, Nepal has not been do-

ing terribly well on the field either. It was defeated by the U.A.E. in the ICC Intercontinental Cup as well as in the ACC Fast Track Countries Tournament early this year. Are we then getting edged out by the U.A.E. in all departments?

Last September, Dubai banked up the blessings of the International Cricket Council for the establishment of the first-ever global cricket academy there. "The academy will be an outstanding resource for the ICC and our 92 members to use to continue the growth of the game," Eshan Mani, the ICC president, said in a statement.

The academy, which is expected to be completed by 2007, will boast of facilities aimed at helping cricketers and others associated with the game to develop their abilities. Apart from indoor and outdoor training facilities, the academy will also have access to a 30,000-seat cricket stadium.

The cricket academy would be one more in a league of world-class partners to be part of the Dubai Sports City—the world's first integrated purpose-built sports city. The Manchester United football school, the Ernie Els Signature Golf Course and the David Lloyd

Tennis Academy are among others to have committed to be part of the project.

Other than the state-of-the-art U.A.E. complex, Nepal is facing increasing competition from academies closer to home. India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have developed their own set of academies of late, and there are speculations that the ACC cricket bosses may decide to develop one of these as the central academy. The idea is to avoid both the costs of developing a new center in Nepal all over again and the country's possible investment risks.

Nepal's cricketing body, CAN, which clearly has its task cut out, would do well to impress on the ACC officials that it means business. It meets the ACC officials again in the third week of December to finalize the contract.

"It's been a long time in the making, but everything will be sorted out in time," says CAN President Shah, putting up a brave front. "And the academy will soon be up and running." For now, the CAN president does sound convincing. Cricket fans in Nepal are keeping their fingers crossed. **N**



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Missing in Action

There's been a certain buzz in town about singer Raju Lama missing in action while on a London tour. Did Lama, the lead singer for Mongolian Hearts, get tired of Nepal? Apparently not, according to his friends at least. Lama, who has been on tour since October, will be back by December, they say. It seems he still has unfinished business: more concerts in London and thereabouts. He's got so much to return home to: A successful singing career and a busy restaurant, Lhasa, in Thamel, say Lama's long-time buddies.



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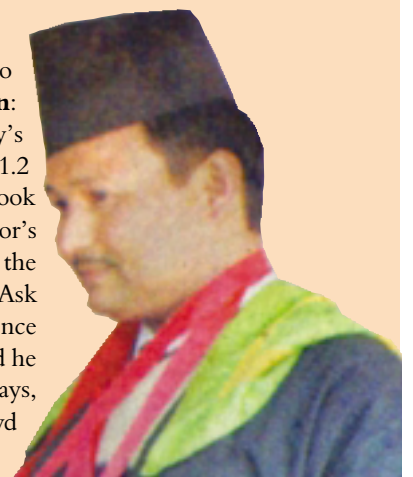
Mountain Film



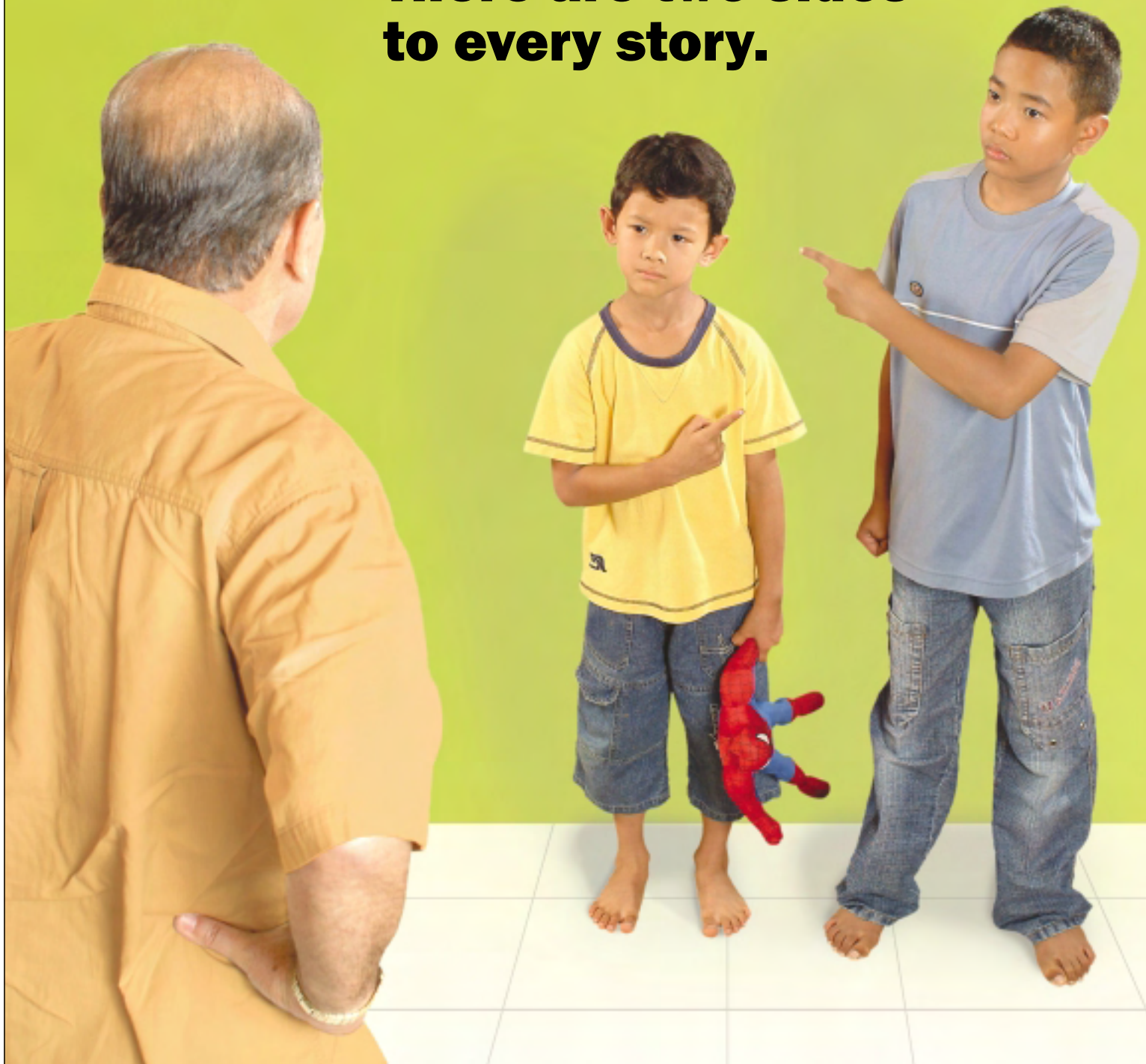
Sapana Shakya, a Berkeley grad, is the co-producer and director of "Daughters of Everest," one of 50 movies on show at the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival that starts on December 9. Shot from February 2000 to May 2000, this 56-minute documentary follows the first all-Nepali women Everest expedition all the way to the summit. The shoot starts with their training sessions in Kathmandu and ends with post-climb fanfare. "The expedition was a historic event," says Shakya, "the physical challenges notwithstanding." Shakya, who confesses to being "un-athletic," adds she only followed the climbers up to "the first ladder on the ice hole." And it was a team member herself who shot rest of the footage on the mountain.

TU Topper

With right choices there's a world of success to capture. This is at least true for **Keshav Pradhan**: the all-Nepal topper in Tribhuvan University's Masters examinations-2060. With an incredible 91.2 percent, Pradhan, a student of animal science, took home such prestigious awards as the Chancellor's Award and the Ram Prasad Manandhar Award at the university's 31st convocation on November 22. Ask this scholar if he regrets taking up animal science rather than medicine and you'll get a flat no. Had he chosen medicine instead of animal science, he says, he would have been lost in the competitive crowd of the would-be doctors



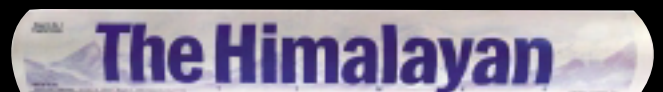
There are two sides to every story.



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

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

The Himalayan Times is not about taking sides. It is about positively expressing the view of both sides.



A GREAT NEWSPAPER



B. Rai

Private Initiative

A seasoned educator, **Dharma Raj Kafley** believes the biggest changes are those that take place in our minds: The change in our attitude. As principal of Campion College, under affiliation with the Tribhuvan University, he looks over nearly 500 students, pursuing graduate degrees in sociology, business administration, and mass communication and journalism, among others.

Kafley, who hails from Biratnagar, has in fact been in the business for quite a while—he started as a teacher in 1966 in Mills High School in his native town. Yashas Vaidya talked to Kafley about how private institutions have fueled the changes he talks about, why an increasing number of Nepali students are heading abroad and how the insurgency has gotten private entrepreneurs deeply worried.

What is the history of private education in Nepal?

People who had sound educational background, who had returned from abroad, were the ones who brought this education revolution. For example, the first school in Biratnagar, Adarsha School, was established by Krishna Prasad Koirala, the father of BP Koirala. Private initiatives and institutions are responsible for the education revolution in our country.

How would you characterize this education revolution?

Private institutions filled in the void that has been left behind by the government. The government “interfered” in the education sector, back in the 1970s, with the National Education Program. I say interfered because a number of private institutions that were running well were brought under government control and look at them today. There was a loss of accountability. There was a loss of public participation.

How have private institutions done themselves? There have been around for a while now.

They are taking a new approach to the same courses. They are introducing learning through audiovisual means, field trips—they are taking a practical ap-

proach to the subject being dealt with. We at Campion College, for example, try to do so by bringing in professionals from different fields to share their experiences with students. This provides the students real-world exposure, something the course books can never provide. That proves extremely handy when they head out of the college—into the real world.

How are private institutions different from government ones?

I think accountability is the key here. It’s no surprise that even when the same teachers teach at both government and private institutions, the private ones perform far better. We provide both our teachers and students with incentives. We have spent Rs. 2.5 million, on scholarships for students annually, on an average for the past five years. And we review their performances regularly.

There is reluctance to make further investments, given the insecurity

But there has been a lot of criticism about private institutions too.

Not all private institutions are doing well. There are some that are being run as arbitrarily as small-time momo shops down the corner—making profits if there’s demand today and simply closing down if things don’t go too well tomorrow. The sad thing is that the government has failed to act properly as an umpire, if not a player. It should lay down the legal infrastructure, the ground rules.

How can the government help?

For one, there should be an independent accreditation body that would evaluate and monitor courses offered by private institutions. I wouldn’t trust the government or the Tribhuvan University. We have had cases where universities hand out affiliation to institutions for courses they have neither the infrastructure nor the necessary expertise.

Who would regulate this body?

I think this is a theme that needs larger discussion. We have the example of the College Board in the United States, which is an independent body. It has some government involvement as well, but it is largely independent. India has such bodies for certain fields of study—law, medicine and so on. Such bodies also exist in the United Kingdom.

To change the track, young Nepalis are increasingly heading abroad for higher studies.

I think it has to do with the fact that everybody wants a better education. The western education system is much more flexible than ours. Also, students there have an opportunity to earn while they learn. In fact, they earn to learn. But I also think that the situation of the country has much to do with that.

How so?

The insurgency and the attendant insecurity have added fuel to the fire. Even the entrepreneurs who are responsible for running private institutions are now a bit weary. The infrastructure we have needs to be constantly upgraded, if we are to maintain quality. There is reluctance to make further investments, given the insecurity. **N**

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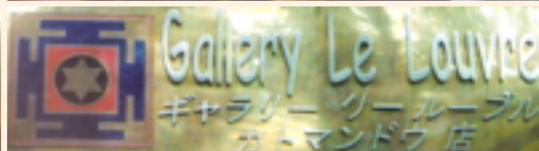
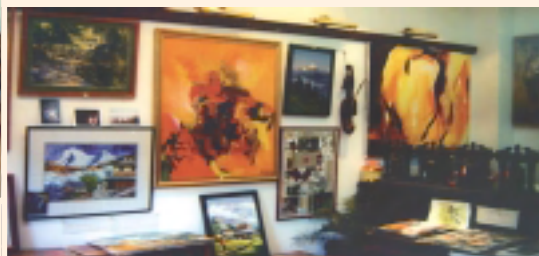
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2/3rd A Life

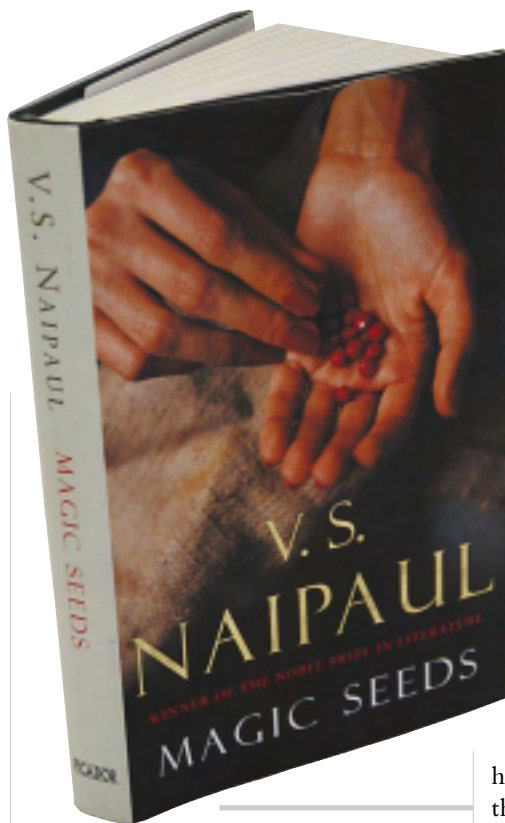
In his last four works of fiction, Naipaul's fear of being "swallowed by the bush" has gone. But his lack of faith in revolution as a means towards social change remains.

BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

Naipaul's new novel "Magic Seeds" continues the story of the aimless, fatalistic Willie Chandran who we first met in "Half a Life" (2001). At the end of "Half a Life," Willie is a 41-year-old refugee living in Berlin with his sister Sarojini. His only accomplishment in life has been a book of stories published when he was 23. All his life he has fled from the places he has lived in: from India to London, driven away by shame of his background; from London to Mozambique, following his wife Ana to her African estate after getting scared of the future in store for him in London; from Mozambique to Berlin, tired of living a life given to him by his wife, fearful of the guerilla movements sweeping the country.

At the beginning of "Magic Seeds" in Berlin, Sarojini rebukes Chandran for having done nothing with his life and urges him to join a Maoist movement in India. Willie, a lost man in search of a cause, agrees. Once in India he realizes that he has joined a different group from the one he was supposed to be in, but he cannot escape. As at every other moment of his life, the attempt to free himself, to seize control of his own destiny fails; as always he places his life at the mercy of other people, in the service of a cause he has no faith in. He lives for nine years among the rebels, helping them smuggle arms and terrorize village populations, and he even kills a man. All this while he is aware that he is among "maniacs". When he finally escapes, he is captured by the police and spends a period of time in jail before being rescued by Sarojini and his old friend Roger, who had helped him publish his book in Lon-

don. He then moves to London, lives with Roger and his wife and gets part-time work at an architectural magazine. When the book ends, he is fifty, has never held a proper job, never owned a house or even a bed of his own.



Magic Seeds

By Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul
Picador (2004)

PRICE: IRs. 495

PAGES: 294

Willie is a man who utterly fails Naipaul's implicit but unambiguous moral standards. These standards were first clearly evident in "Mimic Men" (1967) and have since been added to or refined in subsequent books. The basic

Naipaulian tenet is that a man must have ambition. This is most starkly expressed in "A Bend in the River" (1979): "The world is what it is. Men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it." So in "Magic Seeds" Sarojini tells Willie, "You've never understood that men have to make the world for themselves."

Naipaul's characters are those who find themselves "on the wrong side of history." They are people who are born in a culture that has been broken into by other, more powerful cultures, who find their old ways of life damaged, without the means to adapt to the new state of the world. Naipaul's characters are damaged people, full of shame and rage against the world that created them. Connected to ambition are a number of ideas Naipaul believes people from such cultures should hold on to: the importance of understanding history, the futility of revolution and the futility of seeing oneself as a victim.

It is important to understand one's history, to gain knowledge of how it is that one has been so left behind. In the case of India, it is Naipaul's view that the Hindu world was ravaged and destroyed, first by Muslim invaders, and later, to a lesser degree, by the British. To this Indians reacted by climbing into a hole, refusing to acknowledge or understand what had happened to them, trying to stick to their obsolete traditional ways. Willie's grandfather reaches this understanding towards the end of his life. He is filled with a great rage and keeps saying that his "community has been very foolish. They had seen the disaster but had done nothing about it." That is why they were reduced to "skulking about like half-starved animals."

But Willie does not learn this lesson. As a student in London he is amazed at how little he knows of the world around him and how ill equipped he is to understand it. "This habit of non-seeing I got from my father," he thinks. "This [historical] blankness I got from my mother's side." This could have been the beginning of an awakening, but Willie is filled with shame and lacks the will to confront and understand his and his

culture's humiliating past. Without knowledge of who he is or where he comes from, he drifts from land to land, a stranger wherever he goes, without the ability or knowledge to accomplish anything.

Even in India, where Willie lives among a rebel outfit that is supposed to correct the injustices of history, the blindness remains. The rebels around him are all portrayed as people driven by private rage and shame, without a broad conception of their objectives, fighting only to avenge their personal grievances. There is a rule in the rebel camp that no one inquire into another's past. This suits them all; for nobody there wants to get involved in someone else's private hurt when their own hurt is so oppressive.

Naipaul has always portrayed revolutionaries as people rendered impotent by history, their acts of rebellion as expressions of frenzy or hysteria. Naipaul understands, even feels their grievances deeply, but sees nothing constructive in their actions, only a harbinger of a state of anarchy, of destruction and plunder. Armed rebellion, in his mind, is no substitute for genuine ambition. In his novels from the 70s, he displayed a horror and revulsion towards such revolutionary activity. He felt threatened by it; felt that it could only lead to what is described in his African novels as "a return to the bush." This is one of the reasons why he has been severely criticized: On the grounds that he shows a lack of compassion for the people of the Third World.

In his last four works of fiction the horror and revulsion has been tempered, his famous fear of being "swallowed by the bush" has gone, but his lack of faith in revolution as a means towards social change remains.

Naipaul also strongly rejects the self-perception of rebels, of people in "half-made" cultures in general, as victims. This includes himself: Just because he is the grandson of an indentured laborer transplanted from India to a remote Caribbean island to harvest cane for the British Empire doesn't mean he should

nurse a perpetual grievance against the British. Though the attitude that no one but one's own self can be blamed for one's failings may indicate strength of character and moral dignity, he has been criticized for it by people who think this shows he is an apologist for imperialism.

So after nine years of revolutionary campaigns and a few more in jail, always with the knowledge that "the revolution had nothing to do with the village people we said we were fighting for," Willie is rescued and taken to London. His old friend Roger receives him at the airport and takes him to stay at his house. Soon



Willie realizes that despite the nice house all is not well in Roger's life. He lives with his estranged wife in the big house, his law career is on the rocks and his mistress has left him.

The last 100 or so pages of the book reveal the bleakest, most disgusted vision of London Naipaul has ever written. Everywhere he sees "commonness" and "coarseness". When Willie wonders about a girl he knew in London in his student days and asks Roger what he thinks happened to her, Roger replies, "Fat. Faithless. Betrayed. Complaining about the wicked world. Vain. Talking too much. Commoner than ever. Women are more physical and shallow than one imagines." All over there are people speaking in "plebian accents".

Willie realizes that Roger is a patriot in the deepest way and that the decline of England grieves him. This attitude seems to be Naipaul's own. He has lived in England for 54 years and built a literary career there; London has always been the heart of culture and civilization for him. It is perhaps what he perceives as decline that has prompted him to pen this bleak vision of a city he has come to love.

The prose of "Magic Seeds" is even more pared down, sparer than that of "Half a Life." Descriptions of physical details are minimal, and even inner states are described with extreme simplicity. Some of the episodes in India are so

pared down that they almost read like parables from Tolstoy or Jesus.

Perhaps fittingly for a writer who claims he is at the absolute end of his career. But the story is still not complete. Willie has just begun to re-evaluate his life at the end of his book. He is still curious about the world and we witness the beginnings of the lifting of the fog that has always enveloped him. When "Half a Life" came out J.M. Coetzee wrote, "*Half a Life* reads like the cut-off first half of a book that might be called *A Full Life*." Now we have the second part of the book, but Willie's story has still not been resolved. Perhaps with a third volume, a completion, a final resolution, the Willie Chandran trilogy will stand as a literary monument on par with Naipaul's best works. **N**



RNA At Crossroads

The Royal Nepal Army calls Paandyun a turning point. Not quite so, say the Maoists. They admit they have suffered a reverse but nothing close to what the RNA makes it out to be: some 300 rebels dead. They also insist that the Army will find it difficult to hold on to the strategic outpost given its distance from the district headquarters and the lack of a supply line. Then, they say, the obvious will happen: Paandyun will once again come under Maoist control.

As with all other major encounters, the Paandyun toll will be debated for a long time to come. A soldier who fought the battle told visiting journalists last week that he had counted 26 Maoist bodies. Our own reporter, Satish Jung Shahi, counted 13 bodies during his four-hour stay at the Farwestern battlefield. On their official website, the Maoists themselves said that only nine of their comrades fell in Paandyun. The villagers in nearby Garigaon, Kapada and Pipalsarni say the Maoists forced them to carry away many of their fallen comrades, who will never be accounted for.

But Paandyun is more than just a toll war. Even if the number of fallen Maoists is far less than 300 (the Army's figure), the significance of Paandyun still stands out. Both police and Army officers who have had battlefield experiences against the Maoists tell Nation Weekly that Paandyun may very well have been the first major, decisive Royal Nepal Army offensive against the rebels, who have attacked security forces with reckless abandon. For the first time, they say, there is a realization among Army command-

ers that it's time to go for a military offensive, or else the low-intensity insurgency will continue to take a heavy toll on the Army, both in terms of casualties and morale.

Along with this renewed sense of urgency, Paandyun also perhaps points to the RNA's own dilemma. Its senior commanders have been divided over how they should approach the Maoist problem: Should they go for an all-out military offensive, support an immediate ceasefire to make room for a political dialogue or something in between? And that dilemma reflects in the way various regional and area



commanders have approached their tours of duty. The Army has avoided major encounters in the past, most infamously in Beni early this year; that sent the Maoists a message about the Army's morale as a fighting unit.

Paandyun is important not because the Maoists were pushed onto the back foot on their own turf, but because it shows that the Royal Nepal Army truly stands at a crossroads. Paandyun will be a watershed only if it delivers the peace that the Nepalis overwhelmingly desire. Anything short of that will be a hollow victory.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor



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