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# nation

WEEKLY



## ENDGAME?

Elections before peace mean a fight to the finish for Maoists

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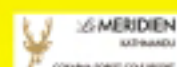
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# Letters



“ Every big city in the world has sex centers, what’s wrong if Kathmandu wants one? ”

DR. AMRIT K.C.

## Porn business

YOUR COVER STORY LAST WEEK had nothing new (“Porn Business,” by John Narayan Parajuli and Indra Adhikari, Dec. 5). Both prostitution and



pornography are necessary evils. Rather than making high-profile raids on theaters and shutting them down for showing pornography, the wiser thing to do is to keep an eye on the porn business: grant licenses to particular theaters (not objectionable to neighbors), which could then charge hefty fees to viewers while issuing explicit warnings for the viewing adults. After all, every big city in the world has sex centers, and what’s wrong if Kathmandu wants to have one? It’s hard to control people from watching X-rated movies, theater or no theater. The thing to do is to take adequate measures so that pornography is out of bounds for children.

DR. AMRIT K.C.  
BISHALNAGAR

## Unpopular ideas

I MUST CONGRATULATE Jogendra Ghimire for his bold defense of Minister Mohammed Mohsin: “For no matter how unpopular, all ideas and expressions should find a place in the

marketplace of ideas” (“In Defense Of Mohsin,” Legal Eye, Dec. 5). Well, this is not going to make Ghimire particularly popular in the press. And hence this letter of appreciation—in defense of unpopular ideas. I have also noted that Ghimire has had a few other tongue-in-cheek articles that don’t necessarily reflect the popular views in the press, particularly the Nepali-language variety, which to me is heavily loaded in favor of the political parties. Ghimire very well may be a supporter of the political parties himself but he still raises a very valid point: Doesn’t Mohsin have the right to express his views on impending authoritarianism? I was dismayed, much like a letter writer in Nation last week, that the press, Nation including, should jump its gun on Mohsin’s purported belief without bothering to find out what he actually said and in what context. The partisan voice of the press is very disturbing.

MAHESH KHAKUREL  
VIA EMAIL

## Poor diplomacy

ACCENTUATING ON DIPTA SHAH’S article on the ineffectiveness of Nepali diplomacy, I firmly believe that our diplomacy is at a perilous stage (“Inadequacies In Diplomacy,” Oct. 31). First and foremost, it is blatantly unequivocal that the elites—political leaders of major political parties—have been frequently embarking on “tirtha yatras” to Delhi to pay homage to their Indian counterparts. This limpidly exposes the fact that Nepal’s policies are dictated by New Delhi. Also, the policy of

Panchasheel—equality, mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, peaceful co-existence and non-interference in internal matters of one another, which is the main thrust of our diplomacy—has been violated because we ourselves are allowing outside interference. Before we even point a finger at India, we should examine our own backyard. It is the ineptness of Nepali diplomacy that allows Indian encroachment, not the other way round. If only we had coherent policies buttressed by dexterous diplomats, we would undoubtedly have more leverage in the outcomes. Furthermore, the sheer reluctance of our authorities to appoint a new permanent representative to the United Nations highlights Nepali diplomacy's impotence. When I asked the visiting Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat during a forum at the Columbia University early this year, he simply shied away from the issue. Instead, his response was very effete: quoting his own words, "Well, we're working on it, and the present permanent representative's term is ending soon too." Well, with all due respect, Sir, Mr. Sharma's term ended the day he took tenure as a U.N. employee. Nepal is arrantly breaching the norms and regulations of the United Nations by allowing Murari Raj Sharma to still hold the portfolio of the Permanent Representative while he also receives his paycheck from the United Nations. Either he should have resigned immediately and handed over the portfolio to his deputy, or the government should have revoked his status quo and appointed a surrogate. Neither has been done till date. To the ombudsman, if there is one, why this reluctance? What justifications do you confer to the Nepali taxpayers?

**CHIRAN JUNG THAPA**  
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL & PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

## Movie fare

YOUR ISSUE LAST WEEK HAD QUITE a few articles on movies. Aditya Adhikari did a good job in providing a sneak preview to Kathmandu Mountain Film Festival and Sushma Joshi had a profile on Tsering Rhitar. I read Nation Weekly for articles that are outside the mainstream

political fare—staple for Nepal's papers, and I still look forward to Mondays. Keep up the good work.

**HELEN TOBEE**  
KATHMANDU

## Brain drain

I READ DHARMA RAJ KAFLEY'S interview with mixed feelings ("Private Initiative," Khula Manch, by Yashas Vaidya, Dec. 5). As a native of Biratnagar myself, I take a lot of pride in people like Kafley who have made enormous contributions to our society. But I also rue the fact that scores of Biratnagar natives have happily forgotten their hometown. Yes, I know many of your readers may dismiss me as a provincial bum for saying that. But think of it—how badly has "brain drain" affected us, and not just Biratnagar?

**RAMESH SHARMA**  
MAHENDRA MORANG CAMPUS  
BIRATNAGAR

## Wither Nepal?

I AM NOT SURE WHAT TO MAKE OF Paandyun ("RNA At Crossroads," Last Page, Dec. 5). The Army says it is a strategic victory, your editorial says the RNA is at a crossroads, the news tells me that the Maoists are coming out even more brutally, and the people are now themselves confronting the Maoists. The death toll continues to climb and the Army continues to demand more money. Where are we heading? Does anyone make sense? Do I?

**SUSHMA SHRESTHA**  
NEWROAD

## Thoughtful obit

THANK YOU FOR YOUR OBITUARY on Shiv Shankar ("The End Of An Era," by Indra Adhikari, Nov. 28). As a fan of the legendary musician, I was happy to see that his obits found a prominent place in the press. Most newspapers had articles long and short on his life and works. That's the least we could have done for the great man. We must celebrate the achievements of these individual writers, musicians, engineers, doctors and social workers who add value to our lives. It's sad that the empty political rhetoric should be the preoccupation of our free press.

**RAM MAN PRADHAN**  
KATHMANDU

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**FACE-TO-FACE:** A security personnel stands guard at Lumbini Museum at the World Buddhist Summit

nation weekly/Sagar Shrestha



# Wakeup Call

There is a gap between the way the judiciary expects to be viewed by the public and the way it is actually viewed

BY JOGENDRA GHIMIRE

**I**t's a do-or-die situation for our judiciary. At a crucial juncture of its history, as questions about corruption, independence and delays are raising doubts about its effectiveness, the judiciary has come up with a five-year plan of action. Publicized last month, the plan of action is an end product of a noble exercise by senior members of the judicial branch. It is humble in its assumption that there is a gap between the way the judiciary expects to be viewed by the public and the way it is actually viewed and understood.

The review is guided by a vision "to establish a system of justice which is independent, competent, inexpensive, speedy, accessible and worthy of public trust and thereby to transform the concept of the rule of law and human rights into a living reality." The plan of action is a result of a series of consultations and deliberations among various stakeholders. One distinctive feature of the current initiative, something that makes it different from many other report on judicial reforms and court management, according to Justice Ananda Mohan Bhattarai, is "its bottom-up approach." Instead of being a report handed down by a team of senior judicial functionaries prepared from their chambers, this plan is the outcome of a series of consultations among the stakeholders in the different regions of the country and extensive deliberations among the senior judges. Bhattarai is a member of the draft committee.

The strategic plan aims to make interventions and improvements in various services and activities associated with the judiciary. Among the strategic interventions envisaged are the development of the court user's charter, the strengthening of mediation and consensus building in the justice system, the implementation of effective case management system, and the institutionalization of the legal aid program, among others. There are a total of 16 similar areas of strategic intervention that the plan identifies, all based on inputs from regional consultations.

The plan works with the assumption that there is a great deal that can be improved in the judiciary's implementation of its core functions. Early disposal of cases has for long been one of its biggest challenges, more so in recent times at the Supreme Court. The plan aims to reduce the backlog of cases by some 75 percent in a five-year period. It aims to significantly improve on the speedy execution of judgments, another area with rather a dismal record and in need of serious intervention, and to encourage alternative methods of dispute settlement outside of the

adversarial system. The strategic interventions envisaged also have built-in time-bound indicators of success and failures.

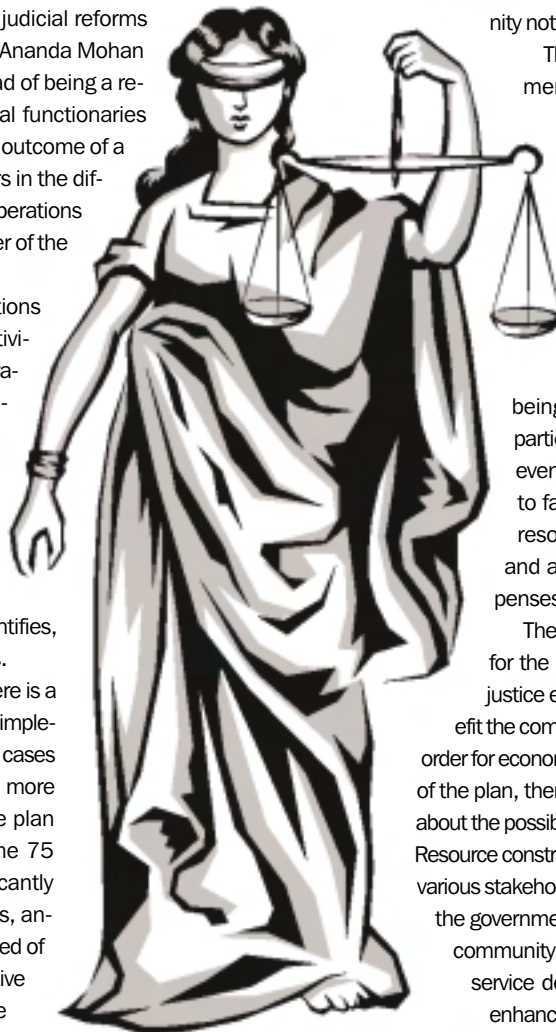
The planning process has benefited from and has been encouraged by the importance that development literature has begun to accord to institutions, including judicial institutions, as important players in the development process. The judiciary, and the way it is perceived in society, has a particularly crucial role to play, especially when it comes to assuring the potential foreign investor that the commercial contracts will be enforced and that property will be protected from state interference.

As with any other plan, arguably the most important aspect of this plan will be the level of successful execution of its objectives. More so, much remains to be implemented and achieved, particularly in case of previous reports with a focus on institutional development of the judiciary. Therefore, there are bound to be concerns about the effective implementation of the objectives contained in the present plan, assurances from the government and the donor community notwithstanding.

The total budget estimated for the implementation of the strategic plan for the 2004-2008 period stands at Rs. 6.8 billion, of which Rs. 3.7 billion will be used for improving the core functions and the remaining Rs. 3.1 billion for the strategic interventions. This means nearly doubling the yearly budget allocation for the judiciary.

The authors of the plan are optimistic in their belief that what is being asked for from the government is not particularly ambitious or out of line. However, even the most optimistic expectations need to factor in such issues as the shortage of resources at the hands of the government and a corresponding rise in the security expenses.

There can be no argument that investments for the improvement of the judiciary—to make justice easily available and effective, and to benefit the common man, as well as provide stability and order for economic activities—are crucial. At the initiation of the plan, there is no point in being overtly pessimistic about the possible outcomes of the plan at its conclusion. Resource constraints aside, at least a recognition from the various stakeholders like the senior judicial functionaries, the government, the legal practitioners and the donor community should go a long way in improving the service delivery capacity of the judiciary and the enhancement of its public trust. **N**



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**COMPETITORS:** Photographers at a photo competition organized by PJ Club at the Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal

**RNA expansion**

The Royal Nepal Army is looking to recruit 17,000 additional soldiers, reported Kantipur. Of the new recruits, 13,000 will man the proposed 93 new security posts, 3,700 will oversee the security requirements of various industries and 173 will be trained as “special forces” for special operations inside Kathmandu. The Army has asked the Finance Ministry for Rs. 6.78 billion for the expansion.

**Rights concerns**

The International Commission of Jurists, the ICJ, expressed concern over human rights violations in Nepal. The ICJ Secretary General Nicholas Howen urged both the government and the Maoists to take immediate steps to end rights violations. He called on the Royal Nepal Army to maintain its image of a disciplined unit. He also asked the Army not to defy court orders, including those on habeas corpus petitions.

**Deuba in Paandyun**

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba inspected Paandyun, where the security forces had launched a major operation against the Maoists on Nov. 21. Nine security personnel had lost their lives. The exact Maoist toll remains unknown. While the

Army says as many as 300 Maoists were killed, the Maoists claim that they had only lost nine cadres in the encounter. Nation Weekly’s reporter, Satish Jung Shahi, who was taken to Paandyun by the Army, counted about a dozen decaying bodies. The rebels are believed to have been using Paandyun as their regional administrative headquarters in the Farwest.

**TADA review**

The CPN-UML ministers in the Cabinet asked Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to review the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Control and Punishment) Ordinance-2061. The ministers had, in turn, been pressured by the UML faction outside the government that had criticized them for supporting the ordinance. The newly revived ordinance gives the security forces sweeping powers to put suspected terrorists in jail for up to a year without trial. Earlier, the period was only three months.

**Golf tournament**

The Surya Nepal Masters Golf Competition-2004 is slated to be held from Dec. 9 to Dec. 12 at the Gokarna Golf Resort. More than 90 South Asian golfers, including 12 Nepalis, will take part. Surya Nepal has been

organizing the tournament since 1993. The Nepal Tourism Board is supporting the four-day tournament this year. Promoting golf tourism, with an estimated worldwide revenue of \$10 billion annually, is high on the NTB’s priority list, officials said.

**License cancellation**

The government canceled licenses of four foreign employment companies that had been sending Nepalis to Iraq. The four—Monalisa Overseas, Ashisht Overseas, Jaikali Overseas and Blue Moon Overseas Nepal—were also fined Rs. 100,000 each. Earlier, the government scaped the license of Moonlight Overseas, which sent nine of the 12 Nepalis killed in Iraq in August.

**Badminton final**

The duo of Puja Shrestha and Sumina Shrestha were defeated in the women’s doubles final of the Asian Satellite Badminton Championship in Islamabad. The duo lost to an Indian team. They had become the first Nepali women’s team to reach the finals of an Asian badminton tournament after a straight-set win over their Pakistani opponents in the semi-finals.

**Another split**

Intra-party squabbling hit the headlines again when the breakaway NSP-A split. The

NSP-A had broken away from the NSP. Some party members, under Mahananda Thakur, decided to form a separate political force by the name NSP-R. Their reasons: The old party leadership, they said, was corrupt and self-centered.

**Miss Sherpa**

“Miss Teen Sherpa 2004 Talent Contest,” the first of its kind, is being organized by The Sherpa Association of Nepal this week. The program aims to provide a platform for the Sherpa teens to show their talent. The organizers intend to spread through the program awareness of the plight of young Sherpas who are deprived of education at a very young age due to the lack of infrastructure across the far-flung districts that Sherpas call home.

**Anti-racism meet**

A three-day international conference on racial discrimination concluded on Wednesday, Dec. 1. The conference addressed the situation of racial and caste-based discrimination in Nepal and formulated strategies to fight traditional prejudices against certain sects. The International Dalit Solidarity Network organized the symposium. There are over 40 million dalits in Nepal.

**Nepali film**

Sapana Sakya and Ramyata Limbu, the producer-directors of “Daughters of Everest,” took home the top honors at The Banff Mountain Film Festival in Alberta, Canada. The Alpine Club of Canada judged their film about two Sherpa women attempting to scale Everest “The Best Film on Climbing” during the festival. Florian Camerer, a jury member, said of the movie: “a delightful and very honest film that captures the camaraderie of a group of women who take pride in their mountains.” The film is on show at the Kathmandu Mountain Film Festival at the Russian Cultural Centre on Sunday, Dec. 12.



### Lhasa bound

Sajha Yatayat will take passengers to Lhasa beginning May 1, 2005. That should bring down costs for those looking to travel to Tibet—a one-way airline ticket to Lhasa costs Rs. 28,000. Passengers, however, will have to switch buses at the Tibetan border. While Nepal uses left-lane driving system, vehicles in China use the right.

### Crowded airwaves

Nepal FM 91.8, the 13<sup>th</sup> FM station to be launched in Kathmandu, went on air on Dec. 3. Nepal FM will broadcast hourly news bulletins and current affairs programs. Nine other FM stations around the country will also air its programs.

### New destinations

Nepali workers will now have 83 more countries to trade their skills in. While the government still has not provided specifics about the monitoring procedures for the new destinations, it reiterated its support for manpower agencies in sending workers to the recently listed countries. The number of countries in which Nepalis can work has reached over a hundred with this addition. The number was 25 before.

### Indian Ultras

S K Dutta, the inspector general of the Border Security Force, North Bengal Range, claimed that the Maoists in Jhapa are training members of militant groups, ULFA and KLO, both engaged in separatist movements in India. According to him, about 50 Indian militants are

learning guerilla warfare under the Nepali Maoists.

### Underutilized funds

Nepal has been underutilizing funds provided to it by the Global Fund against HIV/AIDS, said the team leader of the organization for South and West Asia, Taufiqur Rahmanu. The Global Fund has allocated \$5 million to fund projects to counter AIDS in Nepal. Out of the first installment of \$53,000, only \$11,000 has been utilized.

### Promotion after death

The security personnel and high-ranking civil servants killed by the Maoists will be posthumously promoted by a grade, said the Home Ministry. The move is aimed at boosting the flagging morale of the battle-worn security forces. The scheme covers the civil and armed police forces, as well as gazetted government officials.

### AIDS test

Self-screening test kits for HIV/AIDS will be available in the market soon. Malaysia-based TH Koid Foundation will launch the home test kits for AIDS, HV-7, in mid-January in South Asia, said its representative in Kathmandu. This easy diagnostic tool is expected to lure hospital-shy people prone to AIDS.

### Teachers' plea

Temporary teachers in public schools have called off their nationwide protests for the time being after an agreement with the Ministry of Education. An 11-member committee will be formed to address their demands. There are over 40,000 temporary teachers in public schools across the country. The dissenting teachers had demanded that all those who had completed an academic year be made permanent. A decision to that effect had been made by

Krishna Prasad Bhattarai's government in 1990, but was quashed by the Supreme Court later.

### RBI support

The Reserve Bank of India will provide technical support to Nepali institutions involved in debt recording and management. The bank approved the \$400,000 technical assistance in December 2002, but it came into effect only last week. The fund will be used for the improvement of public debt management systems. The Nepal mission of the Asian Development Bank will regulate the funds.

### Maoist decree

The Maoists have ordered villagers in Baitadi to dig trenches in their backyards. They are trying to enforce a "one house, one bunker" policy in the district. The Maoists told the villagers that the bunkers would protect the villagers from the Army's air

raids and attacks by the Indian army.

### Suicide threat

Around 1500 villagers in Dailekh threatened to set themselves on fire after being forced to leave their homes by the Maoists, reported Nepal Samacharpatra. The villagers living in a local school found themselves homeless after the school holidays were over. The hapless villagers slept under the open skies on the haystacks before desperation led them to consider mass suicide.

### Media jab

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba accused the media of overplaying the Maoist issue and of blowing the conflict out of proportions. He accused the media houses of doing little to bring the insurgents to the negotiating table. He asked if the job of the journalists was to discourage Maoist activities or to harp along those lines.



**FOOTBALL FEVER:** Saturday's clash between Brigade Boys and Friends' Club in a preliminary round match of the Himalayan Bank Cup

## Maiden Double Ton

**M**ehboob Alam became the first batsman to score a double century in any recognized form of cricket in Nepal. An all-rounder, Alam was axed from the national team just before the recent Hong Kong tour this October. A string of poor performances led to the exclusion.

The Saptari all-rounder scored an unbeaten 256 as his team mauled a hapless Udayapur by a mammoth 305 runs in the selection game for the Birendra Memorial National League on Nov. 27. A left-handed batsman, Alam went after the bowlers from the word go at Pashupati Adharsha School Ground in Lahan. His 123-ball knock was studded with 18 sixes and 26 fours. "I kept on playing my strokes despite the uneven bounce on the pitch and suddenly realized that I had scored a double century," Alam told reporters. "It was one of the happiest moments of my life." Alam said he never expected to set any record.

Alam's performance is likely to get him a recall in the national team, which has often been chided for its poor batting performances outside Nepal. His score is by far the best by any individual batsman—the previous best being an unbeaten 151 by Raju Khadka, who incidentally was also dropped from the national team along with Alam. On Jun. 14, the all-rounder took five wickets against Iran in the ACC Trophy in Malaysia while conceding only 10 runs.



nw/ss

### EASY CALL FROM NT

Nepal Telecom has introduced a new prepaid calling card service, "Easy Call." The new service is a part of its new Intelligent Network, which will include toll free calls, like the 1-800 service in the United States, and home-dialing services allowing Nepalis to call home from abroad with prepaid cards



bought here. The

Easy Call card can be used to make phone calls from any normal landline telephone set. The service excludes cell phones and payphones. The user has to first dial the access code (1650) and enter the card number and the corresponding PIN code. The cost of the call will be deducted in real time from the prepaid amount on the card. With this service, customers can make local and international calls without any prior STD and ISD facilities on the phone line. The telecom company has released 200,000 such cards in Kathmandu with three different face values—Rs. 200, Rs. 500 and Rs. 1000. The cards are valid for six months, 12 months and 18 months.

### ADB LOAN

The Asian Development Bank has sanctioned a loan of \$20 million to provide short-term vocational and technical skills to around 80,000 disadvantaged women. The project will consist of three components: increasing access to skills training, strengthening capacity, and supporting policy development and implementation. The loan will benefit poor women and those from dalit communities. The project will be carried out in phases and will start in five districts—Achham, Dhanusha, Humla, Kapilbastu and Pachthar. The project will cost \$25 million, of which the



government's share will be \$5 million. The ADB's loan comes from its Asian Development Fund with a 32-year term, including a grace period of eight years. The bank charges an interest of one percent for the grace period while for the rest of the term the interest is 1.5 percent.

### 11 YEARS OF UIC

United Insurance Company has completed 11 years. According to figures provided by the insurance company, it sold Rs. 90.8 million worth of insurance premium in the fiscal year 2003-2004. This is a 19.44 percent increment compared to sales in the previous fiscal year, said the company.

### FNCCI'S CODE OF CONDUCT

The FNCCI brought out a Business Code of Conduct on its 38<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting late last month. The new code aims at promoting fairness, discipline and transparency in business. The FNCCI Against Corruption Program chalked out the code of conduct after examining inputs from interaction programs held in Biratnagar, Birgunj, Kathmandu, Mechi, Nepalgunj, Mahendranagar and Janakpur.

### ONLINE SHOPPING

Buyers at muncha.com, a business web portal run by Muncha House, can now make payments online through the Kumari Bank at no extra cost. The bank has added to its consumer friendly e-banking services. Bhusan Rana, assistant general manager at the bank, and Amrit Tuladhar, managing director of muncha.com, signed an agreement to introduce the new service.

### COSMIC AIR TO DELHI

Cosmic Air began flights to New Delhi from Dec. 1. Cosmic's newly acquired Fokker 100 jet will operate on the route. The jet can accommodate 78 passengers. Cosmic Air aims to attract more customers with affordable fares and comfortable flights. The airline said "a highly qualified European and Asian crew with over 5000 hours flying experience" would fly the plane. The airline company started flights to Dhaka early last month.

### NET PRICES DOWN

Nepal telecom is slashing its Internet tariffs. The new pricing strategy will be effective from Dec. 16. The telecommunications company said that the reduction came as a response to longtime demands from its customers. The revised tariffs include reductions in the fixed hour





package of 25 hours; the price for the package has been brought down to Rs. 600. Prices for packages for 50, 100 and 300 hours will come down by 20 percent. Also, the prices for Nepal Telecom's fixed hours per month and lease line connectivity schemes will also be decreased. Nepal Telecom will also expand its nighttime economical surfing period from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m., from the current period from 12 a.m. to 7 a.m.

**EUROCLEAN**

Apex Commercials, the sole importer of Euroguard water purifiers, has introduced Euroclean 2000 vacuum cleaners in the market. The 950-watt vacuum cleaner comes in a compact model with 12 accessories and superior air filtration.

**EVEREST DE CARGO**

Everest De Cargo, a licensee of FedEx Express, has completed two years of operation offering the full range of FedEx's services. Everest De Cargo was founded in 1984 and has been a licensee of FedEx since October 2002. FedEx

delivers shipments to the United States, Europe and various other destinations within its global network within two to four working days providing prompt service to its customers.



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# COSMETIC LUMBINI

How not to organize a conference

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI IN LUMBINI

**L**UMBINI LAST WEEK WAS abuzz with last-minute facelifts for the three-day Second World Buddhist Summit. Bulldozers worked overnight to complete gravel roads, buildings received fresh coats, flowers were planted along the freshly dug garden and the roads watered to keep the dust down. Even public toilets came up overnight, a day before the summit started on Nov. 30.

“I have never seen such a flurry of activity here,” says Srinarayan Yadhav, a local who runs a teashop in Madhubani, the bazaar just outside the main entrance to Lumbini. Yadhav was among the many who chose to close their shops because of the Maoist-called two-day banda on the eve of the conference. Though the banda was later withdrawn, the security forces prevented Yadhav from entering his own shop; he had no official entry pass.

Much more was happening inside in the conference venue where King Gyanendra was to make his rounds, where foreign dignitaries were to be accommodated. Even the banks of the pond around the sacred garden in Lumbini were being covered by strips of sod on the first day of the summit, one day before King Gyanendra officiated at the opening ceremony. His visit was brief—less than three hours. After the King left, most exhibition stalls that had come up overnight had closed.

The frantic activity was just cosmetic, and the Lumbini residents doubt whether Lord Buddha’s birthplace will be any better off once the visitors are gone. “The locals were totally ignored throughout the event. It looks like things will revert or be even worse once the event is over,” says Hari Dhoj Rai, president of the workers’ union at the Lumbini Development Trust, which represents 200 of the trust’s employees.

“Everything was directed from the center [Kathmandu], and even we didn’t know who was in charge of the various subcommittees during the event.”

The summit was managed by the “main committee” comprising 251 members, headed by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. There were 14 subcommittees, and at least 10 local journalists were appointed as members. One of them told Nation Weekly that the trust was paying journalists Rs. 500 for every single positive news story about the trust that was printed.

A day before the summit, Rai’s union decided to have it out with the trust: They were inspired by 18 visiting journalists from Kathmandu who protested against the mismanagement at the summit by wearing black armbands. The journalists, who had confirmed their participation a month in advance, had moved out of the Korean Temple Guest House after all of them were told to sleep in a single room. The organizers’ explanation: All rooms allocated for journalists were already full and occupied by the participants.



## KING-PM SOLIDARITY

- Deuba referred to King Gyanendra as “King Birendra” during his inaugural speech
- Deuba helped King Gyanendra with the lamp during the inaugural ceremony to keep it from being put out by the wind while the King lit it.
- King Gyanendra asked his ADC to get a chair for Deuba in the room where he and Queen Komal were giving audience. In haste, the ADC grabbed a garden chair. Their Majesties patiently waited for Deuba’s chair to arrive before they took their seats.

Conditions were terrible for some of the summit participants too. Over 30 Nepali participants crowded the office of the Lumbini Development Trust. Most didn’t even know where they were supposed to register, and they couldn’t go head back home because of the banda. Throughout the afternoon, no official was available to listen to their grievances.

Tourism Minister Deep Kumar Upadhyay at least expressed “regret” over the situation. He pleaded with the journalists to give the event positive coverage, as Nepal’s international image was at stake. “I have been to similar conferences elsewhere, and I have seen similar problems,” said the trust’s vice president,

Omkar Prasad Gauchan. “Nothing’s new here.”

At least the organizers were consistent: The VIPs were handled no better. Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat was heard calling on the phone to ask trust officials to provide a pass to Sultan Hafeez Rahman, country director of the Asian Development Bank’s Nepal Resident Mission, who had been invited to attend the inaugural ceremony. This after security officials had apparently stopped the ADB’s Nepal chief from entering the venue because he hadn’t been issued a pass.

Listen to these volunteers from the Himali Sherpa Sangh, which was distributing free drinking water. “We were issued only four passes and are facing a tough time covering the entire site. We do not know whom to contact for more,” said Lakpa Sherpa, a member of the *sangh*. The group ended up giving away about 15,000 liters of drinking water.

Even participating Buddhist monks weren’t spared. “There were monks who were helpless, as they had no identity cards and didn’t know where they were supposed to go for accommodation,” says Venerable Tapassi Dhamma Thero, abbot of the Charumati Stupa Monastery. “But even with so much criticism during the conference, I have to say the effort to keep the meeting focused on Buddhism’s message of peace was very positive.”

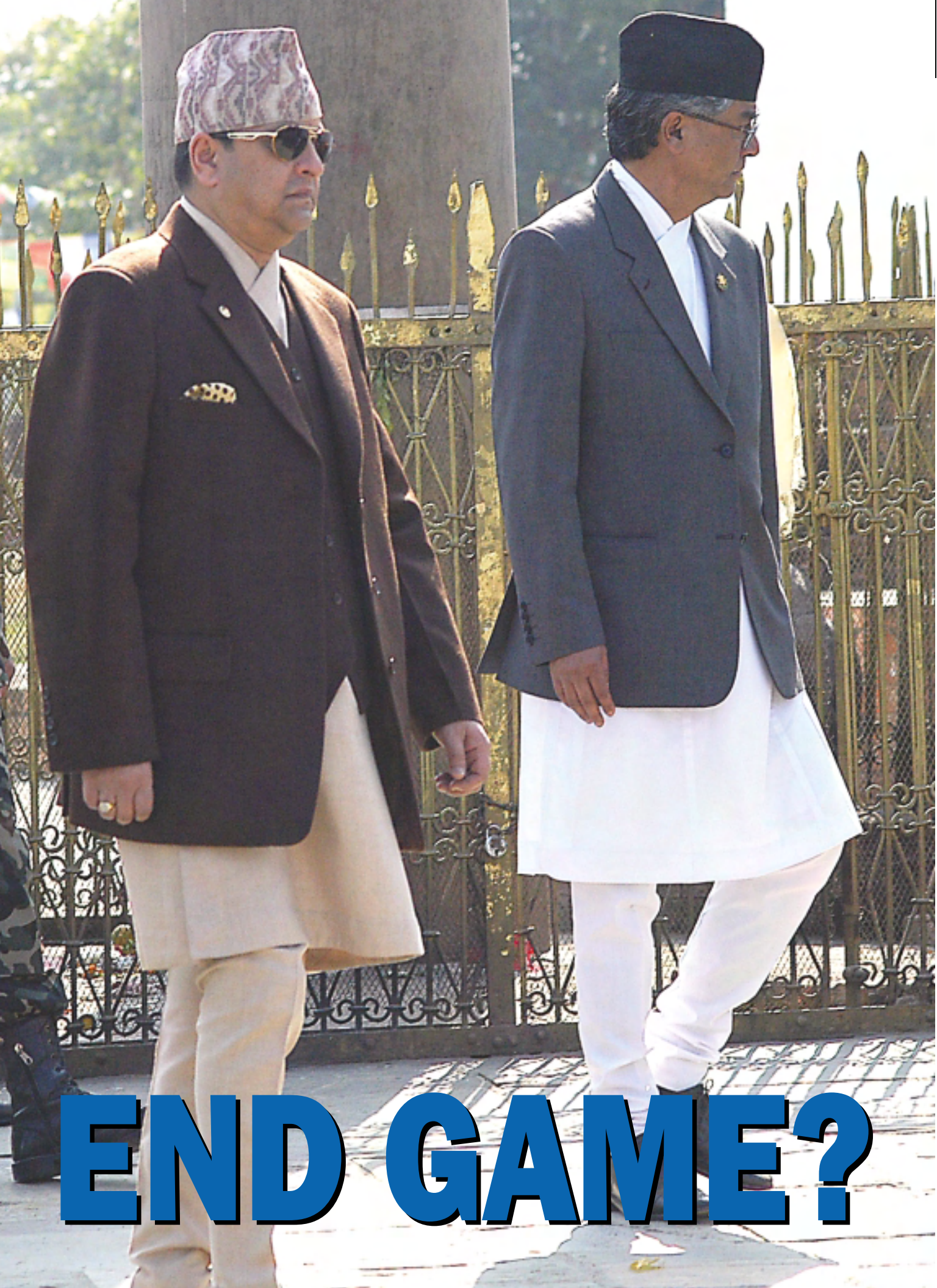
Some foreign dignitaries felt that a lot of effort had been put in to pull the event together. “There were a lot of organizational failures,” says Kamal Ahmed, first secretary for Press, Culture and Education at the Pakistan Embassy in Kathmandu. “But a lot of good things were happening, and I was surprised by the amount of activity taking place in Lumbini.”

But as one journalist put it: “The event could have been an opportunity to write a book on how not to manage a conference.” With a little luck the government and the organizers will have learned a few lessons on how to organize a conference. **N**



**FACELIFT:** Lumbini, abuzz with last minute preparations





**END GAME?**

## The Maoists will take a call for elections as a fight to the finish but this also holds the key to the government's existence

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

**I**F PRIME MINISTER SHER Bahadur Deuba's previous experience and political comeback in June had made him confident that he could restore peace and organize polls, he must be wondering now. While there is still some time left for him to fulfill his mandate from the monarch, time is growing shorter and the pressure on him is increasing every day. Late last month the prime minister responded by issuing an ultimatum to the Maoists to come to the negotiating table by January 13, or the government would call elections.

What the government really wants is measurable progress towards peace, but it hasn't been able to convince the Maoists to come for talks. In the face of this failure, pressure is building within the coalition to opt for reinstatement of the Pratinidhi Sabha dissolved by Deuba two and a half years ago. Deuba has already said no to the plan, and it looks like he will stick to his guns. Unless the Supreme Court reverses its 2002 ruling upholding the dissolution or the Maoists suddenly accept the prime minister's ultimatum, both unlikely events, the government will be left with no options. So will there be elections, if the Maoists don't reciprocate the prime minister's ultimatum? And will the breach of January 13 deadline trigger an existential endgame on both sides?

"We are hopeful that peace can be achieved," says Minendra Rijal, Deuba's aide and spokesman for the NC-D, the prime minister's party. Despite his refusal to speculate on what might happen after January 13, it is clear that the government will be left with few options. NC-D officials give the impression that the government will call the election, but they prefer to talk about peace talks instead.

By refusing to speculate on the future, sources close to the prime minister signal that they want to avoid any situation consequentially leading up to polls or reinstatement of the Pratinidhi Sabha. Many say the ultimatum may not be a statement of actual intent, at least not yet, to hold an election. Nonetheless, it is a last-ditch attempt to turn up the heat on the Maoists, who, without categorically refusing to talk, have, at best, sent ambiguous messages about their intention.

The Maoists have played mainstream parties against each other: At times they have pretended to side with parties in the street, but at others they have attacked cadres of those same parties. The purpose is to keep the parties guessing and keep them divided, and the strategy has worked. The insurgents have succeeded in significantly undermining both the government and the opposition parties, and in doing so they have become the dominant political force in the country today. The government has been forced almost to a standstill by its internal contradictions and the Maoists' psychological warfare.

The government knows it cannot afford to be seen as ineffectual. Analysts say by talking up the election the government is keeping hopes for its own survival alive. The peace or polls refrain stems directly from the twin mandate from the King. The government wants to be seen to be trying to live up to at least one of those goals. But peace and polls are so intertwined that meaningful elections without peace will be a huge gamble.

No one could feel more ambivalent about elections than the prime minister himself: The issue has deeply damaged his political reputation and could do so again. His renown for being a finisher in politics and his ability to appease irate parties has been damaged by his previous flip-flops on the election issue. But the situation has reached do-or-die proportions for Deuba; he has to champion elections if he is to ensure his government's existence. "The election glitz is a political compulsion for the present government," says professor Bharat Bahadur Karki of Nepal Law Campus, who keeps a close tab on political affairs. And the prospect for successful, credible elections will rest on the Army's ability to provide a measure of security.

The Royal Nepal Army, with its 80,000 troops, says it is ready to provide security for the polls if the government



**DESERTED BY PEACE:** The Peace Secretariat has so far proved ineffectual

calls on them. But it also warns that no one should expect an election under such circumstances to be normal. Far from it: “There *are* going to be explosions,” says Brigadier General Deepak Gurung, the Army spokesman, “but that shouldn’t deter us.” One can expect the situation to be a lot like Kashmir, he says.

It’s not clear that the Army can improve security to match Kashmir-like conditions, but a senior minister of Deuba’s party remains upbeat. He cites the recent elections in Afghanistan, and other government officials are also enthused by the remarks of election observers who served there. If elections can be held in war-torn Afghanistan, the minister quotes an observer as saying, they can be held here too. Deuba’s aides also seem to be reassured by that an election, once announced, will take its own momentum.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat, during a dinner with journalists late last month, con-

ceded that the government hasn’t made a final decision about polls and that it is still ambivalent. “Once we decide to hold elections,” says Minister Mahat, “[the decision] will automatically build momentum and help create consensus.” He believes that once the election is announced, even reluctant parties like the Nepali Congress will decide they have to participate.

NC-D ministers in the government also seem to have taken heart from the recent Dailekh uprising against the Maoists. More such spontaneous rejections of the Maoists, says Mahat, will make the task of the security forces that much easier. Observers say that Maoist excesses have reached the saturation point. “Unless people resist,” says Chitra Bahadur KC, the coordinator of Jana Morcha’s resistance committee against the Maoists in the western region, “there will be no escape from Maoist atrocities.” Jana Morcha and the Maoists are at war with each other. “We

are not about to just cave in without a fight,” says KC.

The women-led uprising still spreading in Dailekh seems to have stunned the Maoists and their response has been brutal, something that’s unlikely to make them heroes in the eyes of the local population. The government is hoping for more of the same, and even for a countrywide uprising against the rebels. The Dailekh incident is a clear signal that the people’s tolerance is waning quickly after they have been cowed by Maoist violence for years. And the Maoists, perhaps for the first time, have seen directly the extent of ordinary Nepalis’ alienation from them. Maoist leader Diwakar’s hastily faxed statement last week, which said that his party would probe the Dailekh incident and punish the guilty, is a clear indication of the effectiveness of the public uprising.

But it is also a sign that the Maoist leadership is losing control of its radical

**REMAINS DISSOLVED:** Deuba is in no mood to reinstate the parliament



and zealous cadres. The testimony of people who had been in Maoist detention supports the reports of factional disputes inside the Maoist movement. The psychological toll on Maoist cadres must be enormous after nine years of war.

Even three years of deployment have been difficult for the Army. "How can you expect security forces to perform better when they haven't had a break for the last three years?" asks an Army officer. There is battle fatigue among the security forces, although Army officials avoid using the term. The security personnel are also deeply distressed by Maoist intimidation of their families. Army officials point to the gravity of situation when they say that most soldiers haven't been able to visit their homes and families even during festivals because they are unsafe there. Despite such a revealing insight, officials are quick to add that they are fighting a hydra-headed enemy, and that it will take time to win. "Insurgency cannot be resolved immediately," says Army spokes-



## 'No One Can Stay In Power Indefinitely'

**M**inendra Rijal, a close aide to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and spokesman for NC-D, the prime minister's party, spoke with Nation Weekly about peace, polls and government priorities.

### Has this government outlived its utility?

Of course not. This is a government with broad support comprising four parties entrusted with the tasks of finding a peaceful solution [to the Maoist insurrection] and holding elections. No other government of any shape or size can fulfill these responsibilities.

### But does this government still have the goodwill it had back in June?

It has. I understand that the people might have become impatient. That's natural. Finding solutions takes time. But efforts are underway.

### The UML has clearly said that the present government has failed to live up to the 43-point Common Minimum Program.

We have made significant progress. Establishing peace was one of the broader headings. We have provided relief to the victims of conflict. We are furthering the cause of democracy. You can see the progress.

**Many say that the prime minister hasn't been able to get his priorities straight. The government has been incoherent and inconsistent and has failed to make tangible progress.**



No, that's not true. Give me an instance.

### To begin with, it hasn't been able to get a truce.

That's not going to happen overnight. The government has said it is open to talks.

### Is the prime minister serious about his ultimatum to the Maoists? Will there be an election after January 13?

I don't want to speculate. Efforts are underway to bring the Maoists to the table. We are hopeful we will succeed. As an advisor to the High Level Peace Committee, my task is to bring the Maoists to the table. However, in a democracy no one can stay in power indefinitely without elections.

### But is it possible?

There are instances in the world where elections have happened during conflict and during negotiations. So here also we can initiate the election process by reaching a consensus, and then find the solution after the election.

### Has the government thought about reinstatement of Pratinidhi Sabha as a more pragmatic solution to this crisis?

No. That's not an issue. The Supreme Court has upheld the dissolution. No one can over-write the verdict.

### If the Supreme Court reinstates it...

Any verdict given by the Supreme Court is acceptable to the government. But I don't want to talk about hypothetical matters. We are not recommending reinstatement to the King.

### Can we safely say that the government will hold elections at any cost by April, if peace is not restored?

Mr. Deuba cannot remain as prime minister for an indefinite period. No individual has the right to appoint or remove him. Only the people with sovereign will can, through elections. Hence periodic elections are a must in democracy. **N**



man Gurung. “No levelheaded Army officer would say it is easy.” Such comments show increasing realism in the security forces’ appraisal of the situation.

RNA officials insist they have never called for a military-only solution, and they are now quick to point out that for the insurgency to be defeated completely, its socio-economic underpinnings have to be addressed quickly and comprehensively. But that hasn’t happened in the last nine years; there’s no reason to be surprised that it hasn’t happened in recent months either.

### **Endgame**

After more than six months in office, the Deuba government hasn’t accomplished much to change the status quo. The Maoists are becoming increasingly ruthless. Reports about occasional atrocities by some members of the armed forces have become more shocking. The middle ground feels more victimized than ever. “The Army is making certain mistakes,” says Gurung, “but we are correcting them.” Army officials admit that the security personnel haven’t been able to give the impression to the people that they are fighting for them. The Army says it is making progress against the Maoists, but none of it has been translated into progress towards peace: That’s all that matters to the public.

If peace were so easy, the Deuba government would have wasted no time in securing it. Unfortunately, it is not. Deuba knows that he can’t just wish away the prob-

lems and that he has squandered much of the goodwill and the high expectations of the people since he came to office in June. The government has appeared to be inconsistent, incoherent and, worst of all, to be drifting steadily to the right.

Critics say that the government’s credibility has also been undermined by its inability to get a truce and by the hubris evident in its handling of the peace process. The only thing this government has been consistent in, they say, is its refusal to make the first move or to learn from the situation. Pundits say the other big mistake this administration made was in not making clear its own agenda and its bottom line for negotiations. They say the government drew the wrong lessons from the past. By steadfastly refusing offer symbolic concessions prior to talks, the government seems to have hardened the Maoist position.

Analysts say that the Maoist leadership cannot afford to be seen to cave in to government pressure: Their cadres would simply not accept it. They say that a symbolic concession from the state could bring the Maoists to the table. But the government has refused to make any, based on the reading that despite the apocalyptic rhetoric they have no choice but to talk. The refusal has also been influenced by military analysis that concessions would provide the rebels space to regroup and rearm themselves, as they did during previous rounds of talks. The government continues to believe that the Maoists will come in from the cold, but it realizes it cannot wait indefinitely. The ultimatum is a last-gasp attempt to bring

the Maoists to the table. The careful language Deuba uses and the government’s deliberate refusal to commit to a date for an election are its best effort to balance both carrot and stick.

If Prime Minister Deuba was careless in dissolving the Pratinidhi Sabha in 2002, he certainly is being careful now avoiding its reinstatement. If he was hasty about postponing the election last time, he is slowly moving in that direction now. He clearly wants to escape both options and wait for peace talks to take place, but he can’t. Elections have become crucial to his government’s continuing existence and to his retaining personal and political prestige. But part of government’s problem also stems from belief among some factions within the Maoists that the rebels can win by being patient and simply not losing ground.

“The Maoists feel that they are close to wielding state power,” says professor Karki. This may be the reason why they have avoided talks. No one knows for sure how long the Maoists will abstain from a dialogue, as their messages have been ambiguous. And it’s certainly not clear whether they are any closer to wielding the state power now than when Deuba took office.

Hope is still a common refrain in government circles, though. “We are hopeful that they will come to the table,” says Deuba’s aide Rijal. But such hope is tempered with the realization that without elections “Mr. Deuba cannot remain as prime minister for an indefinite period.” Deuba’s reputation and much, much more is on the line. **N**



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The government believes that increasing the number of universities will help the education sector. Experts say it will only add to the mess.

**BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI**

**C**OINCIDING WITH THE SECOND World Buddhist Summit last week, the government cleared the way for the establishment of Lumbini Buddhist University through an ordinance. It is not the only university the government plans to set up this year: As many as six others are in the offing. It is likely to issue separate ordinances for each of them and another for the University Umbrella Act, all before Dec. 15.

Officials at the Ministry of Education say that the more the universities, the better the chances of students getting placements in the area of studies they want to pursue. The idea is to provide more room in the crowded higher education sector.

Educators, however, say the numbers will not necessarily bring respite; it is sound management that will. There is a widespread fear that the increasing numbers will only add to the education sector's managerial mess. Despite the strong objection, however, the government is all set to move ahead.

The universities in the offing include Rajarshi Janak University in Janakpur, the Agriculture University in Rampur, an open university (the venue is yet to be decided), an information technology university (possibly in Banepa), among others.

There are already five universities in the country, including the oldest, Tribhuvan University, the TU. The others are Mahendra Sanskrit University in Dang, Kathmandu University in Dhulikhel, Purbanchal University in Biratnagar and Pokhara University in Pokhara. Interestingly, the last two universities have a number of affiliates in Kathmandu, which already has the most number of universities.

Though not going by the name of universities, there are two autonomous medical institutions—the BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences in Dharan and Bir Hospital in Kathmandu.

The National Education Commission formed in 1992 created the initial proposal for more universities. The commission recommended that the government establish one university in each development region, partly to make higher education accessible to people living in all parts of the country and partly to reduce the burden on the TU, which was until then the country's only university. The commission cleared the way for the establishment of Kathmandu, Purbanchal and Pokhara universities. Educators had hoped that instead of starting new universities from scratch, the government would allow bigger TU affiliate campuses in the regions to develop as universities.

But the commission's recommendation to that effect was ignored. In-

stead the new universities were set up and expected to draw the TU campuses under their umbrellas. That hasn't happened.

None of the new universities have been able to encourage any of the TU campuses to merge into them, writes educator Tirtha Khaniya. They haven't served students outside Kathmandu either: More than 50 percent of students in the affiliates of the new regional universities are in fact from the capital. What is even worse, Khaniya points out, is that the new universities haven't reduced the flow of students to the various TU campuses.

Experts like Khaniya cite the instance of Prithivi Narayan Multiple Campus in Pokhara. It has more than 11,000 students, more than all three universities set up after 1990 put together. By the logic, the government would have been better off sorting out the issue of TU affiliation before opting for new universities.

## VARSAITY DIVERSITY



**DEEMED A UNIVERSITY?: Tri-Chandra might get “deemed university” status**

Part of the problem, educators say, is that both the Purbanchal and Pokhara universities have concentrated on providing affiliation to private institutions and collecting royalties in return. These universities have few campuses of their own. The liaison officer of Pokhara University in

Kathmandu, Santosh Adhikari, admits that the university has a high number of affiliate colleges but hastens to add that the university has put a moratorium on new affiliations. Out of its 27 affiliated colleges, 12 are in Kathmandu. Some even suggest that the regional universities should be stopped altogether from “selling” affiliation to other campuses because they were meant for the students outside the Valley.



And in order to relieve the TU from the perennial management nightmare and to help flourish in-campus development of regional universities, the government should ask the TU to require its regional affiliate campuses to merge into the new universities, says Kedar Bhakta Mathema, former vice chancellor of TU.

One of the objectives of having more regional universities was to cut down the monstrous size of the TU and make it more efficient, while encouraging bigger campuses to emerge as either constituent campuses or universities under it.

But ironically the two biggest campuses in the region—Pokhara’s Prithivi Narayan and Biratnagar’s Mahendra Morang haven’t been encouraged to associate with the new regional universities, Pokhara University and Purbanchal University.

Some 90 percent of higher education students still enroll in the TU. Though Kathmandu University has done exceptionally well in terms of providing quality education, it’s not a regional university. Educators lament that none of the new universities have become a “multi-university,” a modest-sized, easily managed university providing quality education through constituent campuses at affordable prices.

The government last month said that it planned to promote the “deemed university” concept. The plan is to develop independent universities out of existing TU-affiliated campuses. For instance, Padma Kanya, Tri-Chandra or any other campus can apply for the status of a deemed university; it will then receive a five-year term to develop the

infrastructure to run on its own. The idea is to relieve the overstrained TU, potentially cutting its expenses by 25 percent.

But some say it’s going to be a pointless exercise. “If all the upcoming universities offer the same courses as the existing ones,” says professor Mana Prasad Wagle, “then there is no reason to have more.”

Could it then be politics, rather than academic needs, that is fueling the government drive to open new universities? The Ninth Five-year Plan clearly states that the objective of new universities should be to make education accessible to people from all regions. It also calls for coordination between the National Planning Commission, the Ministry of Education, the TU and the University Grant Commission before granting permission to new universities. Successive governments seem to have ignored the overarching guidelines.

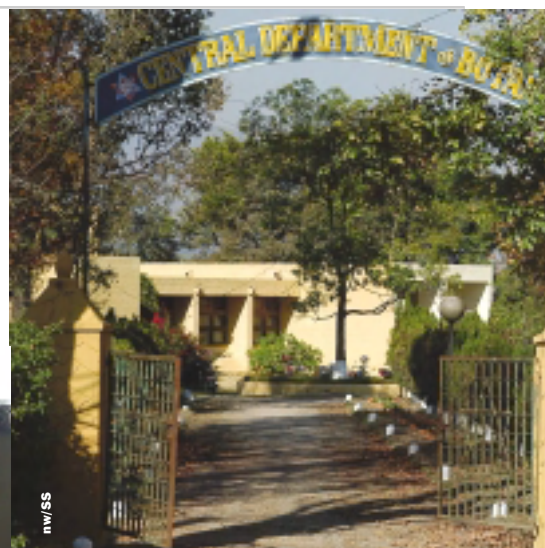
Setting up more universities will also cost the government a lot of money. The grant commission’s budget is less than Rs. 3 billion which has to be distributed to all new universities. They would also have to share TU’s already-strained human resources.

Educators are worried that the government’s motivation while noble is far from foolproof. All that the new universities will do is add to the already existing managerial chaos in the academic sector. Former Vice Chancellor Mathema warns, “The government should not establish universities through ordinance.” But no one in the government seems to listen to these words of wisdom. **N**

**THE OLDEST: Tribhuvan University**



# STATIC SCIENCE



Our leaders in science are busy playing cat-and-mouse games. Few seem to believe that their professional advancement should come through academic rigor.

BY SUNIL POKHREL

**I**T'S BEEN ONE LONG SORRY state of affairs. Scientific researches in Nepal, particularly pure science researches, have failed to add value to the overall scientific development ever since they started in the 1970s. The scientific community is deeply split over the reasons for this stalemate. Some attribute it to official indifference to research while others say that increasing numbers in the scientific community look to secure their future through close ties to power centers rather than through long years of rigorous study and laboratory work.

Over the years, Nepal has invested millions in an effort to enhance scientific research to develop appropriate technologies and expertise. The aim of es-

tablishing of the National Council for Science and Technology, the NCST, in 1976 and the Royal Nepal Academy of Science and Technology, better known as RONAST, in 1982 was to promote studies and researches. RONAST, in particular, was given additional responsibilities to act as an advisory body and help the government formulate necessary science-related policies. Critics argue that RONAST has proved no better than NCST; the latter was dissolved after an uninspiring performance.

It's been a string of failures. In 1977, the Research Centre for Applied Science and Technology, the RECAST, was founded to research indigenous technology and identify exogenous technologies appropriate for Nepal. Structured as a research center of Tribhuvan University,

RECAST saw very good days in the initial stage of its establishment. It acquired five state-of-art laboratories to carry out research on natural resources, food technology, biotechnology and natural dyes. None of the labs are now in operation. Its 30 able scientists do no research.

The story of RONAST, which has a good stock of human resource, is no better. It has 24 academicians and 47 in-house scientists. The academicians have made little contribution while the in-house scientists are as idle as RECAST's. When asked the scientists cite "resource constraints" as the main reason for the lack of studies and researches.

Dilli Raj Joshi, senior officer at RONAST, admits that the organization has failed to conduct any research of substance. "We never considered redefining our role or assessing our failure. It is chronic failure and yet there have been no attempts to assess why we have failed to deliver what we were actually capable of."

To Trinetra M. Pradhananga, ex-spokesperson of RONAST and a scientist himself, the failure is rather systemic than personal. "There is no political will to push science to the forefront. Just look at the science ministers and their qualifications, and you will get the answer to why science is not flourishing," he says. He, however, finds it hard to admit that RONAST has failed to perform.

Much like the scientist, Raja Ram Pradhananga, head of the chemistry department in Tribhuvan University, is frustrated about the way the government has approached the field of science but believes there is little he can do. "We all know what is going wrong but we are



bound by our own constraints to make changes,” he says.

He, at least, has a solution to the long-standing problem: RONAST should act as a facilitator for research activities in the country, as an umbrella institution; but it is the Tribhuvan University, the seat of higher learning in science, that should be the focal point of research programs. “RECAST, as a body of the Tribhuvan University, should in fact coordinate researches of various TU departments and allow the university to take up researches, but that is not happening,” he says

Professor Mohan B. Gewali, executive director of RECAST, is not about to admit that RECAST’s existence has been in vain. He, in fact, believes that “despite the gloomy scenario we have achieved a few things.” Researches on renewable energy, biodiesel and medicinal plants are some of them, he says, but he fails to explain how they have benefited the country either in scientific advancement or economic terms.

The critics of RONAST say it is pretty lame of Nepal’s scientists to talk about resource constraints and that if anything it’s the lack of imaginative leadership and individual will that should be blamed. For instance, RONAST has links with some 26 renowned science and technology institutes around the around and if those ties are properly utilized, getting material and technical support will not be an insurmountable problem. Its memorandum of understanding with the Indian National Science Academy, for example, allows 30 Nepali scholars to do re-

searches annually in India. And each year the opportunity goes begging.

Professor Bishwo Nath Agrawal, an academican of RONAST, blames successive governments for failing to encourage research. “Everyone who has had the authority to change the face of Nepali science didn’t really understand the power of science,” he says. He then adds: “But it would be unwise to blame the politicians alone. The scientific leadership, in particular the ones who have had strong grip on scientific researches, have chronically failed to deliver the goods.” In Agrawal’s view, researchers and the research institutions seem to have done little to explore the possible avenues of financial and other support. Agrawal owns a private research lab, R-lab, set up with financial support of half a million dollars from scientific organizations abroad. “If I as an individual

ics department. The Nuclear Magnetic Resonance and Differential Scanning Calorimeter have met the same fate. Other expensive unused equipment include the Infrared Spectrometer, the Ultraviolet Spectrometer, and the High Performance

## A HISTORICAL BLUNDER

Nobel laureate Abdul Salas, in his visit to Nepal in 1989, proposed the establishment of an International Centre for Science and Technology in Kathmandu. He offered his help to late King Birendra to establish such a center. The King took the offer seriously and ordered a committee to look into the matter. A committee comprising the scientists from RONAST and other institutions was formed. The center never came into existence because a clique of scientists who then had stronghold at the policy level argued against the center. Scientists now believe that had the center been set up, Nepal would have made a huge leaps in information technology and genetics that saw unprecedented development right through the 90s.

B Rai



could do it, why can’t RONAST?” he says. “It is a matter of attitude.”

Many suggest that it is time that RONAST worked as a think tank and formulated meaningful policies or just concentrated on research instead of pretending to do both and doing justice to neither.

Similar to the scientists at RONAST, expect for a tiny number of scientists at the Tribhuvan University, the faculty of sciences aren’t doing much that is scientific. The Masters of Science program in Tribhuvan University goes without exhaustive research. The faculty of science has several important and expensive instruments. An Ozone Spectrometer, which costs Rs. 20 million, is locked in the phys-

Liquid Chromatography, Gas Chromatography and X-ray Diffraction Meter. It has been years since the teachers used such handy instruments for research themselves or allowed students to do so. Most teachers, in fact, seem keener about finding themselves teaching positions at lucrative 10+2 private schools than about making use of these expensive tools.

Meanwhile, the students of science in Nepal will have to keep themselves happy with reading about the wonders science has brought to the world. It will be some time before they can bring about little changes in the lives of Nepalis. To them, science will merely be a theoretical subject in classrooms. **N**

# PATRIOTISM, NATIONALISM AND CULTURE

The 1990 constitution recommendation committee dismissed some of the most important grievances of the population. The committee and the interim government perceived these grievances as a threat to national unity and dismissed them without any attempts at accommodation.

BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

**I**N A RECENT DISCUSSION ON A Nepali public forum on the Internet, the question, “Would it have been better for Nepal if she had been colonized by the British?” was raised. The answers to the question were many, but there was a consensus among a few themes. Most thought that the British would have contributed more to Nepal’s economic development than the Ranas or Shahs did. But it was also agreed that if colonization meant Nepal would now be a part of India, it was better that we weren’t colonized.

This reveals the effects of the current crises in Nepal on national or patriotic feeling. It would have been unthinkable 10 or more years ago for a Nepali to wish publicly for the British to have colonized Nepal. At the same time, however, the fear that Nepal would have become a part of India still shows that Nepali national pride remains intact, though the recent history of our nation has given it a serious blow.

Though often confused together, the nouns “patriotism” and “nationalism” do not mean the same things. Though they do overlap in practice—and this is why they are often taken as synonyms—there is a clear conceptual distinction between

the two, a distinction expressed best by George Orwell: “By patriotism I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one has no wish to force upon other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and prestige, not for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his individuality.”

Patriotism in this sense is a luxury that only people from old, settled nations, their days of glory in the past, can afford. There are exceedingly few nations that are purely patriotic—perhaps none exist outside of Europe. A common language and ancestral ties are not sufficient to foster a pride in one’s culture and the desire to defend it at all costs. What is needed are highly democratized systems of both government and culture; with common institutions that are adequately representative; economic and social security to stem the impulse to immigrate and guarantee a permanence of residence over generations; and a deeply set consciousness of history held in common by all.

For too long it was thought in our nation that it was the role of the state to

create national identity. So the Panchayat attempted to unify the nation by means of the Nepali language and a manufactured history glorifying the territorial unification of Nepal. By the 1990 Jana Andolan, perhaps most in Kathmandu thought that these attempts had largely succeeded, that all over the nation people perceived themselves as Nepalis before anything else. The recognition that the state’s efforts to create a Nepali identity was thought of in many areas as the imposition of a faraway ruling elite, and was thus met with resentment in many areas, came only later. When this recognition first arrived in Kathmandu, it was met with surprise and dismay.

This was vividly illustrated in 1990 itself, when a commission was set up to receive suggestions from all parts of the nation for the drafting of the new constitution. There was a shock when it was recognized that the vast majority of suggestions received concerned linguistic, religious, ethnic and regional issues. Though this could have led to an awakening, an awareness of some of the most important grievances of the population, it was instead met with panic. The constitution recommendation committee and the interim government perceived these grievances as a threat to national unity and dismissed them without any attempts at accommodation. Then-Chief Justice Bishwanath Upadhyaya, who also headed the constitution committee, even thought that these issues were merely “peripheral” and did not think it necessary to deal with them.

Nonetheless, all this is not to say that Nepal is simply an artificial construction, merely a conglomeration of groups with allegiances only to their respective ethnicities. As far as the spread of the Nepali language goes, the state’s efforts for the larger part of the last century have been immensely successful. And though often perceived as an imposition of the state-elite, the establishment of a common language is an important and desirable step towards the creation of a national identity.

But a common identity manufactured and propagated by only the state is bound to remain fragile. Even the view that the state, beginning with the territorial unification of Nepal in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was solely responsible for this

creation has been challenged by contemporary historians. So Pratyoush Onta has shown how individuals and institutions operating independently, though often hand in hand with the state, have contributed to the creation of national symbols. He gives the example of the cultivation of Bhanubhakta Acharya as Nepal's *adikavi*, as the emotional unifier of Nepal through a common language. Manufactured by Nepali literary men living in India before 1940, this symbol was propagated within Nepal over the following decades by a myriad of people and institutions.

What Onta hasn't said, however, is that this process of reifying a historical personage to strengthen national unity is obsolete. It may have played its part in the past, but such efforts cannot be expected to have much success in the future. A true patriotism requires a vibrant culture, and a vibrant culture cannot be based on the adulation of a few men, especially not on the adulation of a poet whose medium of expression was an archaic form of the Nepali language. That so many literary men devoted their talents to the propagation of the Bhanubhakta myth, that Bhanubhakta fulfilled a desire within themselves, perhaps says much about the Nepali psyche. Perhaps our need to worship and venerate whatever deity we can get a hold of reveals a flaw in our character: A character so insecure, so unable to create that we have to cling on to the achievements of a few and claim those as our own.

Perhaps. While the above may or may not be true, what is abundantly evident is that national pride can only be based on a vibrant culture, and a vibrant culture cannot be based on the deeds of a few men. And for our age the most potent means for the creation and propagation of a national culture is the mass media. Look at Bollywood, that most magnificent of modern Indian creations. Films produced in this industry reach, serve as fantasy realms for, millions of people. With foundations in traditional Sanskrit and folk theater, it remains true to its roots while managing to fulfill the needs of the present age. It adopts and assimilates influences from all over the world, but does not get swept away by them: It rests on stable foundations that give it the strength to assimilate without losing its intrinsic character.

And Indians are rightfully proud of their films. Created solely for the Indian public, they have begun to penetrate audiences all over Asia. They are becoming India's most important export as far as cultural relations between nations go, and their importance will increase in the future.

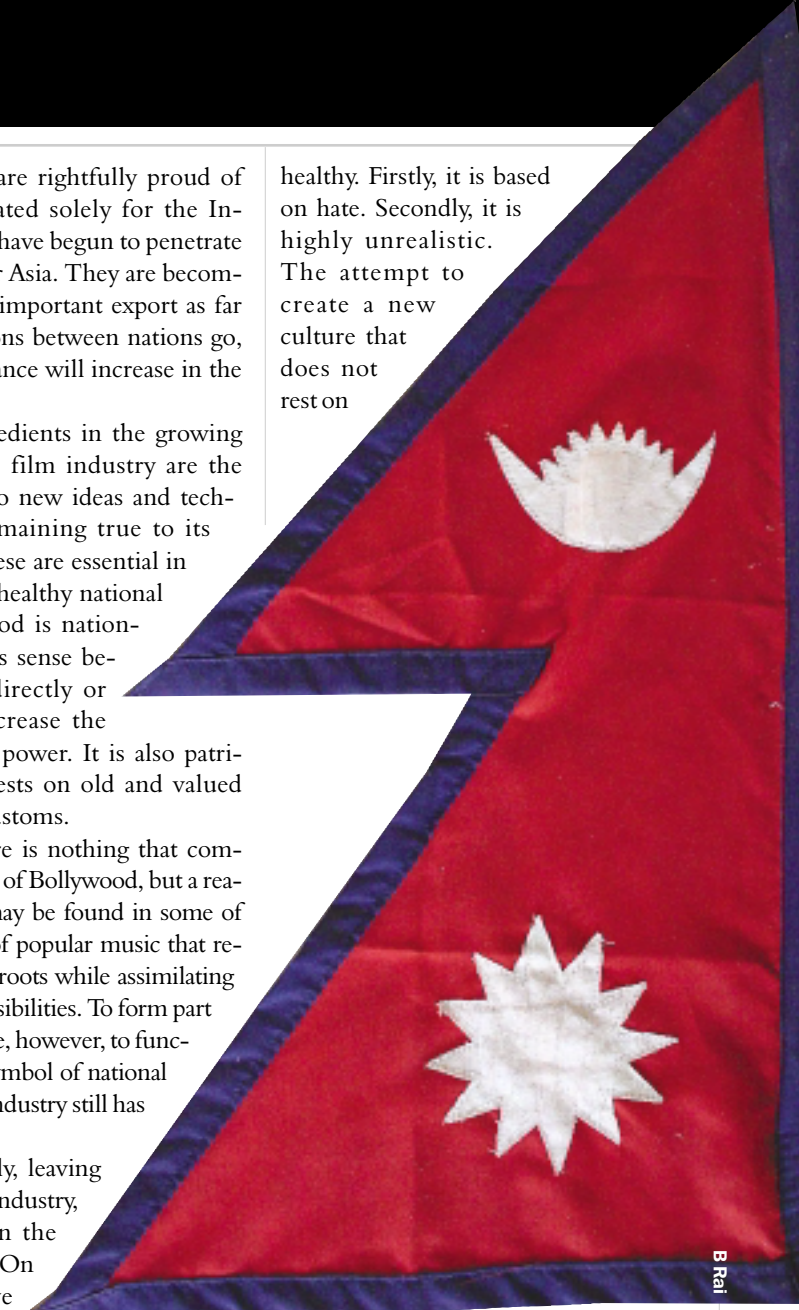
The key ingredients in the growing power of India's film industry are the ability to adapt to new ideas and techniques while remaining true to its roots. Both of these are essential in the creation of a healthy national feeling. Bollywood is nationalistic in Orwell's sense because it seeks, directly or indirectly, to increase the nation's cultural power. It is also patriotic because it rests on old and valued traditions and customs.

In Nepal there is nothing that compares to the might of Bollywood, but a reasonable parallel may be found in some of the recent kinds of popular music that remain true to folk roots while assimilating more modern sensibilities. To form part of a vibrant culture, however, to function as a potent symbol of national pride, the music industry still has a long way to go.

More generally, leaving aside the music industry, there is a split in the Nepali character. On the one hand we have people who may be called "patriots," who seek to preserve past forms of culture that are no longer vibrant. While preservation of this kind has its merits, it cannot reinvigorate cultural life: Relics of the past will remain relics if they are not infused with a modern sensibility.

On the other hand we have our "nationalists," currently exemplified by the Maoists, who seek to break away completely from the past to create a completely new culture. And this they wish to do in isolation, without assimilating any of the influences, whether Indian or American, that play such a dominant role in modern life. While their rancorous anti-Indian and anti-American rhetoric may appeal to segments of the population who feel a deep fear of becoming submerged by foreign influences, this brand of nationalism is extremely un-

healthy. Firstly, it is based on hate. Secondly, it is highly unrealistic. The attempt to create a new culture that does not rest on



B Rai

traditional foundations, that doesn't accept any outside influence, is like trying to build a castle on air.

As we have seen, patriotism as a devotion to the ways of the past is not possible or desirable in our nation at the present time. Our culture is not strong enough to preserve itself. But the political nationalism of the extreme left is equally unhealthy and unrealistic. What we need, and what can develop only gradually, is a patriotic nationalism (or a nationalistic patriotism) that emerges from within the realm of culture and stays quite apart from the realm of politics. And it will be people currently quietly immersed in their personal apolitical pursuits—musicians, filmmakers, writers and historians—who will contribute most to national culture and pride in the long run. **N**

# CONFLICT DIAGNOSIS

The current analysis of the conflict has focused largely on the ‘grievance’ aspect and has ignored the ‘opportunity’ aspect of the conflict

BY BIPUL NARAYAN

**T**HE GOVERNMENT, THE MEDIA and the donors have spent much time and resource analyzing the causes of the conflict, which is now eight years old and has resulted in the deaths of over 10,000 people. Almost all explanations of the conflict have centered around one primary thesis—that social exclusion, inequality, and deep-seated caste and ethnic divisions are the primary causes of conflict. The discourse on the “people’s war” has taken these perceptions of the causes of civil conflict at face value. The conflict has been projected as an intense political contest, fueled by grievances, which are so severe as to have burst the banks of normal political channels. The rebellion has thus been interpreted as the ultimate protest movement, the Maoist cadres being self-sacrificing heroes struggling against oppression.

These explanations are so fashionable that they are now accepted by many in even the ruling elite—the people who have exercised power for much of the nation’s modern history. Much of the effort to bring the Maoists into the mainstream has centered on commitments to make the governance structures more inclusive and equitable. The government has initiated a slew of reforms towards this by offering reservations to dalits, women and janjatis in education and the civil service.

But yet a closer examination of all these reasons reveals that they cannot be entirely true. It is not so much that each of the reasons offered for the conflict—social exclusion, inequality, caste and ethnic divisions—are false but that these reasons could not by themselves be behind the conflict.

Nepal has been a feudal, patriarchal and caste-based society for hundreds of years. For hundreds of years, the lower castes and women have been mistreated

and abused by the male upper castes who used religion to justify their hold over the power structures of the state. By all measures, Nepal during the Rana rule and, to a lesser extent, under the Panchayat was an unequal and unjust place for the lower castes and the ethnic minorities. In contrast, the Nepal of the mid-90s was slowly making a transition to a more equal and just society. The onset of democracy had significantly strengthened the minority voices, which were seldom heard during the absolute rule of the Ranas and the Panchayat. Despite several imperfections, development in remote areas of the country had gained pace through the government’s decentralization initiatives. While corruption continued to be rampant, people could now protest against corruption and demand accountability from their representatives.

To accept the logic that social exclusion and inequality were the primary reasons for the conflict would be to accept that Nepal in the 1990s was a more unequal place than during the Rana rule and the Panchayat era; that somehow things had suddenly gotten worse, which

is completely untrue. But what are the primary causes of the conflict, if social exclusion and inequality are not? Why did the conflict start in the mid-1990s when the state structures were more minority-friendly than they had been for





years and not earlier during the Rana rule and the Panchayat.

The answer can be partly found in the research of Paul Collier. In an empirical analysis of the causes of conflicts in 27 countries between 1965-99, Collier finds that the risk of civil conflict is systematically explained by opportunities for building a rebel organization and not by any measures of social grievance. According to Collier, opportunity is determined by access to finance, such as the scope for extortion of natural resources and donations from a diaspora population. Opportunity also depends upon factors such as geography and poverty: Mountains and forests may be needed to incubate rebellion. It is also easier to mobilize a rebel army in a country with widespread poverty and high unemployment. Conversely, and astonishingly, objective measures of social grievance, such as inequality, a lack of democracy, and ethnic and religious divisions, are shown to have no systematic effect on risk in Collier's analysis. As an example, the Michigan Militia was unable to grow beyond a handful of part-time volunteers, whereas the FARC in Colum-

bia has grown to employ around 12,000 people. The factors that account for this difference between failure and success are to be found not in the "causes," which these two rebel organizations claim to espouse, but in their radically different opportunities to raise revenue.

Because the results are so counterintuitive, Collier advises against being trustful of the loud public discourse on conflict. Observers often reason back from the political discourse during conflict and deduce that the war is the consequence of particularly intense political conflict, based in turn upon particularly strong reasons for grievance. But Collier's analysis shows that the intensity of objective grievances does not predict civil war and that wars will only occur where rebellions are financially viable. Collier argues that a rebel organization must generate group grievances for military effectiveness as part of the process of war. According to him, objective grievances do not generate violent conflict, but violent conflicts generate subjective grievances.

Admittedly, Collier's research is skewed heavily towards African countries where most of the conflicts reviewed by Collier took place. But it is quite amazing how many similarities Nepal has with conflict-affected countries analyzed by Collier. While it might or might not have been the single most important cause of the conflict, it's a fact that Nepal in the mid-1990s offered tremendous opportunities for building a rebel organization. The high mountains and the difficult terrain played a vital role in incubating the Maoist rebellion in the early stages. The big Nepali diaspora in

India provided both the funding and the inspiration to the Maoists in the early stages of the revolution. The Maoists were also able to dip into a huge pool of poor and unemployed youth to shore up their recruitment. Once the Maoist cause gained momentum, they were also able to threaten private businesses and rich farmers, and extort money without much difficulty. There was no concerted effort to discourage the tendency to pay up to the Maoists by the government, which was unable to provide security assurances to these people. The state was considerably more "soft" than during the Rana rule and the Panchayat when any kind of dissent was nipped in the bud.

The current analysis of the conflict has focused largely on the "grievance" aspect and has ignored the "opportunity" aspect of the conflict highlighted by Collier. This has limited efforts for a true diagnosis of the conflict, which is of critical importance to formulate the proper response to conflict. If the conventional grievance account of the conflict is accepted, then the appropriate policy interventions are to address the possible objective causes of grievance. On this account, the government should reduce inequality and increase political rights. But if opportunity account of the conflict were accepted, other policy interventions would be required.

I hope the Peace Secretariat that was established with much fanfare by the Deuba government is busy researching the causes of the conflict in Nepal, formulating policy responses and advising the government on its negotiating positions. But if my hunch is true, it must still be negotiating over its salary and benefits. **N**





# THE CROSSROADS OF OUR NATIONAL IMAGINATION

The state of conflict has become, for the nation, a state of mind

BY SUSHMA JOSHI IN NEPALGUNJ

**N**EPALGUNJ HAS PALM TREES. It has good *sekuwa*, thought to be perfected with MSG. It has a “New Road” that is being constructed; massive concrete buildings going up within the space of a few years, occupied by people fleeing the conflict in the mid- and far-western districts. It has mosques with elaborate minarets next to gurudwaras and temples. It has businesses, from law firms to tire stores, named after Bageshwori, the patron goddess. It has a list of ethnic groups, not all of whom drink water from the homes of other groups. It has Abadi speakers and Urdu speakers. It has a pluralistic, multilingual, vibrant border culture that does not, by any stretch of the imagination, fit the confines of Nepal’s limited Constitution.

For a city that is so close and yet so excluded from the presently limited imaginings of the Nepali nation, Nepalgunj has a special fondness for national figures. Specifically, it has an embarrassingly rich series of “chowks”—an intersection with a statue in the middle—named after national figures past and present. The list goes like this: Tribhuvan Chowk, Mahendra Chowk, Birendra Chowk, Gyanendra Chowk, B.P Chowk, Ganeshman Chowk, Pushpalal Chowk. Gyanendra Chowk and Ganeshman Chowk are under construction. The rest are surrounded by stacks of sandbags against potential ambushes.

The first sight of the conflict is not the exodus of Nepalis who cross the border every day at Rupadiya—their numbers sometimes rising to 2,000 migrants a day as they flee the “one man from every home” rule of the Maoists—but the fortified statues.

The Nepalgunj resident skirts this fortified reminder of war every day as he goes to work in his horse-driven tonga and his bicycle. The statues are a little misshapen. Rumours claim that the Birendra statue-maker got scolded for making the statue a little smaller than life-size. Pushpalal’s statue looks like it’s made of plaster by an artist used to making Saraswati statues that are submerged in the river during Saraswati Puja. His fist is upraised in the traditional comrade salute, but apparently he’s not immune to violence: He receives the same sandbag protection as figures of other political persuasion. During the day, a bevy of soldiers lounge behind the sandbags, staring at each passing car with curious eyes. At other times, they chat with each other to pass time. Their helmets are tossed carelessly on the bags. Any passing rebel with a grenade could blow up the edifice within a few tragic seconds.

An intelligent observer might wonder why so much resource is being used to protect some rather poorly made statues. After all, should not those thousands of rupees be better served if they were directed towards the refugees living under plastic in nearby Kohalpur or to the Badi community that has yet to produce

a member with a Bachelor’s degree? Would those funds be better served going to educate the children of two farmers whose wives were raped and drowned by security forces dressed up as Maoists or to the Mangta community that still, to this day, goes to Kathmandu and to other places in India to beg for a living six months of the year?

But the argument of this observer would be wrong. All nations need icons, national or otherwise. They need the signs and symbols of national integration. If integration has been suspended, and national disintegration has taken over, the need to construct iconic symbols becomes even more urgent. In Nepalgunj, one gets the feeling that every long-dead king, and every martyred leader, will soon have chowks constructed and named after him. From the speed at which the chowks are being constructed, there appears to be competition between different political forces to ensure that their particular history graces the streets. Never mind if the chowks already disorient traffic and cause confusion.

Nepalgunj’s crossroads allow a traveller to make multiple choices. Directly beyond the city boundaries are roads which do not provide the same choices and which are not as navigable. A few days ago, passenger buses carrying pilgrims were shot at by the Maoists, reported a newspaper. Helicopters hovered over the city all afternoon long. Children are reported to be laying landmines on the Mahendra Highway. Black lines of defused ambushes cut through the roads. Travellers go through India to get to other border districts like Kailali to avoid blockades and crossfire.

Government employees cluster within the city and fear to go beyond the Rapti River. Beyond the river is unknown territory controlled by the Maoists. Everybody from the CDO's office to the police, from the land revenue office to the forestry office, has not crossed the river in a few years. The void left by the abrupt departure of all elected officials and state agencies is felt most keenly by those who were receiving benefits, no matter how small, from the government and non-governmental offices. Programs from education to childcare have stopped as INGOs withdraw. Birth and death have become impossible to register as all grassroots-elected representatives withdraw to the city or flee to India. Marriage certificates and citizenship papers, registered at the CDO's office, are in arrears as people disappear into India for months and sometimes years, often coming back to claim their papers after a period of time has elapsed. The buying and selling of land has also stalled. Land disputes are now settled at the local levels, increasingly by the Maoist "People's Court," the *Jana Adalat*.

For some actors within the most marginalized communities, conflict has sometimes brought odd windfalls. Take the Magta, traditional supplicants from Banke who put a big earthen container of rice in front of their windowless huts

to "lock" it up and leave for six months every year to beg for a living. Both security forces and Maoists avoid their village, although the Maoists did blow up the police post as they passed through. For the men, the removal of the police force is a blessed relief. They no longer get beaten up. Dispute resolution has gone back to a traditional system. Men get together, fine the perpetrator of petty quarrels Rs. 10, and then spend the money collected on an all-male feast with drinks and pork. The women mourn those rosy, long gone days when a marital dispute involving domestic violence could be reported at the police station. They complain that they are not heard by the traditional council. It's not all a big party, however: The men, who used to work as rickshaw drivers and worked till 10 at night, now have to leave by 7 p.m. The number of working hours has lessened, and so have their earnings.

The Badi too face pressure. Considered the lowest of the 23 dalit groups, the Badi fail to feature in most government policies and literature. They are outside the national imagination. At the local level, however, the police are all too aware of their presence. All Badi women are perceived to be involved in the sex trade, even though 60 percent of them now work in other areas. Police harassment and torture, along with police patronage of the sex trade, is com-

mon. The Maoists have also told them to get out of the sex trade. Caught in the crossfire, many Badi women from rural areas have fled to India, where nobody stigmatizes them for their caste or occupation.

This state of conflict has become, for the nation, a state of mind. For a tailor living in Nepalgunj, this state of mind is omnipresent. After the Maoists made him and his family leave their home in a mid-western hill district (one of his sons was a policeman, and this did not please the rebels), he migrated to Tarai. A loan from a kind clothes-seller, and 10 years of work, allowed him to build another home on ailani (government) land in Nepalgunj. A few years later, his younger son was taken by the security forces as a Maoist. The irony here is that the same son had run away from the Maoists, who had abducted him and made him do forced labor for six months. The tailor, for the second time, was told to leave his home by the Maoists—this time because they thought the detained son might give out information. The family is currently in hiding. The couple do not sleep at night—one of them always remains awake to keep guard. Sleep is a small sacrifice for these two who have seen their lives broken up too many times.

Keeping guard has become our national burden as Nepal tries to steer her way out of two armed forces. As

we return to the city from the village in the gathering dusk, we notice that the statues and the chowks have been abandoned to the protection of the sandbags. All the young security guards are gone. Thankfully, some responsible leader in the Unified Command has decided the life of a human being is more important than a statue. In these times, night could mean potential death for a young man left alone to protect an icon of stone. Our car swerves to avoid a madman squatting and throwing stones from the middle of an empty road. A ghostly—and in the darkness, unidentifiable—statue rises behind him. **N**



ON THE MOVE: In Nepalgunj



# The Man And His Magic

Kishor Kayastha uses state-of-the-art technology to convey and express art forms that are almost lost

BY VENEETA SINGHA

Magical, that's the first word that comes to one's mind when you see Kishor Kayastha's photographs. Color and contrast produce a splendid picture of women at work in the courtyard. Harmony, emphasis and balance all come together for another of a young woman carrying her child. Faces and places burst out from another in which the rhythm is perfect. Shapes and volumes are symmetrical in one more. The list is endless and the collection is truly breathtaking.

Born and bred in Bhaktapur, the 26-year-old gushes with a smile: "I started when I was nine years old. I was not tall enough and had to use chairs for support." The camera stands were taller than him. Both

his parents are photographers and he talks of Arya Sagar as his inspiration as a photographer. Kayastha now focuses on commercial advertising photography and fine art photography.

"I want to help establish photography as a fine art medium in Nepal," he announces determinedly. Nepal predominates in his art, his passion and his conversations. It is the object of his art and the subject of his medium. Culture, expressions and society—these lie at the center of his photographs. But he also speaks of the return on investments that most photographers now receive which is a relatively new trend in Nepal.

His first photography exhibition in 2001 was titled "Images of Bhaktapur." He is now working to complete a set of photographs of the Kathmandu Valley. If one should ask what his greatest reward





is, he will answer—appreciation. He talks of senior photographers of Nepal and their struggle. “We have it easy now, we youngsters,” he says. The communication media, technology and exposure have all helped young photographers like Kayastha. His exhibition, “Life through the Lens,” opened in Indigo Gallery on Dec. 3.

Kishor’s exhibits are masterful pieces that evoke nostalgia for tradition and culture. There are 42 photographs in all with both digital and analog productions. Paradoxically, he uses state-of-the art technology to convey and express art forms that are almost lost. Modernity is creeping into the art but the objects remain traditional.

Misty hues of the seasons, bold dashes of color and splashes of people—those are his strength. His photography takes

from the mundane and transports it to the extraordinary. Life is his subject matter. One door closed and the other opened—symbolic of his own views on life and living, perhaps.

We now get to the serious business of his art. He talks of the present situation of the country—how the current environment is not conducive and should the political situation improve, creativity will flow naturally. His technique is simple: He chooses a subject and imagines the composition in his mind first. He has often taken three to four years to develop a single photograph. “Taking and making pictures are different,” he adds jovially.

The 11 laws of fine art are woven intricately into his art yet he remains modest. “My art is not complete until I have completed the set on the Kathmandu Val-

ley,” he says. He speaks with veneration about the masters. He seems like a pupil still until you have seen his work.

He also teaches photography to aspiring photographers.

“Photography is a good medium of expression and there is demand these days.” He opines. The man weaves his art masterfully but is always looking ahead. Art and magic have come together in his photographs and they convey the man’s magical vision. **N**



B Rai

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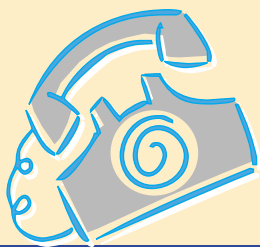
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# Jomsom Journals: Part 1

## Falling off the map

BY KUNAL LAMA

In case you were wondering where I'd disappeared to, I was up and away in lower Mustang. Yup, the same region that has appeared in a recent Time "Asia's Best" issue as the "Best Place to Fall Off the Map." (Incidentally, the accompanying photograph was of Jharkot, the intriguing but brooding fortress-like village at 11,500 feet, half an hour below the pilgrimage destination of Muktinath.) You don't have to pay the \$70-a-day fee to enter this lower region of Mustang; if you cross from Kagbeni to upper Mustang, i.e. towards Lo Manthang, then you do.

Watched over by the Nilgiri, Jomsom airport was new and efficient. I walked out of the terminal straight on to the one and only Jomsom (Puthang, actually: Jomsom, prefixed now by "Old," is the settlement further up the trail) street, lined by hotels and lodges on both sides. I made contact with a guide/porter at the Alka Marco Polo Guest House, and I set off almost immediately on the road to Kagbeni, about four hours walk away. Just before Old Jomsom, I was stopped at an army check-post. My baggage was searched; my driving license retained, to be collected on the way back, and issued instead with a *ilaka* pass; asked the much-repeated questions: Why are you traveling? Where's your group? Alone? When I replied that I just wanted to get to know my country, I was given a disbelieving look, but allowed to get on with my native quest.

For the next few days, from Jomsom to Kagbeni; from Kagbeni to Muktinath via Jharkot; Muktinath back to Jomsom; Jomsom to Tukuche via Marpha; I was astounded by the outstanding nature of the barren landscape shadowed by snow-covered mountains: Dhaulagiri, Dhampus, Tukuche, Tilicho and Annapurna, among others. The trail almost always followed the Kali Gandaki River. There were amazing cliffs riven with fissures or displaying diagonal stratifications, sometimes dotted with grazing sheep and goats, occasionally accompanied by the lone herder! Along the way, endless pony and mule caravans rang the air with their cheerful bells, littering the trail with copious depositions of their dung and urine. There were highland plateaus with nothing more than thorny, scrubby low bushes. And all around, all the time, mountains and the blue sky speckled with playful clouds and the dancing rays of pure sunlight. The wrap-around, panoramic views took my breath away. I felt humble and ecstatic to have the privilege to be there, to witness, in mute respect, this astonishing beauty of Nepal.

I rode a pony from Kagbeni to Muktinath, having overnighted at the Nilgiri View Lodge, which sports a rooftop solarium. The pony was to hurry me along because I wanted to visit the seldom-explored villages of Purang and Dzong across the river valley from Muktinath. The pony was not much faster at all. All I had to show for the ride were a sore bum and hitherto undiscovered muscles that were aching after having sat wide-legged for hours. Along the way, the pony attendant, a boy of 17 from Myagdi, initiated a strange and long conversation expounding his personal and unique theory of horse riding being singularly erotic and orgasmic, especially for women. Sidesaddle riding, presumably, is not an option for the ladies to undergo this Freudian experience!

Prayer flags a-flutter above red, yellow and blue striated, flat-roofed mud houses packed together to create narrow lanes and underpasses; silent villages dominated by crumbling forts; green *uwa* (barley) fields; rushing streams; yak hair insulation spiraling around solar heating pipes; frozen ponds with patches of turquoise-green and purple water; apples in every form: juice, air-dried chips, pies, brandy; soaring mountain faces pockmarked with caves created for religious retreats and escapes from marauders; the incongruously-named Bob Marley Restaurant in Muktinath. **N**

I was fantastically over-prepared for the eight-day trek into this arid Himalayan region: -10-degree sleeping bag with a micro-fleece liner; Leki "spring" walking stick; layers upon layers of woollies and wind-and-rain-and-chill proof clothes (including a red-and-green striped thermal long johns which made me look like a mad harlequin on the lam from an exceptionally color-conscious loony bin!); UV-screening sunglasses and SPF 60 sun lotions; waterproof boots. You name it; I had it. But what I wasn't prepared for were the series of glorious and utterly unimaginable visual assaults and human exchanges that lay in store for me. The fun started on the 17-minute Cosmic Air flight to Jomsom from Pokhara. Ten minutes into the flight, there was a sudden and dramatic change in the landscape below: from green, flat, tree-dotted to craggy, sparsely vegetated, brown-grey, rock-and-boulder strewn terrain. At times, it felt that we barely managed to scrape through the narrow mountain passes as we flew towards a mysterious land. The airhostess insouciantly passed out sweets and cotton wool and huddled in one corner, wrapped up in her pashmina and thoughts.



Photo: Courtesy of Time magazine





us. Though shepherds too have been affected by the changes, much about their lives remain as it was a thousand years ago.

The yearly cycle of the shepherd has always been dictated by the weather. The difference now is how the shepherd responds: A scene in which a shepherd's caravan is airlifted by helicopter to a plateau in the Alps shows the beauty of the mountains and the utility of modern technology, but it also reinforces the age-old cycle. In the summer, the shepherd heads to the mountains, the Alps, and he retreats to a warmer clime when snow and cold take hold in the winter.

The shepherd's life is hard; in the mountains it is more so. He lives out in the open—in a small hut, a tent or a caravan. The movie focuses on the simple life that shepherds lead. Scenes that the director feels are important are shown in detail to reinforce the simplicity—children enjoying a bath out in the open in a small tub; a shepherd setting up his camp in the woods. Other details that are emphasized include lengthy explanations about the shearing of the sheep, the cutting of their hooves, the milking of goats, the making of cheese, and the mating behavior of the billy goat. At times like these it is easy to become overwhelmed by the details and lose track of the larger narrative.

The movie is long, about two hours. And moves slowly, but the soundtrack, in contrast, is up-tempo.

Most interesting are the reflections on the shepherd's way of life. A radio reporter asks one whether he is ever bored. He is surprised by the question and answers that he does what he has to. It is an occupation that the shepherd, a former radio electrician, has taken up out of his own choosing. So why did he take up such a life? And what drives him? As the shepherd puts it: "I cannot sit still... I'd like to be on the go forever." **N**

**REVIEWED BY: YASHAS VAIDYA**

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Photo: courtesy of Time magazine

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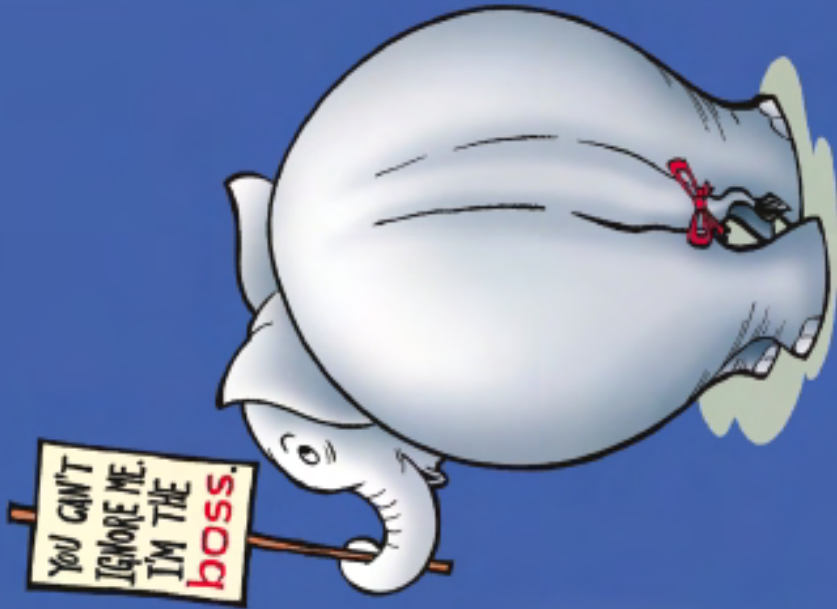
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# CITY This Week

At the Russian Cultural Centre, Kamalpokhari. Films are screened back-to-back from 9:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

**DEC. 9, THURSDAY**

**HALL A**

**2:45 p.m. Det Forbudte Landshold (54')**  
**The Forbidden Team**  
*Rasmus Dinesen/Arnold Kroeigaard* (Denmark, 2003)  
 A team finally gets to play football.

**3:55 p.m. Moenji, SaBukEul MootDa (83')**  
**Sabuk Uprising, April in 1980-Dust Buries Sabuk**  
*Lee Mi-Young* (South Korea, 2003)  
 Miners seize a Korean mountain town.

**5:35 p.m. Starkiss: Circus Girls in India (77')**  
*Chris Relleke/Jascha De Wilde* (Netherlands, 2002)  
 Nepali girls in India's oldest circus.

**HALL B**

**3:00 p.m. Marriage (80')**  
*Bibo Liang* (China, 1999)  
 Singing for a bride.

**4:35 p.m. Tripping Towards Lhasa (27')**  
*Leo Artalejo* (U.S., 2002)  
 A visual, meditative tale of a road trip.  
**Cinquentona Gallotti (33')**  
*The Gallotti Turns 50*  
*Priscila Botto/ Paulo de Barros* (Brazil, 2004)  
 Around and about a Brazilian peak.

**DEC. 10, FRIDAY**

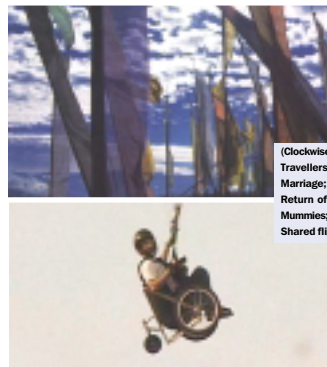
**HALL A**

**10:00 a.m. Das Geheimnis der Sherpa (90')**  
**The Secret of the Sherpa**  
*Gertrude Reinisch* (Austria, 2001/2002)  
 Sherpa life below Chomolongma.

**11:45 am Pororoca-Surfing the Amazon (26')**  
**Bill Heath** (Germany, 2003)  
 Riding the ultimate wave (nothing to do with mountains!).  
**Experimental Shorts**  
**Das Rad (8' 5"), Rocks**  
*Chris Stenner/ Heidi Wittlinger/Arvid Uibel* (Germany, 2001)  
 Charming cartoon where the rocks speak.



**Hochbetrieb (6'), Nuts & Bolts**  
*Andreas Krein* (Germany, 2003)  
 A man, a frog, and a construction site.  
**Mouse (7' 5")**  
*Wojtek Wawsczyk* (Germany, 2001)  
 Bigger is not better.  
**Peace into Pieces (4' 47")**  
*Raghuwar Nepal* (Nepal, 2004)



(Clockwise from top left)  
 Travellers & Magicians;  
 Marriage;  
 Return of the Mummies;  
 Shared flight

Shattered hopes, experimental.

**2:30 p.m. Schools in the Crossfire (52')**  
*Dhurba Basnet* (Nepal, 2004)  
 Education and the Nepali conflict.

**3:45 p.m. Six 'Stories' (43')**  
*Mohan Mainali* (Nepal, 2004)  
 Women caught in the crosshairs.

**4:45 pm. Travellers & Magicians (108')**  
*Khyentse Norbu* (Bhutan, 2003)  
 Tale of a monk and modernity.

**HALL B**

**10:00 a.m. Meltdown-In the Shadow of Nepal's Lost Glaciers (50')**

*Richard Heap* (U.K., 2004)  
 The Khumbu's receding glaciers.

**11:00 a.m. Hirtenreise ins dritte Jahrtausend (124')**  
**Shepherds' Journey into the Third Millennium**  
*Erich Langjahr* (Switzerland, 2002)  
 The 21<sup>st</sup> century shepherd.

**2:00 p.m. The Idu of Dibang (42')**  
*Pramod/Neelima Mathur* (India, 2002)  
 A study of the Idu of Arunachal.  
**Random Voices from Kashmir (12')**  
*Dr. Parvez Imam* (India, 2003)  
 Kashmiri voices on the long conflict.

**3:15 p.m. Eigernord wand - Aufden Spuren der Erstbesteige (52')**  
**Eiger North Face - In the Footsteps of its First Climbers**



*Frank Senn/Thomas Ulrich* (Switzerland, 2002)  
 Retracing climbing history on the Eiger.

**4:20 p.m. Pensieri Nel Vento (19')**  
**Thoughts in the Wind**  
*Ermanno Salvaterra* (Italy, 2003)  
 Another meditation on mountaineering.  
**Alpi: Le Marittime e le Liguri (29')**  
**Alps: Coastal Peaks and Valleys**  
*Folco Quilici* (Italy, 2004)  
 Rocks of the Mediterranean. Glorious music.

**5:25 p.m. Hummingbirds - Jewels of the Andes (50')**  
*Heinz Von Matthey* (Germany 2003)

Pleasing vignette on South America's tiniest bird.

**DEC. 11, SATURDAY**

**HALL A**

**9:30 a.m. Farther Than the Eye Can See (72')**  
*Michael Brown* (U.S., 2003)  
 Being sight-impaired on the Western Cwm.

**11:00 a.m. Ang Pagbabalik ng mga Mummies Part 2 (41')**  
**The Return of the Mummies**  
*Abner P. Mercado* (Philippines, 2004)  
 Filipino mummies go home.

**12:00 p.m. Storm fur die Sherpas Sherpas n Die Moderne am Mount Everest (30')**  
**Electricity for the Sherpas - Modern Times at Mount Everest**  
*Bettina Ehrhardt* (Germany, 2004)  
 The Khumbu Bijuli Company brings light.

**2:00 p.m. On the Road with the Red God: Machhendranath (50')**  
*Kesang Tseten* (Nepal, 2004)  
 Conflict and confluence in the Machhendranath Jatra.

**3:15 p.m. Into the Thunder Dragon (47')**  
*Sean White* (Canada, 2002)  
 Unicycling about Druk Yul.

**4:20 p.m. Some Roots Grow Upwards - The Theater of Ratan Thiyam (51')**  
*Kavita Joshi/ Malati Rao* (India, 2002)  
 The guru and the troupe, in Manipur.

**5:35 p.m. Nima Temba Sherpa (52')**  
*Margriet Jansen* (Netherlands, 2003)  
 Mr. Sherpa speaks.

**HALL B**

**10:00 a.m. The Adventure is Not Yet Over (39')**  
*Richard Else* (U.K., 2004)  
 Bonington reflects on a life of climbing.  
**Base Matterhorn (22')**  
*Mario Kreuzer* (Austria / Switzerland, 2003)  
 Leaping off the Matterhorn. Have parachute.

P U B L I S H E D

## District Development PROFILE of NEPAL 2004

**COVERAGE**  
 Divided mainly on three parts, the publication covers  
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11:15 a.m. **Fiestas populares entre tradicion y mercado-** (41')

**Condors and Bulls Brought on Stage**  
*Andre Affentranger* (Switzerland, 2001/2002)

The real and unreal behind a documentary.

**Shepherd Women of Shambala** (9')  
*Joy Tessman* (USA, 2001)

Pakistan's Ismaili women welcome an outsider.

12: 15 p.m. **Wspolny Lot** (50')

**Shared Flight**  
*Mirosław Dembinski* (Poland, 2003)  
Paraplegic paraglider surmounts the odds.

2:00 p.m. **K2: Una Storia Italiana** (49')

**The Conquest of K2**  
*Alessandro Varchetta* (Italy, 2004)  
The historic conquest of K2.

3:10 p.m. **Al filo de lo Imposible: Makalu, ese viejo Sueno** (55')

**The Verge of the Impossible: Makalu, That Old Dream**  
*Sebastian Alvaro* (Spain, 2003)  
Tragedy of a Spanish team on Makalu.

4:20 p.m. **Mount Poi-The Big Thing** (26')

*Jochen Schmoll* (Germany, 2003/2004)

Climbers mix with Kenyan locals.

**Alpi: La Valle Diaosta** (29')

**Alps: The Giants of the Val Diaosta**

*Folco Quilici* (Italy, 2004)

Good views on rocks, people and ice.

**DEC. 12, SUNDAY**

**HALL A**

10:00 a.m. **Home** (68')  
*Wang Yan/ Zhou Xiaolin* (China, 2002)  
The Yao minority is being relocated.

11:25 a.m. **Gantabnya Mahabhir** (41')

**Destination Mahabhir**  
*Mejan Pun/Dab Bahadur Garbuja* (Nepal, 2004)  
These honey hunters are Pun Magars.

12:20 p.m. **Never Ending Thermal** (47')

*Sean White* (Canada, 2003/2004)  
Venezuelans celebrate the paragliding lifestyle.

2:00 p.m. **Story of our Climb** (38')

*Dinesh Deokota* (Nepal, 2003)  
Nepali amateurs attempt a virgin peak.

**Natural Heights** (23')



*Helen Atkinson* (U.K., 2003)  
Meditations on modern free climbing.

4:45 p.m. **Daughters of Everest** (56')

*Sapana Sakya/Ramyata Limbu* (Nepal/USA, 2004)

The First Sherpa Women's Expedition on Everest.

**HALL B**

10:00 a.m. **Pizzet (Forsa liutim on)** (52')

**Pizzet: Maybe the Last Year**

*Ivo Zen* (Switzerland, 2004)

Chronicle of a mountain farmhouse.

11:05 a.m. **Hidrofilia** (58')

**Thumbnail**

*Jesus Bosque* (Spain, 2004)

Two women and a peak.

12:15 p.m. **Wildness** (56')

*Scott Millwood* (Australia, 2003)

Photographic quest to save Tasmania.

2:00 p.m. **Tavaline Seiklus** (89')

**Adventure High**

*Liivo Niglas* (Estonia, 2004)

A cycling odyssey - Mongolia to Nepal.

All films are in English or subtitled. Tickets (Rs. 30 per screening) are available at *Saraswati Book Centre, Hariharbhawan (5521599/5528017); Mandala Book Point, Kantipath (4245570); Suwal Music and Video, Lazimpat (4421522); Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka (5543017); Thamel Book Shop, opp. Sanchaya Kosh Building (4419849); Vajra Book Shop, Jyatha (4220562) and at the venue.*

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(Covering remote sectors)  
Effective from 16 SEP - 31 DEC'04

From	To	Flight No.	Days of Operation	Dep. Time	Arr. Time	Rupee Tariff One way	Dollar Tariff One way	Remarks
Kathmandu	Lukla	YA 111	Daily	0700	0735	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA 101	Daily	0705	0740	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA103	Daily	0710	0745	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	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
	Taplejung	YA 901	3	1025	1135	2695	164	DHC-6/300
	Phaplu	YA181	1,3,5	1030	1105	1480	85	DHC-6/300
	Rumjatar	YA 221	2,4,7	1030	1105	1245	61	DHC-6/300
	Manang	YA 601	6	1030	1130	2995	122	DHC-6/300
	Meghauly	YA171	Daily	1130	1200	1340	79	DHC-6/300
	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
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
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

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एउटा सरोकार गर्दा पञ्चकन्या अङ्कित आफ्नो छद्मले प्रवीण गर्छ। गुणिकले सम्भावना रहन्छ।

# A Life of Dedication

The display of the *Panche Baja* at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art was finally established last year. This is an accomplishment Krishna Man Manandhar feels especially proud about.

BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

**B**hikshu Krishna Man Manandhar has been a witness to Kathmandu's evolution since the last decades of the Rana regime. Born in the late 1920s he has observed Kathmandu and its culture keenly and today is a treasure house of information on Nepal's past. He offers unexpected tidbits of information: "The *gaines* [the traditional traveling musicians] acted as spies for Prithvi Narayan Shah," he says. "They came to Kathmandu and took back information which helped him capture this city." Or, "every month a *gupta* [secret] *puja* is held at Pashupatinath where they worship Buddha and Mahadev together. An image of the Buddha is placed atop the *linga* before worship commences."

And his recollections, his knowledge accumulated through his research are not simply the rambling recollections of an old man. This slender man remains remarkably astute, his mind remarkably organized, and all the bits of information in his possession form part of a larger structure in his mind. He speaks with the lucidity and passion of a historian, and now this Buddhist monk has taken on a new role as a cultural historian. He is working on a cultural history of Nepal's traditional traveling musicians, the *gaines*, as well as a book on the differing religious significances of Muktinath for Buddhists and Hindus.

He has already completed a number of books: a book in Nepali on the library sciences; "Peace Pilgrimage Nepal-

America," an account of the peace walks he has held in the United States; and translations of two books by Buddhist monks based in the United States into Nepali.

Manandhar joined the monkhood of the Mahayana Buddhist order in 1992. He had always felt a deep attachment towards religious life, and some years after he retired from his job as a librarian at the American Library where he worked for 27 years, he finally felt the time had come to devote his life to Buddhism. "My children had grown up and settled down," he says. "I felt that I had fulfilled all my responsibilities. My parents had also passed away by that time."

The influence of his parents has stayed with him throughout his life, though. He even partially attributes his decision to become a monk to them. As his father was Hindu and his mother Buddhist, he finds that both these religions have offered him reasons to join the monkhood. "In Hinduism the tradition of leaving home in old age to



Photos: Courtesy of Krishna Man Manandhar



ASTUTE: Bhikshu Manandhar (left) with U.N Assistant Secretary General Kul Chandra Gautam and the curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York



become a *sanyasin* is prevalent,” he says. “On the other hand there is a tradition among the Mahayana Buddhists of the Himalaya to send one of their children to the monastery when they are very small. Though my mother was a Theravada Buddhist and not a practitioner of Mahayana Buddhism, she always wanted her youngest child to become a monk. But he became a businessman. So it was I who decided to fulfill her desire.”

Long before this, there was another important turning point in Manandhar’s life that he still remembers with fondness. He won an international essay competition sponsored by the Japanese Reiyukai in 1981. The topic was “Shakyamuni Buddha and I.”

“Do you know who Ram Prasad Manandhar is?” he asks. He is surprised to hear a no. He then says enthusiastically: “He was a brilliant man, a person who never stood second in his life. Ever since he was a little child to the time when he received his Masters degree there was no one who could beat him. And at this essay competition it was I who won and not him.” There is a pause, and he says more reflectively: “Perhaps they thought his language was too literary and hard to understand. I just wrote what I had to say in a very simple way.”

The enthusiasm returns soon. This time he looks at the ceiling and there is a shine in his eyes: “My mother was very proud of me at that time. She said to me that with this award I had finally repaid all the sacrifices she had made for my education.”

The sacrifices Manandhar refers to were made in 1948. There were still two more years for the Rana regime to come to an end. Those were years of stress for his family as his father, Chandra Man Sainju, a compounder, had been jailed by the Ranas. Sainju transmitted messages between King Tribhuvan and members of the then banned political parties in the early 1940s. He was arrested in connection with a plot to overthrow the Rana regime and was sentenced for life, but was of course released in 1950 with the demise of that regime.

In 1948 however there was no way of knowing that his father would be released in two years. It was at this stage Manandhar’s mother realized her son’s potential and decided to send him to study at Ewing Christian College in Allahabad with funds she had accumulated painstakingly, partially by selling ornaments and other objects of value in their house.

That was the sacrifice his mother said he had finally repaid more than 30 years later. The award for the essay he received in 1981 allowed him to visit Japan and the United States, and this significantly broadened his outlook. But it is evident by the animated and passionate way he speaks of his mother’s pride that this was what mattered to him the most; it is clear that his mother’s happiness was for him the biggest award he could receive.

In New York he visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art where he saw a display of musical instruments from all parts of the world—almost all, for Nepal wasn’t included. Since he had a keen interest in music ever since he was a child and was especially interested in traditional instruments, he felt a

“pinch in the heart” when he realized that there were no instruments from Nepal on display.

“These days no one has a use for those instruments anymore,” he says. “We have become too influenced by western music. I think that even though we don’t use our traditional instruments, we should at least remember them, display them in museums or have books available where people can read about these instruments of the past.”

When Manandhar returned to Nepal after his visit to the United States, he looked around for a set of the *Panche Baja*, the five in-

struments that played an important role in folk music. It took him longer than he expected, four years, to find a complete set. “I couldn’t just find any old instrument,” he says. “I had to find instruments that still worked, that could still be played.”

The display of the *Panche Baja* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was finally established last year, after a long period of waiting. This is an accomplishment of which Manandhar feels especially proud.

Manandhar’s vision for the future is to establish a stupa based on the Swayambhu in the United States. Around the perimeter of the stupa he envisions inscriptions in six languages, from the six major religions in the world. “When people visit this place they will become aware of other religions,” he says. “In its way it will help foster mutual understanding in a world where conflicts based on misunderstanding take place each day.” He hopes that his next peace walk in Pennsylvania, to be held sometime next year, will help to bring in the needed funds.

Then after the conversation is over, he stands up and walks swiftly away, his spine erect and head held up high, with the same energy he has displayed throughout the conversation. It is time for him to head to Chapagaun, to the monastery next to the Bajrabarahi temple, where he often spends the night. ■



SHOWCASED: The *Panche Baja* (top) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY



# Speaking Out About AIDS

It's time to talk openly about the disease, but Oxygen's street theater missed a golden opportunity

BY BISWAS BARAL

When Ujjwal, a drug addict in his early 20s, finds out that he has AIDS, he cries out to the audience for social acceptance. The eager young actors presenting "Maunta Ko Antya," a 40-minute street play organized by the Oxygen Research and Development Forum in Patan Durbar Square to mark World AIDS Day on Wednesday, Dec. 1, held the attention of a diverse audience—expectant locals, bewildered tourists and busy street vendors.

The play's title, "The End of Silence," could be a metaphor for the emerging voices of today's youth, and the street actors' enthusiasm was more potent than the play's uninspired script. Barring a couple of eyebrow-raising moments, for example when a character asserts that the use of drugs is more widespread in small villages than in big cities, it was a standard street performance. Much attention was focused on the climax; nuance was conspicuously absent. But the play's message was ap-

parently food for thought for many in the audience, judging from the expressions on their faces.

The enthusiastic performers, who seemed mostly to be in their mid-20s, put on a good show—the acting was much better than the script. The chasm between rudderless youth and their out-of-touch parents was handled well, and the actors highlighted the need for effective communication between parents and their children. The cost of drug abuse was a main theme.

In "Maunta," four close friends find themselves waylaid into abusing drugs. When they later learn that each has contracted AIDS from their habit of sharing needles—and that one of the group has infected his sister through a contaminated blood donation—they decide to give up their addiction and to live the rest of their lives with hope and dignity. Unfortunately the play had almost nothing to say about the transmission of the disease through sex, the primary way AIDS is spread.

The troupe's focus only on the issue of drugs would lead one to believe that they were reluctant to face up to the issue of sexual transmission. Drugs are a major social problem, but to believe that drugs are primarily responsible for the festering the AIDS epidemic in Nepal is naïve.

Unsafe sex is the primary danger—one that gets passing mention only after half the play is over. Abstinence from sex, being faithful to one's partner and the use of condoms, the best precautions against contracting HIV, were not even mentioned. The play's avoidance of the subject is hard to fathom. Is the point that we as a society are still living in denial, much like the participants in the play?

The play urged the audience to break the silence on AIDS, a good idea. But in harping on that theme it missed a chance to talk about avoiding unsafe sex. Do the performers realize that they could be promulgating the wrong message? Avoiding drugs is not the most important way of protecting oneself from the disease. One of the four friends is married but doesn't express concern at the possibility of having infecting his wife with HIV when he learns that he has the virus. Speaking out about sex would have been a stronger message.

The World AIDS day was celebrated with much fanfare in Nepal. Famous personalities, schoolchildren, AIDS patients, social workers and ordinary people all took part in various functions. But there is little cause for celebration:

The country that was once considered a "low-prevalence" nation has now been categorized as having a "concentrated epidemic" of AIDS. It's not an exotic disease any more.

As the participants of the street play say, the time to remain silent has passed. Without the resolve to halt the spread of this deadly disease urgently, a gloomy future of a soaring number of AIDS patients and a crippled society awaits us. What they should be speaking up about, though, is sex education and abstinence. **N**



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## ACROSS THE OCEANS

Almitra von Willcox, a 57-year-old American, has traveled on foot to three continents. Starting in 1997 from Augusta in southwestern Australia, Willcox has crossed more than a dozen boundaries across Europe and Asia. Late last month, after crossing the Khoja on the Tibet border, she walked into Nepal through Simikot. But why on foot? "Walking will leave me the most open and accessible to meet people," says Willcox. "I can't be involved with life through the windows of a moving vehicle. I have to breathe it, taste it, adjust to its subtle rhythms." The final stop: San Diego, in 2012.

## Pump Up The Volume

Adrian Pradhan, the drummer and singer of the band 1974 A.D., knows how to keep himself busy. Just off a charity performance at the "Beatles Night" in St. Xavier's Godavari School on Nov. 27, he was back on stage, slated to perform at "Jazz at Boudha" at the Rox Bar on Sunday, Dec. 5. That's not all. His first solo album "Aja" hit the market two weeks ago. Does this mean Pradhan has ended his six-year association with the eminent 1974 A.D.? "My solo album was just a side project," explains Pradhan who joins the band for their upcoming Bhutan and Australian tours.



B Rai



B Rai

How often do you come across people who come here on a short holiday and forget to go home? Meet Yuko Akiba—a Japanese photographer who came to Nepal in 1990 and has stayed here since. Her photographs were on show at the Park Gallery recently. "Near Wild Heaven, Voice From The Mountain," Akiba's first ever exhibition, was highly appreciated. More than half of the 43 photographs put on show have been sold. These pictures are of people and landscapes from around the country, mostly Rasuwa and Gorkha, as seen through her eyes. "The beautiful mountains, the rich culture and the amiable people in Nepal attracted me to live in the country," says Akiba. "Letting others see through my photographs the beautiful Nepal I had seen throughout these years left me the most satisfied."

## THROUGH HER EYES



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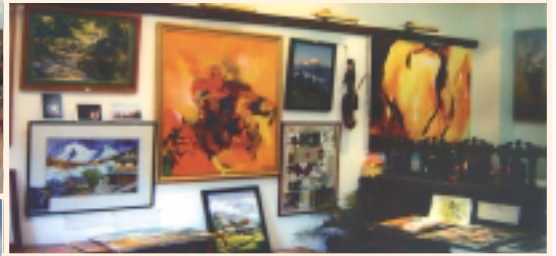
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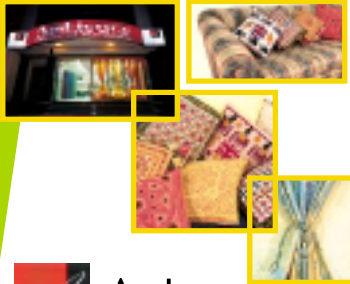


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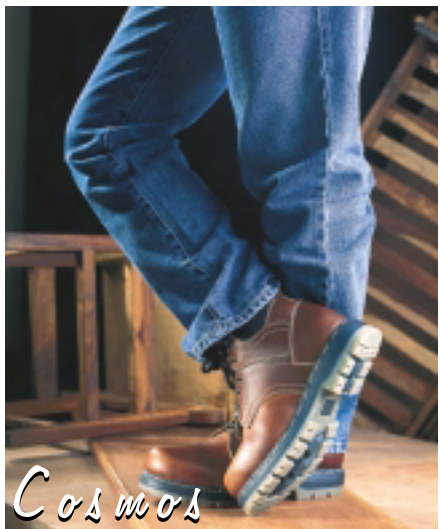
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# Filming Mountains

**F**or **Ramyata Limbu**, it's the culmination of a one-year-long effort. As festival director of the Kathmandu Mountain Film Festival, she's worked hard to bring in 49 films from 21 countries. Not that she hasn't done all this before. On December 9 the curtains rise on the third edition of the biennial, non-competitive



B Rai

film festival. Over four days, audiences at the Russian Cultural Centre will be treated to the continuous blitz of filmfare. Still, this edition of KIMFF is a special one for her: Limbu's own documentary, "Daughters of Everest," is being screened at the festival. Yashas Vaidya talked to Limbu about the film festival, mountain films and her own experience as a moviemaker.

**How did the KIMFF come into being?**  
Himal Association organized the Film Himalaya back in 1997. Then it did the Film South Asia, a festival that focused on South Asia. We saw then that there were both filmmakers and an audience for documentaries and films [that were not regular feature films]. We saw, not exactly a market, but an interest. The Himal Association then decided to do a mountain film festival—a regular feature in North America and Europe—focusing on the mountains, which are part of Nepal's identity.

**What do you expect to achieve?**  
We hope the films will attract peer review and critiques from filmmakers and the audience. And that this in turn will lead to better documentation and a better understanding of mountain issues and people, especially in the highland regions of the developing world. We aim to educate, inform about the lives and times of these places and, at the same time, entertain.

**Not all the films you screen are films about mountains...**  
Except for a few films, one about surfing the Amazon and another about a paraplegic paraglider surmounting the odds and a few experimental shorts, the

majority of films touch on some aspect of mountains—as a sport, about a people, a lifestyle, wildlife, conflict or the environment. By mountains, we don't necessarily have to be above 6000 meters or have a gleaming, crystal white peak in the picture. It's about perspective. For example, "Hummingbirds" is about South America's tiniest bird that inhabits the Andes while "Shepherd's Journey into the Third Millennium" is about high-tech shepherding in a mountainous country like Switzerland.

**What about you—how did you, a freelance journalist, get involved in all this?**  
I am interested in the outdoors, trekking, stuff like that. When Himal Association decided to have the KIMFF, they asked me whether I was interested. The project combined my interests—films, moun-

**I've tried to get a mix of films so that the festival appeals to a wide audience**

tains, meeting people and documenting issues. So I thought it was ideal for me.

**What do you do as festival director?**  
It isn't as grand as it sounds. It involves basically coordinating everything—from doing the PR to looking for good mountain films. I look for the films, correspond with the filmmakers and coordinate the four-day festival.

**What would be the right films for you?**  
While some films are good from a technical point of view, informative with

beautifully shot images, like a National Geographic presentation, they should also have an element of passion, conflict and drama and should inspire people. I've tried to get a mix of such films so that the festival appeals to a wide audience.

**Seven years down the road from Film Himalaya, do you think such documentaries and indie films are now financially viable in Nepal?**

Well, I wouldn't say that yet. We haven't got to that stage. There are a few exceptions that have done well. Outside festivals are a market for filmmakers to sell their films, to meet distributors. We [the KIMFF], on the other hand, are a meeting place where people express and exchange their ideas. We're a small festival.

**Let's now talk about "Daughters of Everest," which you co-directed and co-produced with Sapana Shakya. How did that come about?**

What happened was I came to hear about the first all-Nepali women's expedition to Everest in 2000. I thought, well, there's adventure involved, there's a story and the mountains. That interested me. I got in touch with Sapana who has a background in broadcast journalism. She jumped at the idea. We asked the organizers if we could tag along and they agreed.

**How was the experience?**  
We spent six weeks at the Everest base camp. We, Sapana and me, had to do all the shooting, the interviewing by ourselves. It was basically two women and a camera. It was tasking at times; at times it was exhilarating. **N**



# Eternal Optimist

Unlike many thinkers and commentators who continually mourn the dismal state of our country, Karna Sakya believes Nepal still has a lot to offer

BY BISWAS BARAL

**S**och,” Karna Sakya’s first major venture in Nepali literature, is a collection of memoirs; a travelogue; a manual for successful entrepreneurship; and, more importantly, a prescription for all dispirited Nepalis.

Sakya is a visionary and a highly passionate person. The subtle blending of these two attributes confers on him the resoluteness palpable in all his undertakings. He cannot sit idle for any length of time with his get-go mentality and is constantly haunted by new ideas.

That the majority should remain ignorant about a man who has contributed so much to our society is indeed sad. Sakya, sometimes single-handedly and working up to 20 hours a day, has envisioned and handled some of the most important and ambitious projects, mostly in the fields of nature conservation and tourism. And remarkably, due to his uncompromising nature, he has managed to keep his image clean, even when muddled in the often-dirty bureaucracy.

Visit Nepal Year, 1996; Cancer Hospital With One Paisa, 1989; Tundikhel Road Expansion, 1997; Dream Garden, Keshar Mahal, 1998 are some of the important proposals he has presented and helped materialize. The development of Bharatpur as a medical city and the introduction of the concept of endemic tourism (a small-scale, epicurean concept of tourism) in Nepal can also be credited to him.

Though, reading between the lines in “Soch,” Sakya’s reluctance to open up completely is palpable at times; but, by and large, he is open and honest. He is very emotional, he admits—his eyes well up at touching moments during mushy

Hindi movies. And he doesn’t shirk away from mentioning his poor accounting skills: Even today, he is unable to differentiate between debit and credit. But he knows his strengths and is proud of what he has done so far.

The book as a travelogue is pretty interesting as well. Sakya narrates his vast and sometimes amusing experiences—from swimming naked in the Great Barrier Reef in Australia to the tussle with a pickpocket in Italy—he has gained during his extensive travels,



## Soch

By Karna Sakya

Publisher: Nepalnature.com

**PRICE:** Rs. 250

**PAGES:** 286

both in Nepal and away, with the aplomb of a consummate raconteur.

But the most important point “Soch” strives to hit home is: Unlike what many thinkers and commentators who continually mourn the dismal state of our country today believe, Nepal still has a lot to offer. Those who depict Nepal’s situation as dreadful and hopeless are doing a disservice to our nation; they are failing to put things into a larger perspective, Sakya contends. Despite the crippling insurgency, our social reforms and economic achievements since the restoration of democracy are commendable, he says. Yes, without the rebellion, we could have achieved much more, but the situation is not as bad as many intellectuals like to put it. He believes Nepal does not lack opportunities. But

because the youth shun certain jobs, an apparent vacuum has been created. We don’t have enough construction workers, carpenters and cooks, he says. We don’t take up these vocations because of our spurious notion of dignity. With formal education getting such emphasis, the value of informal education is invariably being forgotten.

On a personnel note, there are some pretty touching chapters. The untimely demise of his first wife, Sanuchori, and his eldest daughter, Samjhana, both of cancer, left a gaping void in his life. The revelation Sakya has abed in a Bangkok hospital, where he is admitted for a suspected case of prostate cancer himself, terminates an emotional roller coaster that this book is.

Any thoughtful Nepali, in Sakya’s optimistic portrait of today’s Nepal, will find plenty to mull over. “Soch” is a mirror every Nepali should take time to look into. An illuminating read, indeed. **N**



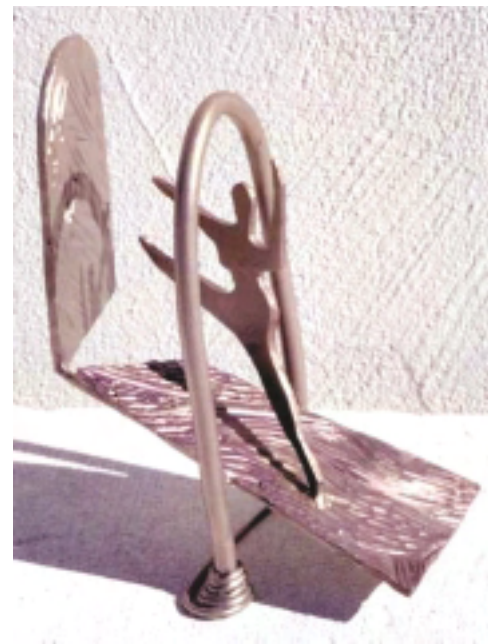
# Make It Happen

**F**irst in Dailekh last month and later in Baglung this month, people came out openly against the Maoists. The apolitical protests in Dailekh in particular showed that the Maoist ways are far from popular in their supposed stronghold, the Midwest, and people are now daring to break the shackles. The three visiting Cabinet ministers, all from the region themselves, must have taken heart from what they saw in Dailekh on Nov. 23. Thousands of men, women and children from at least a dozen VDCs chanted angry slogans against the Maoists and vowed that they were not willing to abide by the Maoist dictates anymore. There have been similar protests in the district after that, but none in that scale.

While we do record Dailekh as an important event in the annals of the “people’s war,” we will keep short of calling it the watershed our officials say it is. Indeed, we call on them to make that happen. The Maoists have made no secret about the fact that they would go to any length to silence the voices of dissent, lest it spread like a bushfire in these remote hills. They made their statement right after the demonstrations when they killed five protestors. What followed gave indications of things to come. More than 400 families fled their villages in the wake of the violent retaliation from the Maoists to take refuge in the district headquarters. And the district administration was soon stretched thin. The chief district officer in Dailekh, Rishikesh Niraula, gave away a little over Rs. 150,000 to 182 families, currently taking shelter in a local school, Tribhuvan Higher Secondary School where close to 2,000 villagers are living in 12 cramped classrooms. Despite repeated calls for help from local officials, the Home Ministry finds itself in an unenviable position.

This is exactly where the government and the state apparatus should try to make a statement of their own. For records. On Nov. 23, the visiting Home Minister Purna Bahadur

Khadka—with Local Development Minister Yubaraj Gyawali and Minister of Science and Technology Balaram Gharti Magar in tow—promised the protesting villagers that the government will “guarantee” their safety against the Maoists. That hasn’t quite happened and in part is even understandable. It’s difficult to foil guerilla attacks even in the heart of Kathmandu and that in broad daylight. As much was evident when Maoists detonated a powerful bomb at the Sanchayakosh early last month.



What the government can do—now that the Dailekh residents believed the government guarantee and came out openly against the Maoists—is provide support and safety to the homeless, who are still not out of danger. The government just cannot afford to abandon them. Indeed, the cash-strapped government should mobilize the goodwill of the international community and aid agencies to help the needy. Failing this, the great opportunity that Dailekh has offered will be squandered. And make no mistake, the Maoists want exactly that.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor



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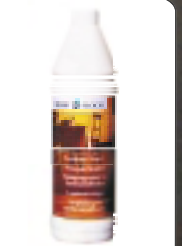
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