



Courage & Conviction

newsfront

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On the roll

Sitaula always had the last word in every crisis during the negotiation with Maoists. But Terai proved to be his Waterloo

■ Bishwamani Pokharel

It took 20 deaths and a sizeable part and population of Terai up in arms to oust K P Sitaula, the most powerful Home Minister in the Government. His insensitivity and mishandling has been blamed for the situation that is building up in the country.

His attempt to salvage the crisis in the last moment with a veiled threat—that home minister's resignation would soon lead to that of the Prime Minister—was not taken seriously by G P Koirala. His ouster, with the image of a villain and incompetent minister, cuts short a promising career clubbed with the image of a peace maker with the Maoists when he assumed the charge in May.

As it was only a question of 'when' than 'if', the Prime Minister was also said to be on a look out for a successor who could contribute positively to the ongoing peace process and bring the Terai leaders in the mainstream through dialogue.

The pressure for Sitaula's exit which first came from the Madheshi Janadhikar forum leader Upendra Yadav, as the pre-condition for dialogue with the Government got additional boost with at least 56 law makers from Terai region cutting across the party line contemplating resigning from parliament. Prime Minister Koirala's all powerful daughter Sujata lent her support to the 'remove Sitaula campaign'.

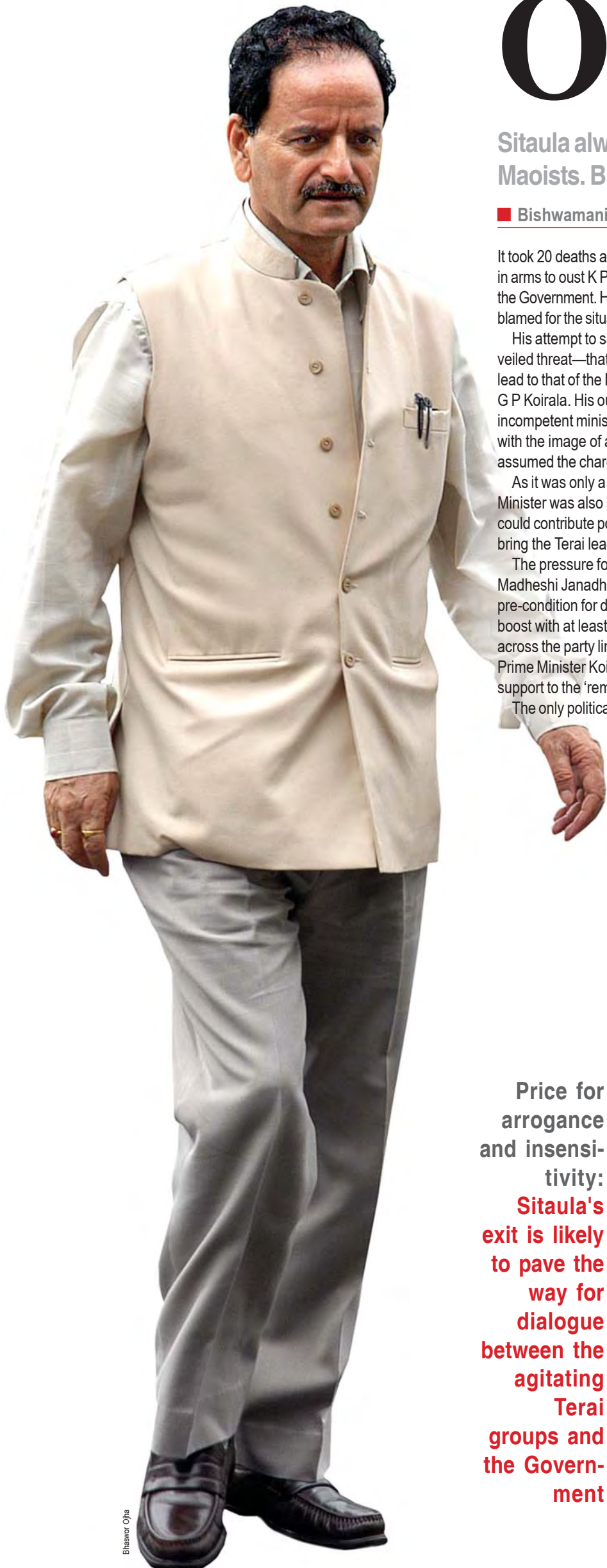
The only political group that supported Sitaula's continuation

was the Maoists whose political line was it was mainly the palace infiltration and instigation which was responsible for the agitation in Terai. His exit is likely to pave the way for dialogue between the agitating Terai groups and the Government. The capital which has virtually remained cut off from supply of essential commodities will be back to normal soon.

The forum asked for Sitaula's resignation from January 19 when he refused to have a local Maoist leader arrested and tried for murdering a 15-year old student Ramesh Mahato in Lahan. Despite the Maoist leader Prachanda's apology, the Home Minister was firmly silent.

According to a top official in the Government, Koirala's anger against his once trusted Lieutenant reached a pitch when he prepared a list of political opponents for arrest which included that of former Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa, calling him pro—palace, and by extension, a suspect in the violence in Terai. Koirala intervened and stopped the possible arrest.

"We will come to the negotiation table the moment Sitaula is out. When that happens, we can naturally expect a fair probe into the use of excessive force in the Terai in course of the agitation", Yadav told newsfront, after his meeting with the prime Minister. He said Terai was looking for an honourable settlement and the forum leaders believed in finding an amicable solution through dialogue, in conformity with what the Prime Minister stated in his address to the nation last week. ■



Price for arrogance and insensitivity: Sitaula's exit is likely to pave the way for dialogue between the agitating Terai groups and the Government

Bhaswar Ojha

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Bhaswar Chha

Twice lucky Hridayesh

Loss of ministerial chair may not always be a setback. That's something Hridayesh Tripathi who quit the Government last week ostensibly to express solidarity with

the Nepal Sadhbhavana party claim it was not approved at the highest level of the party. "We have to find the reason of his resignation once he recovers from Jaundice", Sarita Giri,

Tripathi managed to save his chair six months ago when the Government withdrew its decision to hike the price of petroleum prices to narrow down the loss of billions of Rupees that Nepal Oil corporation has incurred. His resignation has not been accepted by the Prime Minister, but Nepal Sadhbhavana party which Tripathi belongs to has already threatened to pull out of the coalition if Terai demands are not fulfilled by the Government.

Indian embassy sources in Kathmandu said that it was purely because of the disruption of the vehicular movement along the highways linking Kathmandu that fuel pumps have gone dry.

■ Newsfront Report

Long queues for petrol and diesel, with all but 10 out of 81 fuel pumps going dry in the capital has generated a frustration over the Government's inefficiency.

the Terai movement must have realized by now.

No one knows whether the premonition of fuel crisis or the Government apathy led to his resignation last week since sources in

Government's inefficiency. As a result, more than 70 per cent of the vehicles are already off the road in the capital. Naturally, the scalp that people would be after would that be of Tripathi's as the minister of civil supplies.

Prophetising Moriarty

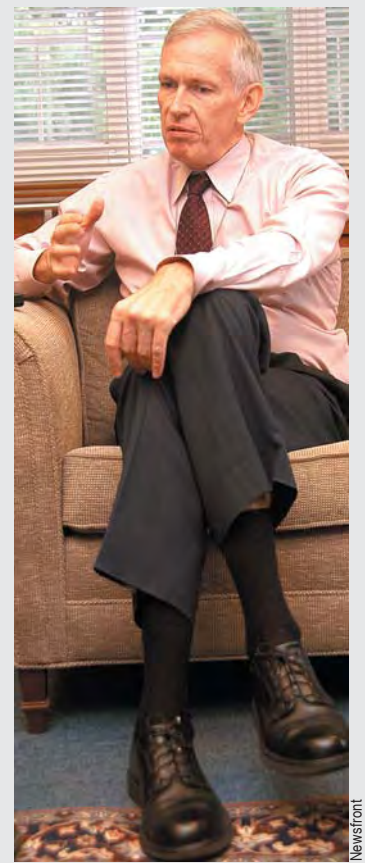
C P Gajurel's version confirms the fear Moriarty has been expressing time and again

Notwithstanding the oft-publicised contempt Maoists' show for Ambassador James F Moriarty, all their utterances literally have only turned him into a political prophet. The latest one came from C P Gajurel party's top ranking leader who declared in Delhi that Maoists joining the peace process was a mere strategy, and they could begin the "revolution any time now."

"We have raised the strength of our army from 10,000 to 37,000 now and the task has become easier", Gajurel told an assembly of sympathisers in Jawaharlal University. And another statement, "we would be ready to start a revolution in city centre any time", only confirms the fear Moriarty has been expressing time and again--demanding that Maoists prove their words through 'credible conduct'. While Gajurel's another revelation that Maoists new found friendship with India was also a part of the strategy has drawn no reaction from the Government of India, Bharatiya Janata party has accused Maoists of dragging RSS-BJP family into Nepal controversy unnecessarily.

"It's not our ethos to get into the internal affairs of another country. But the Maoists are dragging our names as they are fast losing their credibility among the people," Prakash Javadar, party's spokesperson told the media in Delhi. Maoist Chief Prachanda, ideologue Baburam Bhattarai in Kathmandu had accused that the Terai crisis was aided and abetted by the RSS-palace nexus with truck loads of Hindutva supporters crossing the border in Nepal to fan crisis in the Terai. Gajurel echoed almost similar sentiments in Delhi, adding that the U S and the RSS wanted to have palace back in power and was acting in that direction.

Maoist accusations against Madheshi Janadhikar forum has



Newsfront

been quite sharp--That UpendraYadav is being instigated by the palace, that he is in league with the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh, India's Hindu fundamentalist organization and that truck loads of their supporters are coming to incite violence in Nepal's Terai. India's main opposition party reacted sharply to the Maoist leader C P Gajurel's allegations in Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, a bastion of the left and the RSS-BJP baiters.

Javadar's rebuttal came a bit late "They are blaming us because the Maoists are fast losing the support of the people in Nepal. It is not our ethos to interfere in affairs of other countries. Since they (Maoists) are losing the battle against common people, they have started dragging the BJP and the RSS into their mess", he said.

■ Newsfront Report

Deal on Rayamajhi commission

The cabinet committee headed by Deputy Prime Minister, K P Oli, overruled the beleaguered Home Minister, who insisted on initiating action against the police officials he did not like. As a compromise formula, Shahabir Thapa, former Chief of the Armed Police force, resigned from service, on assurance from Oli that he would face no further action.



Ravi Manandhar

solicited on how to try the politicians, mainly the ministers during the Royal Regime.

The Government has come in for sharp criticism of the Human Right Groups and the media for not making the Rayamajhi commission report public. But the political composition and conduct of the commission during the investigation has

brought the commission's credibility and impartiality into question. In fact, the Government, despite repeated queries, refused to submit a copy of the report to the office of the Human Rights High Commissioner in Nepal, apparently fearing that a scrutiny of its findings and the method adopted would expose its prejudice.

Oli left for Bangkok today for his treatment soon after handing in the recommendations to the PM.

■ Newsfront Report

Former APF Chief resigns, AG opinion to be solicited for politicians' trial

to have fallen victim to a powerful clique surrounding the Home Minister.

As per the recommendations of the committee, while the commission's suggestion for trying the king with laws retrospectively legislated will be left to the Constituent Assembly, Attorney General's opinion will be

But the two senior Additional Inspector Generals—Rajendra Bahadur Singh of civil police and Rabiraj Thapa of the Armed Police force—who the Rayamajhi Commission indicted along with 200 others would be reporting back to their department with immediate affect, with no charges being pursued against them.

Thapa was victimised for no valid reason as Sitaula wanted to clean the deck for promotion of his cousin Basudev Oli to the top slot in the APF and Singh is believed

Out of barrack?

Prime Minister G P Koirala yielded to the Maoists opposition to the Nepal army being deployed in the trouble torn areas of Terai despite incidents of 'antisocials' taking advantage of the situation. But he acted firmly and ordered NA deployed in the dry port in Birgunj, along the Raxaul border, with clear instructions that their job would be restricted to safeguarding the port.

This is the first time that the Army has been 'deployed' after the Koirala Government came to power eight months ago. Army helicopters and personnel have however, been pressed in airlifting the wounded from trouble zones

for their treatment in Kathmandu. All that the Army headquarters has said on the issue is, "we are always ready to carry on the instruction of the Government. At the moment we are in barracks because the Government has decided so".

While assessing the law and order situation, the cabinet last week was believed to have informally delved on the need for army being deployed in certain Terai areas, but the idea was shelved as Maoists Chief Prachanda said that for every two Nepal army personnel, one 'People's Army' should also be posted.

■ Newsfront Report



Monitoring child adoption

A three day international conference on 'inter-country adoption' of children beginning March 11 will be held in Kathmandu focussing on correcting malpractices and corruption in adoption business.

The conference, first of its kind in the country, is being organized jointly by the Ministry of women, Children and Social welfare, Central child welfare board, Child NGO Federation and Nepal Children's Organisation. A host of Nepalese children adopted by foreigners since 1981—the year adoption was legalized—are likely to participate in the conference.

The mega assembly is being hosted amidst controversies and

International conference on 'inter-country adoption' of children is being hosted amidst controversies and allegations

allegations that adoption of Nepali children by foreigners has been fast

growing into a money minting racket in which most of the 27 orphanages are the beneficiaries.

According to vice president of the organising committee, Upendra Kesari Neupane, around 100, including adopted children, parents and adoption agency representatives are expected to participate in the conference. The conference will be discussing issues like proper care and upbringing of adopted children, simplifying adoption procedures with high-degree of transparency and appointing some of them as country's good-will ambassadors

Hope road

"I came here in a helicopter, but after a year, I assure you, you will be riding Jeeps", was an assurance Girija Prasad Koirala gave to the people in Jajarkot headquarter in Khalanga 16 years ago. The road still remains a dream for it never was built.

A year after this grandiose

After a decade and more, Jajarkot headquarter Khalanga still doesn't have a road linking to any highway. The proposed highway to Khalanga from Chhinchhu of Surkhet with a span of 107 km is still underway. Ironically, the highway linked with Sallibajar, 42 km from Chhinchhu, a decade back but the rest of 65 km

people continued to face problems because of it."

Jajarkot, that had become like a war zone during the Maoists' armed struggle is now eager for a new lease on life and even more so now when the long neglected road project seems to have caught the attention of the

People in Jajarkot are once again hopeful for the long awaited road. Hope this one turns into the reality and soon.



statement, Koirala held the post of Prime Minister and obviously he forgot the promise he made to the people of Jajarkot remembered. The last time he flew in to visit the place, the locals questioned the leader why he lied to them and the answer was, "As you know the Maoists are fighting against the system now, and so we just can't start any development project." This effectively silenced the simple people.

road was left untouched.

The reason behind this was the looting of three hundred kilograms of explosives by the Maoists. What they did with the loot, intended for use to construct the road doesn't need much guessing but it cost a lot for the locals who are suffering a lot due to lack of the road.

Ratna Prasad Sharma, MP representing Nepal Communist Party- UML said, "After the incident, the construction was held up and the

government. One can hear explosions at various sites and a hundred and fifty labours are busy working this month. From the budget of 10 crores for the road, Nepal Army has got 7 crores and the Road Department has 3 crores to spend.

People in Jajarkot are once again hopeful for the long awaited road. Hope this one turns into the reality and soon.

■ Chhatra Karki in Jajarkot

abroad.

Compared to 300 USD charged by the Government, orphanages are said to be charging upto 20,000 dollars for every child sent out for adoption. The US state department, French Government and other countries adopting Nepali children have sent out warnings through their official websites about corruption in adoption in Nepal. French Government has blacklisted at least one main orphanage in Nepal.

According to the official

information, nearly 1700 Nepalese children have been adopted by foreigners during the past six years—almost a rise of 150 per cent compared to the preceding two decades. Officials attribute this growth to the conflict, direct involvement of the NGOs and lax government regulations. Spanish parents have adopted the highest number of Nepali children (317) between 2000 and 2005 followed by Italy (274), U S A (251) France (172) and Germany (158).

■ Kiran Bhandari

VACANCIES IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Sajha Yatayat, the pioneering cooperative transport company of Nepal, plans to revitalise its operations from its hub at Pulchowk, Lalitpur. The goal is to serve the dramatically expanded needs for public transportation, in urban transport within Kathmandu Valley and long-distance travel within the country. Two senior positions need to be filled as Sajha Yatayat starts in this renewed journey. We invite applications to fill the positions. The selected candidates will be hired for an initial contract duration of two years. Possibility of career advancement with expansion of the company's network and ambitions. Salary scales are according to ability and expectations.

1) Position: Business Manager

Reporting to the Executive Director, and interacting closely with the personnel, the Business Manager will help define and implement management decisions to develop Sajha Yatayat's service within Kathmandu Valley and country-wide. The Manager would use the company's four-decade experience as a foundation to serve the evolved needs of the traveling public. S/he will be involved in the executive leadership in the company, to develop business plan and identify and evaluate business opportunities.

Responsibilities:

- Report to the Executive Director in policy-making, programme planning, monitoring and evaluation, taking on first-responsibility as possible
- Help develop and implement business plan for Sajha Yatayat's short-, medium- and long-term goals
- Seek to develop sustainability in the company's workings and explore options for income-generation
- Planning long-distance routes as well as Valley urban network
- Develop management strategy on the basis of profitability assessment and competition analysis, balancing this with the service demands on a public transport company
- Work to diversify into alternative, environment-friendly energy transport systems
- Overseeing training of staff to maximise safety, security and efficiency
- Commercialisation of assets for revenue maximisation
- Special responsibility for passenger safety as well as comfort levels in both urban and long-distance sectors
- Liaise with government departments to enhance service-capabilities, and develop links with private bus operators with a view to maximising transport options to the traveling public

Qualification and Experience:

- MBA, with preference given to candidate with specialisation in enterprise area and or transport sector
- Minimum seven years' work experience in senior management in reputed private or public-sector organisation(s)
- Clear understanding of the basic concept of transport management and market driven enterprise development strategies
- Clear understanding of the needs of public service by a transport company
- Ability to lead by example, experience in managing large number of personnel
- Advanced computing and communication skills

2) Position: Automobile Engineer

Reporting to the Executive Director, the Automobile Engineer will supervise and coordinate the company's technical team to maintain Sajha Yatayat's fleet of old and new buses.

Responsibilities:

- Repair and maintenance of bus fleet
- Efficient inventory management
- Ensuring quality on all aspects of vehicle operation
- Ensuring passenger safety
- Develop long-term technical strategies for optimising fleet
- Supervision and guidance for upgrading and maintenance
- Knowledge of automobile and electrical systems, and latest systems for monitoring, inventory and route management
- Specialised knowledge of fuel efficiency processes and interest in alternative fuels, electric vehicles and environment-friendly procedures
- Personnel management
- Liaising with senior management within Sajha Yatayat, and keeping contact with required counterparts in government, industry and engineering institutions

Qualification and Experience:

- Bachelors Degree in Automobile or Mechanical Engineering with 5 years' experience, or Masters Degree in Automobile or Mechanical Engineering with 2 years' experience.
- Team player, with ability to motivate engineering staff
- Competent in advanced technical requirements specific to a transport company

Interested candidates who fulfill the requirements should submit to the address provided below application with biodata and as much details of work experience as possible. Also submit names and contacts for two referees. Please also include a one-page essay on "Public Transportation in Nepal" written from your personal perspective, whether technical or managerial.

**Deadline for submission to 15 February
Short-listed candidates will be contacted by 28 February.**

Submit Application to:
Job Application Desk
Sajha Yatayat, Pulchowk, Lalitpur, Tel: 5524679



साझा यातायात
जहाँ नेपालको आँटो



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Media's agony

Nepali media's growth and journey towards professionalism in the era of democracy has been exemplary. A sizeable section of the media came in the forefront of advocacy Democracy after the King's takeover with clear understanding that Democracy in peril is the gateway to autocracy and anarchy. Media people have been targeted both by the state, Maoists and various organized forces despite their oft-repeated commitment for free press and have indulged in anti-media character many times. When logic and reason fail, when rule of law becomes exception, rule of muscles or brute powers come to dictate.

The anti-media character of different groups in the past unfortunately is being repeated by supporters of the pro-agitation groups in Terai areas recently. Their anger and frustration over the media being 'biased' or 'less supportive' may have justified reasons, but terrorizing journalists or forcing them to submission is a crime. That will not only discredit the leadership as well as the entire movement for a right cause, but will also give it anti-democracy and anti-media tag in the eyes of freedom watchers across the world. Journalists in Biratnagar and Birgunj have been targeted, first by the Madheshi Janadhikar forum supporters, and then by the Government. This is not only a dangerous tendency, but also a crime for which accountability is needed.

Media ownership, background of those working as journalists, lack of inclusive character and less number of experts on given subjects are the reasons which make our reporting and analysis sometimes flawed—something that need to be addressed. But no where in the world is journalism accepted as 100 per cent objective or perfect. In fact, almost everywhere media and journalists are quite often targeted for anything that goes wrong.

Exposing Nixon's Watergate scandal and the criticism that journalist Bob Woodward faced initially is just one example - but a representative one even in major democracies. But what makes situation worse here is that media persons are physically targeted and the perpetrators of crime enjoy impunity. Attack on media anywhere is condemnable. It's a challenge as well as opportunity for the forum leaders to behave and act differently. Let them learn to live with criticism and prove they are committed to the freedom of press.

If you can't speak against injustice, you cannot fight for justice.



Letters

Provide online version

Keep on sharing the spirit of courage and conviction with the public. Also provide it to online readers abroad. Wish you all the best.

Suresh Basyal
 Unit Manager
 ALICO AIG Life
 Dubai, UAE

The paradigm and approaches possessed by policy makers, INGOs, NGOs and GOs do have problems and publication of new paradigm for development intervention would draw the attention of concerned authorities to rethink their strategies.

Amrit Bhandari
 Monitoring and communication Assistant
 Heifer Nepal, Lalitpur

Appreciable coverage

I wish newsfront grand success. The content coverage is highly appreciated. I hope, it will be able to give enough due importance to voices of people and rights based approach to development.

Yamuna Ghale
 Development Professional

Attractive

I found newsfront attractive but I wish it had more teenage stuff like quiz, horoscope, celebrities and also a help line column for people of our age.

Damu Sherpa
 British School, Sanepa.

Rich varieties

I was delighted to see newsfront with rich varieties of news and opinion. I still see scope for more space for opinion—as diverse as they could be. I wish newsfront moves ahead with the initial objectivity and impartiality it has shown in the coverage of news and events. It will be great if newsfront takes the lead role in giving space for developmental activities and news, something which most media have neglected.

Maybe, the lay-out needs improvement.

Ram Sharan Sedhai
 Sr. Communication Officer
 Action Aid, Lazimpat
 Kathmandu.

Needs further analysis

Newsfront looks better, reads better. It has tried to include varied issues. From Madheshi movement's context, I think coverage needs further analysis.

Vijaya Lal Karna
 Leader, Madheshi movement

Awesome !

The contents of newsfront are awesome. Some of the issues raised were not even mentioned in daily newspapers.

Roshan Pokhrel
 Sanepa, Lalitpur

Good mix

It's a good mix of political analysis, news and features. But wit seems to be missing. Don't be so serious. Even serious issues can be written with a sprinkling of humour.

Dilasha Kansakar,
 Sanepa

Letters to the Editor should be addressed to:
newsfront@bhrikuti.com

Spiritual Corner

Compassion and the Individual

The purpose of life

ONE GREAT QUESTION underlies our experience, whether we think about it consciously or not: What is the purpose of life? I have considered this question and would like to share my thoughts in the hope that they may be of direct, practical benefit to

those who read them.

I believe that the purpose of life is to be happy. From the moment of birth, every human being wants happiness and does not want suffering. Neither social conditioning nor education nor ideology affect this. From the very core of our being, we simply desire contentment. I don't know whether the universe, with its countless galaxies, stars and planets, has a deeper meaning or not, but at the very least, it is clear that we humans who live on this earth face the task of making a happy life for ourselves. Therefore, it is important to discover what will bring about the

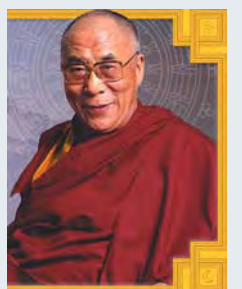
greatest degree of happiness.

How to achieve happiness

For a start, it is possible to divide every kind of happiness and suffering into two main categories: mental and physical. Of the two, it is the mind that exerts the greatest influence on most of us. Unless we are either gravely ill or deprived of basic necessities, our physical condition plays a secondary role in life. If the body is content, we virtually ignore it. The mind, however, registers every event, we virtually ignore it. The mind, however, registers every event, no matter how small. Hence we

should devote our most serious efforts to bringing about mental peace.

From my own limited experience I have found that the greatest degree of inner tranquility comes from the development of love and compassion.



■ Tenzin Gyatso;
 The Fourteenth Dalai Lama
 (Extracted by www.dalailama.com)



pic by Bhaswor Ojha

Intentions, emotions not enough



The rigid mind-set of the Maoists that Madheshi Janadhikar forum leaders do not carry much support will only add fuel to the fire. Emerging realities cannot be ignored if resolving crisis peacefully is the common aim.

■ Yubaraj Ghimire

A major triumph in recent Nepali politics is a collective realisation that which through violent methods might have taken years to deliver, peaceful process could do it instantly. That was an openly expressed realisation which brought Maoists to the negotiation table eight months ago. Can the approach be different now while dealing with the emerging problems, especially the one in Terai?

The agitation in Terai needs to be understood and explained in the context of people's natural tendency to be a part of power structure, to seek a sense of belonging and to be treated equally during transition, irrespective of birth, class, caste, ethnicity, gender, religion and region one is associated with. These natural aspirations were expressed more vocally in the Terai in the aftermath of the People's movement.

Problems began soon after the ruling seven party alliance and the Maoists excluded people from the political process that followed restoration of peace in the country. All major decisions have been taken in Baluwatar in which only these parties and a selected few from the 'civil society group' are involved. The entire process lacks transparency and the neo-rulers never thought that the people have the right to

be a part of it. The eight parties and others involved never encouraged the participatory process, a major lack of fore-sight.

The assumption that they decide from the precincts of power and the decree must be acceptable to Terai and groups in the hills and the mountains with similar aspirations, is largely responsible for what initially appeared to be a symbolic protest and now is snowballing into a mass movement. The Government of the day and its controlling force, the Maoists, need to realize their demands deserve serious attention, and the leaders of the movement need to be brought to the negotiating table.

The rigid mind-set of the Maoists that Madheshi Janadhikar forum leaders do not carry much support will only add fuel to the fire. Emerging realities cannot be ignored if resolving crisis peacefully is the common aim. MJF's inclusion, no doubt, should pave the way for participation from other geographical and political groupings with similar aspirations so that the process and mechanism of devolution of power to the people is charted out collectively. That will be the real experiment in giving space to the 'sovereign citizens' in decision making process. Prime Minister, G P Koirala, expressed good

intentions when he addressed the nation last week with ample display of emotions. But intentions alone do not work. His address had many flaws. He failed to acknowledge MJF as the emerging face of the movement; he failed to pay tribute to those killed and wounded in the movement, and he made the error of entrusting the responsibility of forming a negotiating team to Home Minister K P Sitaula. This was fatal specially after MJF had declared the minister's resignation as the pre-condition for dialogue.

The outbreak of violence in parts of the country including Koirala's home district and burning of his effigy along with that of Maoist leader Prachanda and Sitaula clearly indicates that Koirala's image as a savior has received a thrashing.

Though the issue of resignation of the Home Minister is one that should have been dictated by his own conscience, for MJF to put it as a pre-condition may not be a good idea. The Government however, cannot ignore investigations into 16 deaths, about a hundred wounded and property destroyed.

Visible are communal undertones going by the incidents in Janakpur, Rautahat, Biratnagar, Jhapa and some other places. The ultimate



accountability of this would lie on the shoulder of the leadership of the movement. A political movement can either be a violent one or a non-violent one. It can not be a bit of both. Its objectives and methods have to be spelt out for which the leadership should be held fully responsible.

The Terai and the associated movement elsewhere essentially revolves round the general aspirations for search of identity and to be a part of inclusive nationalism. It is in a way in a much more advantageous position compared to the Maoist movement. India, United States and the United Kingdom, among others have already 'recognised the fact that while their aspirations are genuine, violence is not the way to achieve the goals'. This translates into the recognition of the movement, but it can easily turn the international community hostile if its leadership fails to contain the violence.

Prime Minister's address though inadequate has shown intentions to solve the crisis peacefully. But the forum leaders' rigid attitude might see the movement slipping out of their hands and giving birth to more radicals. That will be detrimental to national unity and integrity and will stall Nepal's smooth transition towards a meaningful democracy. ■

Violence no solution



Bhaswar Ojha

Cry for inclusion

Political conflict is like a human disease. Its remedy lies in finding the root causes through a chain of diagnosis, analysis, foresight and prescription



■ Dev Raj Dahal

Irrationality of Violence

Violence as a tool of politics belongs to the pre-modern period of history when the concepts of sovereignty, democracy, peace and social justice were not well-defined. Unable to confront future challenges, Nepalese leadership now is heading towards the familiar political discourse rather than a new one.

A democratic political culture rooted in human rights expresses that popular sovereignty can neither be alienated nor delegated to anybody. The dilemma of absolute power in Nepal is therefore peculiar to the spirit of modern politics and in no way stands to the universal validity. Obviously, absolute power requires absolute accountability to the people.

Nepal lacks a sound institutional mechanism to avoid the fatal dialectic of inclusion and exclusion, carry out democratic accountability of a social contract whereby citizens commonly agree to define the foundation of society and the state and facilitate smooth transition to democracy through Constituency Assembly elections.

Now, the structural violence emerging from power centralism and its resistance by subsidiary identities—Madhesi, Janajati, Dalits, women and religious forces is creating an inhospitable climate for modern politics of non-violence.

When society is rationalized by humanitarian norms there is no symbiosis of violence and politics. People of diverse origins can live under the same political sovereignty, subdue anarchy and satisfy their legitimate needs and aspira-

tions. But, minorities in Nepal argue that the imposition of the Interim Constitution is the imposition of the will of the powerful.

The problem of democracy in Nepal is rooted in the primacy of grand narrative of particular units, such as party, class, caste, religion and region rather than synthesizing the visions of these units and eliminating the irrationality of the ends and means of sectoral violence. This is the way to negotiate a mutually acceptable social contract for all the people, rather than just between the rulers themselves.

If key rulers continue to be driven by primordial instincts of self-image, ego, error of judgment and even misreading ground realities there is no hope to escape from spiral of conflict pivoted on the determination of sovereignty and

democracy. The alienation of various groups from the Interim Constitution indicates the flaw of the power of grand narrative to clasp potential dissenters. Alternative to violence must be invented as a tool to score political objectives in the future.

Conflict escalation destroys the nerve system of society and the public order, an order that is essential to create a space for all citizens to peacefully coexist, engage, communicate and effect collective action. Conflict in Nepal has already imposed huge costs for the weaker sections of society who are caught in hierarchically driven structural injustice and who are now resorting to various positions, looking for roots and stressing differences.

Politics of Peace

When peace is at stake, the pre-rational conception of politics does not match the needs of majority of Nepalese looking for social justice. In this politics, power is pitted against power for survival, supremacy and recognition. The political contest of this sort spells out a hard choice for the leadership as to how to reconcile with particular interests of each actor with the general interests of the society.

Primacy of particular interest corrupts discovery of common ground as the highest civic virtue. Absolute power, in the absence of democratic dissent, blinds its users to human feeling, experience and knowledge of ground reality.

Solution of multi-causality of conflict in Nepal

requires the multi-step and multi-track approaches. Dialogue and communication are essential for opening various perspectives

and legislating positive change. Civil society's role lies in articulating the reaction of social causation in public sphere and using non-violent communication techniques, such as early warning, awareness raising, communication and mutual understanding for the fulfillment of rival groups' legitimate objectives.

Rationally speaking Nepalese leadership now is to choose political association according to national affinities thereby reassuring the priority over the reasons of state. The state is a political community and therefore, restoration of its raison d'etre facilitates the activation of democratic process. Similarly, governance reform must embody an element of trust building between civil and military relations so

that national security and democracy can go together. This is important to establish the authority of the state institutions to enforce constitutional rules and manage the nation's geopolitics in this intensely difficult situation.

Peace does not primarily depend on legal acumen but on harmony between state and society mediated by intermediary societal groups and resolution of conflict residues through transitional justice and peace dividends. Civil society can generate a widespread sense of responsibility among political actors to settle various dimensions of conflict and to resolve the modern problem of civil co-existence created by pre-modern politics.

Sustainable peace can be sustained by a framework of social justice. Extension of social justice in every sphere of life allows the expansion of peace throughout the society. Leaders in the government and opposition have special responsibility to establish a balance between order and justice so that diverse citizens begin to cooperate and shape the judgment of younger generations.

Conclusion

Political conflict is like a human disease. Its remedy lies in finding the root causes through a chain of diagnosis, analysis, foresight and prescription. This suggests that political conflicts, then, can be solved through application of reason and reasonable action once the right kind of social contract is invented for integration of each actor—actual, potential and the ignored; and realization of their legitimate needs, concerns and aspirations.

Peace is the zeitgeist of modern times. It has friends within and outside the national borders. In this context, the role of civil and political societies lies in addressing the conflict-producing causes and expanding the space for civil coexistence of all Nepalese citizens. ■



Samatha School



Access to education

Pix by Sushma Amatya

From darkness into light

Determined to banish dark shadows from the lives of vulnerable children, Uttam strives to spread rays of education

■ Sushma Amatya

From hanging out on streets, getting into gang fights, prostitution, begging - to spending nine hours a day in school studying, playing, interacting. From being shooed away, hit, shoved, shouted at and exploited - to being treated as a human being with unlimited potential and as an equal to any other human being. This is how the lives of the orphans and children of very poor parents who would have ended up on streets sooner or later have been changed by Uttam Sanjel, 35, who has dedicated his life to ensuring these children get a decent education.

The plight of girl children who were forced into prostitution hit him hard and created an impetus to do something about it. He said, "It hurt me to see the plight of the children involved in gang fights, pick pocketing, drugs and especially the tragedy of girls who had nobody to shield them from harm. I realised that not just food or clothing but education would help them lead decent lives". Thus inspired, he took the plunge and without much planning, he opened his first school, Samatha Sikcha Niketan in Jorpati in BS 2058. "Samatha means equality. It's our motto. No matter where the children come from, or which class they belong to, here in the school, they are all equal", Uttam added.

This was the major turning point in Uttam's life who till then had been struggling in the world of films, assisting in directing TV serials. He now is a committed education provider for three schools (second one in Bhaktapur and the third one in Gwarkho carrying the same name) that provides free education for 10,000 children out of which 75 pc are girls.

Uttam said extremely poor families who were living in slum areas were prone to having many children they were unable to take care of with their meager wages as labourers. And many men from that background suffered from the misconception of prioritising a boy child over a girl child that led to them leaving their wives after having several girl children in a row. "I have eight fatherless girls from one family studying in my school now", said he.

The three schools follow government curriculum and besides the fees of Rs. 150 registration charge, the only other fees the school asks for is Rs. 100 as monthly toilet cleaning fee. Around 1000 children who are unable to raise any fees are supported by the school that includes stationary and tiffin in the afternoon and uniform is provided to all children. Uttam said he's been receiving all the financial support from Nepali people so far and added most of the visitors to this school end up supporting it in some way or the other.

Having seen the lives of the children inside out, he expressed sadness about their parents'

attitude towards girl children, "some parents send their sons to a 'boarding school' (English medium) that costs them 500 rupees per month and just dump their daughters here as it costs them next to nothing. But a girl child sent here ended up helping her brother who went to 'boarding school' with his studies. And a girl

working as domestic help used to go back and help her employer's son. Offended, the parents took the girl out and sent her to a government school. They did not want the 'servant' girl to do better than their son. That incident really hurt me". He said most parents simply don't realise the value of education. "They just don't know what education means".

Constructed entirely out of low cost, local materials, mainly bamboo, all three schools carry a distinct, arty look. He recalled that he made his first school from bamboo donated by residents of Gothatar VDC. "I made it with my own hands with help of my friends and I believe in making anything I make as beautiful as possible. It brings joy to whoever looks at it."

Speaking of challenges he said finding funds every year for the schools is a huge task that occupies his mind all the time. Uttam said, "the three pieces of land are taken on lease for which I have to pay a hefty amount, and there's a big sum that I have to pay as salary since I hire mostly trained teachers. I worry so much, I guess I've become immune to it! But God has been kind to me and I've been able to scrape by so far. But I definitely need more help now."

He added his aim was to target all the districts. "We are trying to start one in Banepa, Kavre, concentrating on town areas; where children of migrants are left on their own by working parents. Such children are the most vulnerable."

Uttam takes pride in being able to instill in his children that they must not beg. "Earlier, we used to see our children in uniforms begging in Boudha but not anymore."

His vision is to educate his children till class 12 and get the most capable ones to take charge of one school in every district. "I also plan to adopt the Grameen Bank method and use it to benefit women in villages; and use it's returns to educate their children. And I also wish to open a small hospital for these children who suffer from many maladies due to poor nutrition and hygiene."

Full of ideas and energy to match it seems there's no obstacle that can't be surmounted by this samaritan. ■





Newsfront

Reach out, don't hide



Raise your awareness to ensure your children are not lured into addiction of any kind

■ Ragina Shah

Most parents believe that the dreaded scourge of drug addiction will never cast its shadows on their homes and take it for granted their children will stay far away from clutches of addiction. But the harsh reality that we as supervisors of drug rehab centers have learned to accept is that children who are as young as ten could start walking the path beginning with seemingly harmless act of smoking a cigarette.

Parents discover their children's addiction to smoking tobacco, marijuana, alcohol and other drugs usually only after a year or two. Drug addicts in Nepal have increased three times or more than the stated estimate of 60,000 stated in UN report of 2051.

Prime factors in the rise of drug addiction in our country are lack of awareness, peer pressure, identity crisis, bad company, lack of attention or over protection by parents, and pressure from parents to be someone they are not or cannot be. A boy or a girl venturing out to try something exciting thinks he or she can very well keep it under control but before the child knows it, it soon spirals out of control and the addiction has already tightened its grip on the hapless victim. The temporary 'high' and unrealistic sense of control derived from using drugs of any kind gives one a false sense of control over one's life.

Sooner we learn how vulnerable children are and communicate with them, earlier the signs of despondency, restlessness and other signs of addiction are spotted and quicker help is sought, the better are chances of recovery. We should realise that addiction of any kind is a sickness and treatment must be sought. It is nothing to be ashamed of. Would we be ashamed of taking our child to a doctor when sick with any other disease that the child has developed or

contracted? So why do we hide it when our child suffers from addiction?

Parents should make it a point to let their children know that once they try out any drugs, they stand a high chance of getting addicted to it and once addicted, they are rendered powerless and urgently need help. Anybody suffering from addiction tends to think he is not doing any harm to anyone else but only himself. In reality, an addict affects his family adversely and everybody else who cares about him. Apart from creating grief, agony and financial loss for the family, an addicted person suffers from severe mental and physical pain.

To find anybody in this bottomless pit unable to reach out a hand is a tragedy that must no longer be ignored or hidden. We have to stop blaming parents when a child turns out to be an addict. No parent would knowingly make his/her child an addict. Addiction is a condition resulting from a sum total of hundreds of other contributing factors. In the process of helping an addicted person recover, the family also needs support from other members of society.

There are about 46 rehabilitation centers in Nepal that deliver various methods of treatment. Out of those five or six offer free treatment. It's a beginning but we still have a long way to go in terms of educating, informing the society as a whole, getting rid of the stigma that surrounds this issue, make treatment easier to access by all, and establish more centers that reach out to the poor.

(Ragina trained in Narconon technology rehab center, Melbourne, Australia. She is working as a supervisor in a rehab center in Hattigauda, Ktm)

Queries related to addiction of any kind can be addressed to: newsfront@bhrikuti.com. Outstanding issues will be short listed and dealt with by the expert in future issues ■

Book Review

A different Bangladesh

■ Dr Bishal Dhakal

A Nobel peace prize to an economist would naturally raise many eye-brows. That's exactly what happened when Muhammad Yunus, founder of the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. By addressing one of the root causes of possible conflict, poverty, Yunus rightfully got what he deserved.

His efforts to reduce poverty by using micro-credit system as a base is an example of how it has helped the poor to live better in Bangladesh. In 1983 Muhammad Yunus established the Grameen bank (bank of villages) with hope that it would provide the poorest with small loans. It was purely a personal initiative to help the poor lift themselves out of poverty, but with their own involvement. In 1976, when the country was hit by famine, Yunus began his programme with mere 27 dollars, all that he had then. He distributed

this amount as credit to 42 families in a tiny village, Jobra, situated close to University of Chittagong where he once worked.

There was no looking back for him after that. In just three decades, the total number of borrowers now stands at 6.61 million of which 97 per cent are rural women. The bank has 2,226 branches, covers 71,371 villages, total staff number is 18,795; and loan recovery rate is 98.85%. Since its inception, the loans distributed amounts to US\$ 5.72 billion, and in a record performance, US \$ 5.07 billion has been repaid.

The book contains a vivid description and insights into the bank's birth, its battle against poverty and dedication to the poor. The book in a way is also an autobiography of Prof Yunus and his baby, the Grameen Bank. The 262-page book divided into 14 sections envisages and argues for a world sans poverty.

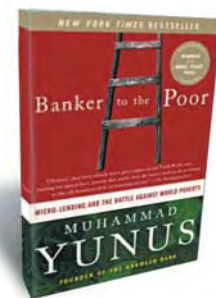
Written in simple language, its about a mission for simple rural folks. It portrays a Bangladesh different from the one we know. Far

from issues of political instability, cyclones, floods, and a country often run down by media around the world, it just focuses on the outstanding concept of Grameen Bank and how it was translated into reality.

The book dwells on a few theoretical approaches in the study of the poor population and most importantly, the Grameen science detects ten indicators to define poverty and prescribes ways to get out of it.

Yunus's suffered a lot before he could gain peoples trust and secure government cooperation. A rigid bureaucratic structure and mind-set, and NGOs and INGOs repeated failure to identify the potentiality of micro financed small scale self employing entrepreneurship made things all the more difficult.

The Grameen bank concept required defining skills which was a self identifying process. Yunus suggests skill training is less important than economic independence of poor, something which has always been at the center-

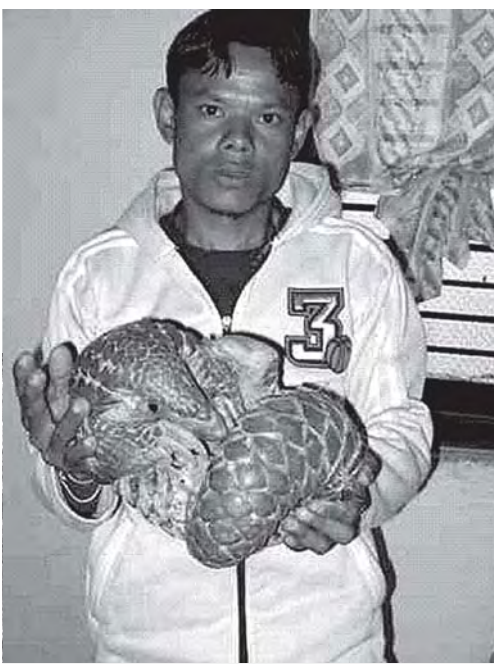


Banker to the Poor: Micro lending and the battle against the world poverty
By Muhammad Yunus
Published by PublicAffairs, New York

stage of his crusade against poverty. Developing an ability and asking for the loan of one's choice was a new culture developed under the concept.

With these small projects, Yunus created a huge and socially responsible entrepreneurship. It brought technology within the realms of reality in the rural Bangladesh, and in the aid of the poorest.

Despite the visible successful model in the fight against poverty, Professor Yunus's dream to keep poverty in museum seems an ambitious dream given the realities. But the book definitely encourages one to be socially responsible. Without a sense of responsibility and action in favour of the poor, the future would not be a safe place to live in. ■



Vulnerable animals, insatiable greed



An appetite for body parts of wild animals across the globe is nothing new but the past five years have shown this demand on a sharp rise. It has hit Nepal's conservation mission sorely. One-horned rhinos and tigers, both endangered species, face near extinction, thanks to poachers and Government's indifference in taking action against them.

Nepal is estimated to have lost at least 252 rhinos during the five years beginning 2001, mostly feared poached. 19 tigers were confirmed 'poached' during the period while 21 suffered natural deaths. Bardia's tiger population has slumped down to 3 from 11 as the 'poaching epidemic' leaves the fate of 325 tigers as per the last census, uncertain. According to the official sources, a census carried in early 2000 showed rhino population in Chitwan at 620, around 300 less than India's Kaziranga forest which had the largest one-horned rhino population of 900 at the time.

Altogether 90 rhinos were trans-located to Bardina National Park on experts' suggestion that a population of 100 would make the endangered population sustainable. The population which crossed 100 with births of baby rhinos has now dwindled down, as at least 87 were killed by poachers.

"You cannot stop poaching altogether, but the sharp rise indicates poachers network is spreading. There

is an easy market willing to pay them, and they enjoy a certain degree of protection from the authorities," a government official said on condition of anonymity.

In June last year, Jagdish Lodha, wanted by the Governments of India and Nepal, with strong links with the poaching trade, was arrested following an initiative by Wildlife Conservation Nepal (WCN), an organisation that works with an objective to conserve and protect wildlife. Lodha had sold over 30 tiger skins to local dealers who in turn supply them to the lucrative market in Tibet. But he was released on bail soon after and has never surfaced again. He belongs to the Bawaria community, a nomadic tribe from Haryana. Several members of the tribe are found indulging in poaching in Sarishka National park along the border with Rajasthan. Lodha is not an isolated case.

The source cited there are Tibetans as well as Nepalis working in the trade with the local and international agents. According to the information gathered by the anti-poaching groups, a rhino horn fetches around five million Rupees abroad, at least five times more than in the local market. Elephant tusks and almost every part of a tiger fetches huge amount

outside as it has medicinal, 'collectors item' as well as food value.

Strict vigilance and laws are required to control poaching but unless and until the family members of those in the trade are given some incentives to be part of the campaign, the measures cannot be effective, said Prasanna Yonjan, CEO of WCN. He added, "it's very difficult to deal with the corrupt officials who take very lenient views towards the poachers even after they are caught."

That's precisely what has happened. The number of poachers released on bail, specially on orders from Gopal Upadhyay, warden of the National wildlife in Chitwan has risen almost in the same proportion to the cases of poaching over the years. At least half a dozen notorious poachers, some of them suspected ring leaders of the crime, were let off during the period. And once out on bail, they get back into the act with vengeance. This is ironic since Nepal does have the most stringent laws against poaching.

A few prize arrests of those in the trade who are believed to be a part of the international racket has come as a deterrent to this organized crime. Tsewang alias Tashi Tsering who was

Nepal is estimated to have lost at least 252 rhinos during the five years beginning 2001, mostly feared poached. 19 tigers were confirmed 'poached' during the period.



wanted by the Criminal Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in India for an INTERPOL alert remains under trial in Nepal. Tsering, originally a Tibetan, is believed to have a wide nexus in China, Nepal and India. And his involvement had come to light in Nepal following a seizure of 279 wild life skins including that of five tigers, 36 leopards, 238 otters and 113 kg of tiger bones - in September 2005.

Poaching also involves crude form of torture of animals since almost every part of those animals has a market. Maiming tigers, rhinos and elephants mercilessly, chopping off their body parts are common practices. De-horning alone is not the modus operandi of the poachers. Since tiger and leopard skins with bullet holes are valued less, trapping the hapless animals for unruptured skin, is preferred. The horrendous details of these inhuman acts could go on and on.

The increase in demand, rise in the scale of poaching and lack of awareness about how important conservation and preservation of wild life is for sustaining eco-balance all contribute to this flourishing racket. Just goes to show how fast Nepal's precious heritage is being robbed and so easily.



GREEN STARS

Kate Bosworth 1 ton

The actress, best known for her role as Lois Lane in 'Superman Returns', turns off equipment at the wall when she is not using it, making a saving of 0.9 tons a year. Further, the US star buys only local food, making savings of an extra 0.1 tons.

Josh Hartnett 1.6 tons

Actor Hartnett ensures he unplugs his phone charger when it is not in use, saving 0.2 tons of CO₂, while low-energy bulbs up his savings by 0.4 tons. But his biggest contribution is the Toyota Prius he has driven for several years, accounting for one ton each year.

Jake Gyllenhaal 1.4 tons

Gyllenhaal, best known for his role in 'Brokeback Mountain' saves a ton of CO₂ every year by driving a Toyota Prius around LA. The star of 'Donnie Darko' uses Compact Fluorescent Light bulbs more commonly known as energy-saving light bulbs, saving 0.4 tons of CO₂.

Leonardo DiCaprio 2 tons

The Oscar-nominated actor drives a Toyota Prius, which saves one ton of carbon dioxide. He cuts down on electricity usage with long-life, low-energy light bulbs which add another 0.4 tons to his savings. DiCaprio also makes another major contribution by recycling his landfill waste which contributes an extra 0.6 tons.

Green: They are. Are you?

Stars are setting out to save the planet. And they want you to help them

Acting cool will help save the planet, according to top stars, who are setting out to convince the world. They have launched a 10-year campaign to try to make environmentally friendly living fashionable, thus putting pressure on world leaders to act. The multimillion-pound campaign, which has won the admiration of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, aims to persuade a billion people worldwide to take simple steps to reduce their emissions of carbon dioxide, the main cause of global warming, by one ton per year.

The stars plan to lead by example, showing how they themselves have already done this - and more - through measures ranging from switching off their televisions at the wall to installing solar panels and driving hybrid cars.

The campaign, called Global Cool, will use pop concerts, webcasts and mass texting to get the message across. The organisers stress that they want to make people feel good by reducing their carbon footprints, rather than guilty about

the amount of pollution they produce.

The Scottish singer KT Tunstall will front the campaign; she has personally saved more than four tons of CO₂ a year by deciding not to have a car, installing energy-efficient lightbulbs, showering instead of having baths (except when "really tired") and unplugging all her electrical equipment when she is not using it. On top of that, she runs her American tour bus on biodiesel and makes her CDs carbon neutral.

The actors Orlando Bloom, Jude Law and Josh Hartnett have also joined the campaign. And a battery of other stars - including Brad Pitt, Jake Gyllenhaal, Cameron Diaz, Leonardo DiCaprio, Julia Roberts and George Clooney - have reduced their footprints through the work of another organisation, the Environmental Media Association, which is forming a partnership with Global Cool.

In the world of music, Pink, the Scissor Sisters, the Killers, Sugababes, Maroon 5 and

Razorlight are all supporting the drive.

"So many people are getting involved that it is becoming really quite uncool not to be involved," says Tunstall. "It's really shocking when someone tells you how much carbon dioxide is emitted by keeping your phone charger plugged in. "The music industry has always been trend led, and the culture we live in is so obsessed with celebrity and fashion that they have great power to raise the profile of the issue."

Global Cool is the brainchild of a former music broker and advertising executive, Dan Morrell, who was one of the first to develop the idea of carbon offsetting, reducing the impact of flights and other polluting activities by planting trees and investing in energy-saving programmes.

Ten years ago, he founded Future Forests, now known as the CarbonNeutral Company, using a phrase he coined. But he came to realise that, by itself, this only scratched the surface of the problem. He decided the answer was to

persuade people to cut back their emissions by making this "an aspirational lifestyle". He enlisted Hollywood stars, raised finance in the City and, with the help of environmentalists and business people, put together an unusually well-thought-through campaign.

The idea is that anyone can easily save well over one ton of CO₂ a year. Unplugging phone chargers, TVs, DVD players and microwaves when not in use will save 0.9 tons. Turning the central heating thermostat down will save another 0.6, and replacing lightbulbs with energy efficient ones up to 0.4.

For pollution that cannot be reduced, a sophisticated offset scheme has been devised, which aims to help to drive up the price of carbon on the market, so encouraging businesses to economise. By creating a mass movement, Global Cool's organisers hope to force politicians to take action. ■

(The Independent)

Bhutan King to visit India

Indo-Bhutan treaty of 1949 to be amended.

Marking a significant change in its approach towards smaller neighbours, India will sign the amended version of its 1949 treaty with Bhutan next week. It's learnt that newly chosen Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuk will visit Delhi between February 7 and 10 to sign the revised treaty allowing Bhutan more independence in its foreign policy and defence relations. He will be accompanied by foreign minister, Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk, and senior officials of the Bhutan government.

The two significant changes are in Article 2 and Article 6 of the 1949 Indo-Bhutan treaty. According to Article 2, Bhutan is to be "guided by the advice of the Government of India in regard to its external relations". This is being replaced by a language of cooperation, which would essentially translate into Thimpu not acting against Indian interests in the conduct of

its foreign policy.

The other change will be in Article 6 that allows Bhutan to import "arms, ammunition, machines, warlike material or stores" for its "strength" and "welfare" but with India's "assistance and approval". This will be relaxed to the extent that Thimpu can go ahead and purchase non-lethal wares for its defence forces without having to obtain Indian approval. Also, for other purchases, India is keen to send out a message that it does not want to play monitor on Bhutan's Defence procurements.

Article 4 that talks about return of land in Dewangiri will be scrapped as the matter has been settled long ago. The signing of the treaty with the new King, South Block officials said, is intended to recognise the efforts being made in Thimpu to establish democracy. The country will have its first elections next year and a mock

election is being planned in the next six months.

According to New Delhi, the changes reflect the contemporary nature of India's relations with Bhutan and more accommodating spirit towards smaller neighbours. Wangchuk, who is still to be formally coronated, was announced as next monarch last year. This will be his first visit after the announcement and he will be meeting Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee besides holding talks with a range of other leaders.

India, sources said, is prepared to work out similar changes with Nepal once the political transition to a new Constitution is complete. In doing so, India would address one of the key concerns of the Nepalese Maoists who have been calling for the abrogation of the 1950 Indo-Nepal treaty. ■

(The Indian Express)



Cultural Essence



■ Neeva M. Pradhan

The weather is perfect for landing. The air quality outside appears crisp under the dusky sky. The jet liner cuts through the quiet, peaceful atmosphere breaking the monotony outside. Soon the runway tar is partially visible as the plane descends for landing. The city lights are quaint and pastoral, but the breathtaking view of the hills, mountains, valleys, rivers, mud huts, and cows grazing along the runway provides a picturesque reaffirmation that I am home. The panoramic view has the effect of churning my emotions and makes me realize how I can quickly make peace with the world I have been estranged from.

There are myriad thoughts rushing through my mind upon descending from the plane. I am grateful for the soft landing and I revel in a brief moment of self reflection. The anticipation is almost unbearable as I try to contain my excitement of an imminent reunion with my family. This state of euphoria is further heightened by familiar surroundings at the Tribhuban International Airport, and the relaxed welcome from attendants decorated with Nepali *topi* is refreshing. Their friendly disposition puts me in a comfort zone to refer to them as 'dai' or brother, a customary practice to establish affiliation and belongingness to the same culture.

Stepping down from the plane, I encounter a warm casual grin from one of the men. Instantly he extends a helping hand with an even broader smile and offers, "dinus ma boki dinchu" (here I can carry it for you). I instinctively let go of my hand carrier and bag with a sigh of relief. This is what I have been waiting for, almost expectantly, after twenty three harrowing hours of flight. I feel ecstatic to have abandoned the laconic, robotic life in the USA for the time being.

Looking back there is no explanation for the lunacy. It is a Herculean task to travel alone with two boys, ages two and six while my husband is tucked away in a fancy hotel room on his office trip. The time change, air quality, altitude, incessant ear popping, food or the lack of it, and the congested economy class seating, all contribute to the crankiness, restlessness and misery for the boys during the entire flight. I lack expertise to administer

my otherwise two well-adjusted and agreeable offspring during this insanely tedious flight. We desperately need respite from the cramped space. They are as anxious as I to vacate the ominous machine.

Once outside, I hastily unfold the stroller and seat my toddler. It gives me an opportunity to straighten up their crumpled clothing and arrange their disheveled and unkempt hair from the long journey. The fresh twinkle in their eyes reflects the state of my relief. Clasp my six year-olds' hand we start to trot to the entrance with a light gait and smile. Engaging in small conversations with the attendant who has taken full charge of my luggage, I arrive in a state to savor the bucolic and unperturbed life I remember.

Now fifteen years later and after a dozen such trips to Nepal, I am still enthralled by the simplicity and beauty of first impressions at landing. I am constantly impressed by the human element and personal touch, like the one shown by the airport attendant, which comes naturally from a culture that values relationships and people. Much to my chagrin however, apart from this initial nostalgic moment where my expectations are met at each landing, I witness tremendous transformation in the social, cultural, religious and political aspects of life in Nepal which could be both a boon and a bane.

In this internet age, Nepal has to a large extent succumbed to the trend of the west. The pace of change seems almost uncontrollable and there appears to be marked difference at each of my visits. One cannot deny that there is great progress materially where new department stores, various ethnic restaurants, international financing companies, businesses, foreign cars, newspapers with a voice, magazines to cater to various social classes and gender, television shows provide various amenities and convenience for the citizens. Then there are other aspects of change that are less than desirable. The crowded streets mainly from the influx of cars, the increase in pollution and noise level, the chaotic traffic pattern, the violent video games that have robbed simple joys and family values are the fallacy of modernization.

I am hopeful that the intrinsic mystery of Nepal, that enigma, the essence, the simplicity and beauty of the place will remain encapsulated in time regardless of any external changes. Only then can I hope for the same exhilarating homecoming I have enjoyed during each landing! ■



Revelation

In jest and seriously



■ Sushma Amatya

Writers and wanna be writer's block gets unblocked when you talk about the three letter word, sex. Now, this taboo subject is the most favorite to dwell on for all those broadminded ones and also those who prefer to talk about it only under the shadows.

Gifted that we are with prudishness, to the extent of appearing divinely inspired celibates, we pretend we have no desires. Children are god's gifts and going by the statistics, we have been generously showered with such bundles of joy. Blessed also with a high degree of self-righteousness, we are quick to pass judgment on others who don't pass our standards of morality, and proudly put ourselves on a pedestal higher than other lowly sinners.

Temptations loom large for those in the Y zone. One just needs to watch men, age no bar, who furtively ogle at the not so discreetly pasted posters of half naked women on side walls when they drive past.

learned to hide or conspire.

In this dog eat dog world, even tiny tots wisen up pretty fast. Two eight year olds were observing such a free show and one commented, "Well, now they will have small puppies but you know, our parents didn't have to do it to have us." Just goes to prove the fact that they were indeed delivered by storks. Well versed in birds and bees early on, the idea of parents copulating indeed doesn't seem to appeal to any children, whatever their age.

Moving away from this steamy subject that would burn your fingers if you dip it in for too long, another question looms large in this wandering mind. That of women going out to attend wedding parties and other social do's in the freezing cold of recent December clad only in dazzling sarees, small blouses and flimsy shawls thrown over shoulders carelessly or draped ever so lightly so as not to cover the jewellery displayed. In sharp contrast were men wrapped up in woolies, top coats and

huddled together for more warmth; sometimes only their eyes and mouths visible.

This certainly warrants an investigation. What could be the secret of the super-women who brave

In this dog eat dog world, even tiny tots wisen up pretty fast. Two eight year olds were observing such a free show and one commented, "Well, now they will have small puppies but you know, our parents didn't have to do it to have us."

Those in the X zone have nothing to stare at, since they don't see men exhibited like they are; and so they glare at the well endowed digitally manipulated pictures and compare it with what they have and wonder what their male counterparts are fantasising about.

Perhaps women ought to put a hold on their brains too, take out a rally, block traffic during office hours, burn tyres, add to air and soil pollution, call for Bandhs, let the sick die and national economy rot – and demand for an equitable exposure of both sexes in the media. But having had more than enough of all that wayward expressions, it's time to turn our attention to more interesting matters and look at nature. Far more relaxed with nature are the canines, man's best friends.

But their relaxed attitude ends up causing much commotion among their 'civilised' two legged friends. One day some time in the month of Kartik (Oct–Nov) reputed to be the hot month for dogs, a father was trying hard to turn his son's attention away from the sight of a pair of dogs busy in the act. Well, canines who don't conform to human mores are least bothered about any embarrassment they might be causing. Creatures of nature never

risks of cold related illnesses, if not hypothermia? Was it super circulation boosted by invisible rays sent out by the men folk enjoying the parade? Or was it self radiation created out of smug satisfaction derived from displaying what have you or what have you on to catch other women's envy?

Ruminating too long on these weighty matters might prove to be too much on minds already overloaded by new jargons, statements, ideologies flaring up in the local skies. Time to take a break from all this drama and pray. Pray for patience and using common sense and not getting swayed by what you instinctively know is wrong. Pray for tolerance and acceptance of differences and co-existence in harmony; and for those on seats of power not to grow roots on their chairs.

Or else, we might just end up inviting the fate of the dinosaurs, that fought and pushed each other into the abyss of destruction and resulted in being a species long extinct. Dinosaurs may have swayed their heads high up in the skies but once extinct, nothing remained and if we invite similar fates, there'll be no more parties, no more talk of sex. What could be more boring than that? ■



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I'll marry Brad



Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt will marry later this year – fulfilling a tearful promise made by the actress to her dying mother.

The pledge came just hours before Angelina's mum, Marcheline Bertrand, lost her seven-year battle with ovarian cancer.

A close friend of the family said: "Marcheline held Angie's hand and told her, You marry that man. He's an angel sent to look after you."

Soon after Marcheline, 56, who was also an actress, was admitted to Cedars Sinai Medical Centre, in Los Angeles, last weekend, Angelina flew to her side by private jet with Brad from New Orleans, where he is shooting a movie there.

The couple stayed at her bedside as a nanny looked after their eight-month-old daughter Shiloh and adopted children Maddox, five, and Zahara, two, at their Malibu mansion.

The friend said, "Although she was heavily

she was. She was our best friend."

In a US magazine interview last year, Angelina lavished praise on Marcheline, who enrolled her and her brother in Hollywood's famous Strasberg Institute acting school when they were in their early teens.

Angelina said: "She raised us – and helped us to become our own people. We are very much her life and I think we help her feel complete."

Angelina, who saw her mother slowly deteriorate after diagnosed with cancer, paid for her to live in a suite at the luxurious Raffles L'Ermitage Hotel in Beverly Hills and visited her regularly.

In contrast, she still refuses to see Voigt. She was only 10 when he walked out.

The friend said: "Marcheline's death has done nothing to heal the rift between Angie and her father. She's never forgiven him for

Twice married and divorced Angelina, 31, is likely to honour her dying mother's wish for her to wed Brad, 43. "I think it's very likely they will tie the knot quickly – possibly as early as spring."



medicated, Marcheline was very calm and very lucid towards the end.

"She asked Brad to look after Angelina and the children. Then she looked her daughter in the eyes and repeated what she'd been saying over and over to her for months. She told her to marry Brad and said he was like an angel who'd been sent to look over her.

"Angelina told me later that she could barely see through her tears. She was utterly choked. She has always been so close to her Mom."

Within hours, Marcheline died peacefully as her Oscar winning daughter wept in Brad's arms. With them was Angelina's 33-year-old brother, actor James Haven, who, like his sister, was fathered by Oscar winner Jon Voigt.

Voigt walked out when they were children. In an emotional official joint statement, the siblings, who remained close to each other as well as their mother, said: "There are no words to express what an amazing woman and mother

abandoning them and I believe she will take that resentment to her own grave."

But twice married and divorced Angelina, 31, is likely to honour her dying mother's wish for her to wed Brad, 43.

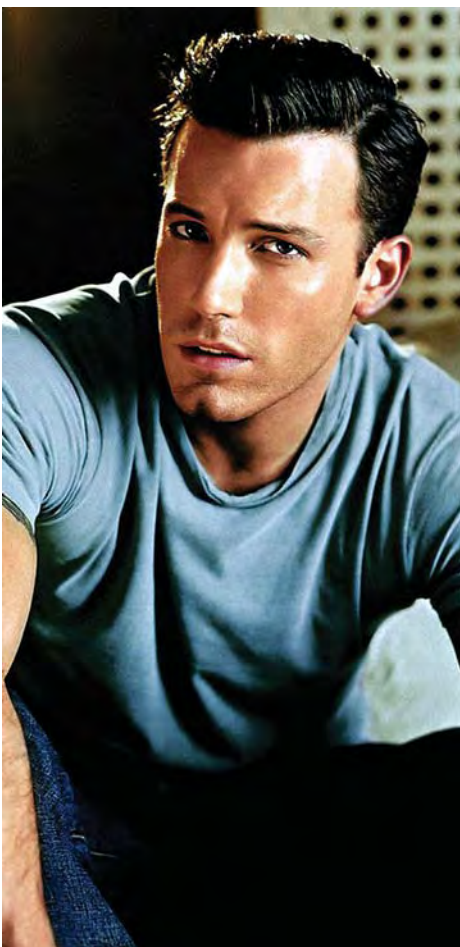
The friend added: "Brad has never stopped trying to push her down the aisle but she's always resisted, saying that it's the children who legally bind them together. Now she'll make good on her death bed promise. I think she always had a little dream that if she did wed Brad, it would be Marcheline who would give her away.

"Sadly, that can't be. But it shows how close she and Brad are, that Marcheline almost looked on him as a son. She thought the world of him and was constantly nagging Angie to 'wed that man'.

"I think it's very likely they will tie the knot quickly – possibly as early as spring." ■

(UK Express)

Smokin' Aces Made Ben Quit Smoking



For the last year or so, Ben Affleck's biggest role has been playing dad to 1-year-old Violet and husband to Jennifer Garner. But last month's Golden Globe nod for *Hollywoodland* and a new role in *Smokin' Aces* has landed him back in the spotlight.

The actor, 34, tells about early-morning baby duty, working with brother Casey and getting back into the Hollywood swing of things.

Are you enjoying awards show season?

The tilt-a-whirl is nice every now and then. ... But, like anything, you can overdo it.

You may not have won, but congrats on the Golden Globe nomination.

I was very happy. My wife was up early with our child and [woke me up] to tell me I'd been nominated – and to get me to change the baby.

You play a chain-smoking bail bondsman in *Smokin' Aces*. You're a smoker, right?

The whole week that I shot, I smoked, like, five packs a day. By the time the movie was over, I was so sick of smoking, I just didn't want to do it anymore, and I quit. I have this celluloid record of the last time I smoked.

How was directing your brother Casey, 31, in *Gone, Baby, Gone*?

A pleasure. It was like directing anybody else, except I could fantasize that if it came down to it I could throttle him.

(People)

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