



Courage & Conviction

news front

Kathmandu | 14-20 May, 2007 | # 16 | Price Rs. 25



YCL activists on the march to submit a million plus signatures in favour of Republican Nepal to Speaker Subash Nemwang in the capital on Sunday.

Bhaswar Chha

Unsafe Nepal

UN contemplating evacuation of expatriates

■ Sushma Amatya

Signaling that Nepal's security situation might take a nose dive, the UN seems to be preparing unprecedented measures for the safety of its expatriate employees posted in Nepal. All such employees and their dependents might soon be asked to obtain Indian Visa, a UN source said.

This is an indication that if the situation deteriorates further and an emergency situation arises, the UN employees may have to evacuate to India, the nearest safe country. The unprecedented UN move follows the United States government issuing travel advisory to its citizens against their visit to Nepal. The travel advisory was reissued almost after a gap of seven months after the peace process resulted in formation of interim parliament and the interim government. The US continues to have the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) on its terrorist list.

But the UN move appears odd since its offices are involved in the peace process with the Secretary General and the office of the UN Human Rights Commissioner in their separate offices in Nepal. However, of late the UN has been critical of the activities of the Maoists

specially for their not returning the confiscated property of private individuals, obstructing the verification of combatants in the cantonments, and violent activities that the Young Communist League cadres have been carrying out in many parts of the country. The UN has also asked the Maoists to immediately demobilise its child soldiers. All these however, have drawn no positive response from the Maoists.

This coupled with the violence, agitation, abduction and execution by armed groups in Terai has contributed to the international bodies reviewing their assessment of safety situation in Nepal. "We have no idea if UN is going to ask its expatriate employees to seek Indian Visas," a senior official in the foreign ministry said. "We however understand that for the UN, the safety of its employees is an important issue for which they will always be alert to."

In the event of such an evacuation taking place, Nepal will be considered an unsafe place like Afghanistan in the South Asia region, the UN source said. It added that Nepal's situation is being assessed at regular basis in New York and any incidence of violence taking place here will have a bearing in the move. ■

Nepal may be considered an unsafe place like Afghanistan in the South Asia region.

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a great flying experience

Inside Outlawing JTMM: Stop genocide on page 2

Pyar Jung Thapa



Newsfront

Stop, don't go

■ nf correspondent

In yet another clandestine operation, the government today stopped ex-chief of the army staff, Gen Pyar Jung Thapa, from going abroad. Thapa was told verbally by an individual carrying, 'order from higher up' at the airport that he would not be allowed to board the flight. By then he had completed all the security and immigration formalities.

Thapa apparently had secured Prime Minister G P Koirala's 'green signal' to attend a ceremony at Sandhurst in his honour. Commission of Investigation on Abuse of Authority (CIAA) which is interrogating Thapa and others implicated by the Rayamajhi Commission had earlier asked to him to be available a month later. "We have no knowledge about who stopped him. It must have come from above," a joint secretary at the Home Ministry said.

Roop Jyoti, a minister during the Royal regime won a case from the Supreme Court recently after he challenged government authorities that stopped him at the airport twice without giving anything in writing. There are reports that the government, under direct supervision of the Home Minister, has prepared a list of more than two dozen people, "who should not be allowed to leave the country."



Melamchi river

Newsfront

Politicians squabble while public suffer drought

War over water

■ nf correspondent

Melamchi Drinking Water Development Project has once again emerged as a contentious issue that may not only bring Prime Minister G P Koirala and the Maoists minister Hishila Yami on a war path, but also warrant international aid embargo on the country.

Koirala is under pressure from Asian Development Bank (ADB) to implement previous commitments including handing over the management of drinking water supply for the capital city, to a U K based company - Seven Trent, by the third week of May; as a pre-condition for ADB's financial support for the project to continue.

The message was conveyed to Finance Minister, Dr Ram Sharan Mahat, during his visit to Japan where the board of ADB met recently. "The ADB Chief's message that he was not happy with the present government, and its lack of seriousness has been conveyed to the Prime Minister," a high level

government source told newsfront.

But the project's fate hangs undecided since Minister Yami has been resisting the management handover firmly. Although Koirala is believed to have assured ADB that one minister cannot stop the project and that he is committed to it; his inability to formalise the agreement with Seven Trent, is delaying further work on the project for which ADB as the nodal donor has committed to spend 170 million U S dollars.

Seven Trent, the sole bidder for the project, has approached the government repeatedly warning that the government might have to face consequences if it did not formalise the contract by the new deadline of the third week of May (May 15).

Beginning with the handover of the management of drinking water to the British company for a period of six years, the Melamchi project is to begin its work on road and tunnel construction. As per the agreement, each tap in the capital will have

one hour minimum water flow in the first year which will be doubled in the second. It is also obliged to replace all the old water supply pipes in Kathmandu.

An official in the Ministry of Physical Planning told newsfront that Minister Yami had already asked the secretary to unilaterally annul the contract proposal with the British company, but she chose the other option of writing to the cabinet for review, since terminating the contract was something beyond her jurisdiction.

Official sources said more than 100 million dollars that came in as external assistance, has been spent on 'improving' the drinking water condition in the capital with no success. In response to the pressure from the donors, mainly ADB; the G P Koirala government with Yami's predecessor, Gopal Man Shrestha as the minister in charge, had decided to handover the management to Seven Stern, the only bidder, two months ago. ■

Outlawing JTMM

Stop genocide or face Nepal army

■ nf correspondent

The government is contemplating outlawing the Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (JTMM) led by Jayakrishna Goit and deploying Nepal army following acts of 'genocide' it has been carrying out. PM G P Koirala is believed to have discussed the issue with some of his cabinet colleagues and diplomats.

The threat of genocide, according to the official sources, has become more real now after Goit declared that more government officials from the hills would be annihilated. The threat came after the JTMM owned responsibility for the killing of government engineer Nabaraaj Bista. Three more officials are still in JTMM group's captivity.

According to the information available, Koirala has been taking up the issue especially with Indian Ambassador S S Mukherjee during the last one month or so, expressing

concern that Goit should not be allowed to use Indian territory to carry out criminal activities in Nepal. Koirala has been assured of maximum cooperation in discouraging criminal activities directed at Nepal from the Indian side, the sources said.

Koirala's last meeting with Mukherjee on Saturday centered on the fuel crisis. He urged Mukherjee to do his best to release more petroleum for Nepal with the promise that Nepal Oil Corporation would speed up the process of clearing in part the 5.4 billion Rupees that it owes to the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC). But the meeting also focused on the Terai problem and Goit group setting up a base in India.

However, Goit's India base alone is not the cause of Koirala's headache. His own minister, Rajendra Mahato, said publicly that if Madhesh is not given to the Madheshis, hill people would be driven away from there; this



Bhaswar Ojha

Slain engineer Nawaraj Bista being cremated at Aryaghat on Saturday.

was said in a tone that tallied with the spirit and action of the Goit group.

The first ever suggestion to outlaw the JTMM group led by Goit along with the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF); and use Nepal Army as well as the Maoists affiliated guerrillas against them, had come from the Maoist Chief Prachanda about six weeks ago. "We are seriously considering using Nepal army against Goit if he does not stop these acts of genocide, but Maoist guerrillas cannot

be part of the NA operation," a senior cabinet minister told newsfront.

While the government has been holding parleys with the MJF leader Upendra Yadav, the possibility of such dialogues taking place with JTMM-G is remote as long as it does not stop the politics of violence and killing, the minister said. The Goit group has also been asking the government to stop police operation against its cadres as a pre-condition for negotiation with the government. ■

Sorry, again !

■ nf correspondent

Maoists are good at saying 'sorry' for things gone wrong, and are even better at letting it happen again and again. As expected, Maoist Chief Prachanda, admitted in a way that the Young Communist League taking law in their hands was wrong, but he did not promise that such mistakes would not be repeated.

Referring to the beating up of a local Congress Leader, Lokmani Giri at Tulsipur in Dang on May 6 right in front of his party colleague Dr Baburam Bhattarai; Prachanda said five days later that he would take action against any of his party members involved in the incident.

YCL, taking a rigid posture said that they would not allow the return of land and other property that Maoists confiscated during years of conflict to the rightful owners, some of them assaulted Giri whose house was the venue for the meeting - between Dr

Bhattarai and Congress leader, Dr Shekhar Koirala, to settle the issue.

The Maoist party is clearly divided over the issue with party's powerful ideologue, Kiran Baidya publicly stating that the confiscated property will not be returned. Baidya's public stance clearly violates what the party has committed to, through the comprehensive peace agreement. The Maoists reiterated the issue on the time of joining the government on April 1; and even had set the deadline for return of such property within two weeks ending on April 14.

"Our party expresses deep concern at the sad incident that occurred," Prachanda said, asserting that YCL response was "spontaneous." "Setting ablaze government property in Dang on Wednesday was also against the policy of Maoist party. We will take strong action if anyone from our party is found involved," said he.

Krishna Bahadur Mahara, who is strongly identified with Prachanda camp in the party also felt that certain YCL activities including their resorting to violence, was wrong.



Maoist Chief Prachanda

Niraj Sapkota

Prachanda made no announcement if any probe was going to take place into the Dang incident. But in a pattern almost similar to his pledges in the past that severe actions would be

taken against his party members, "if found guilty," he however conceded that such incidents might be creating fissures among the eight parties.

News Brief

Carter to visit Nepal

Former U S president Jimmy Carter will be visiting Nepal some time in third week of June. He will be here on a three-day visit, largely to assess if there would be any role for the Carter Center to play, during the election to the Constituent Assembly.

This will be Carter's second visit to Nepal, first being in November 1985. His last visit scheduled on May 6 last year could not take place because of the tense political situation in the country.

Carter Center which has always been taking keen interest with, 'will be happy to play any role,' attitude to sort out the conflict in Nepal, had sent a 12-member delegation here a month ago, offering to send a team of observers for the election. But with the initially proposed mid-June deadline over, the center is likely to take a fresh stand on the issue.

The delegation, besides meeting the government officials, had also held discussions with Maoist leader, Prachanda who had then suggested that the center should send a much bigger number of observers for the CA election.



Jimmy Carter

Sitaula hooted

Angry relatives and professionals, mostly engineers hooted Home Minister K P Sitaula at Aryaghat where he had gone to offer condolences to the family members of Navaraj Bista, an engineer murdered in captivity by the Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (JTMM) group led by Jayakrishna Goit last week.

Sitaula felt compelled to go the cremation site on the instructions of the Prime Minister since angry engineers threatened to lead funeral procession to the Prime Minister's residence if the government failed to give assurance for protection of engineers serving in Terai area. Sitaula who promised to provide the safety also announced on Saturday that each of the government official killed on duty would be declared a 'martyr.'

Nepal Engineers Association (NEA) is however, contemplating withdrawing all its members from the Terai area as the 'Minister's routine and repeated assurance' is not at all convincing, a NEA member told newsfront.



Home Minister K P Sitaula

Bhaswar Ojha



Forum members in Dharna outside the Ministry of Education

Bhaswar Ojha

Shutting down schools

■ nf correspondent

It appears that the best way for any organisation in the country to prove that it exists is to just call for a strike and pelt stones on the road. That is exactly what Nepal Educational Republican Forum has done. All the schools in Kathmandu observed a day's Bandh on Sunday, some under threats from the forum, and the rest in expression of solidarity with the government engineers in the country who are demanding arrests

of the culprits responsible for the killing of Navaraj Bista, an engineer, posted in Sarlahi.

The forum which commits itself for 'democratic republican Nepal' has given a call for indefinite shut-down of all the government and community schools and educational institutions in the country from May 16 to press their multi-point demand that includes automatic promotion of teachers who have completed ten years in service, re-absorption of all teachers who have

been removed from services under different charges in the past and better service facilities. Interestingly, the forum does not have its office address printed on the letter head. The statement issued by the forum contains names of its office bearers along with their mobile numbers.

Most schools in Kathmandu declared a day's Bandh after the forum issued a threat that non-compliance would invite dire consequences. ■

EPA doldrums

■ nf correspondent

The Eight Party Alliance (EPA) has failed to meet for more than a month now with at least three scheduled meetings postponed for some reason or the other. The latest one had to be called off since Prime Minister G P Koirala left for Biratnagar; and the Home Minister K P Sitaula for Jhapa to attend marriage of a Congress parliamentarian, considered as an 'extra-constitutional authority' in the Congress party.



PM G P Koirala

Bhaswar Ojha

The EPA has failed to meet even once to review the situation arising

out of the announcement made by the Election Commission last month that elections to the Constituent Assembly by mid-June as pledged through the interim constitution was not possible.

While there are already questions being raised that the present government would forfeit its 'legitimacy after mid-June on grounds that it did not honour the constitutional obligation, the PM who heads the EPA government, seems least concerned about it. ■



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 Tel : 4443888, Fax : 4421147 (Edt.), 4411912 (Mkt.)
 Email: newsfront@bhrikuti.com, marketing@bhrikuti.com (Mkt.)
 Printed by: Express Color Press, Buddhanagar, Tel.: 4781810, Distribution: Kasthamandap, Tel.: 2010821

Point to Ponder

Man's crimes are his worst enemies, following, Like shadows,
 till they drive his steps into The pit he dug.

- Creon

Timber Terrorism

Timber smuggling is an old business in the country. But the latest rounds of sandal wood smuggling establishes that the illicit business has grown to massive proportions with Nepal serving as a transit point to ferry the natural resources from India to China. With the death of Veerappan last year, a notorious timber smuggler who ruled Mysore's sandalwood rich forest, it was hoped that even the jungles would be ruled by the law of the Indian state and the trade would be carried legally.

But reality has it otherwise. Truck-loads of sandalwood come to Nepal border from Mysore. This means that for thousand of miles and over half a dozen Indian states between Karnataka and Nepal, there are government machineries and officials patronising the organised timber smuggling. However, the entire trade gains legitimacy only after Nepali customs levies tax and permits its transportation to China's Tibet, via Tatopani border. This only implies there is a cross border network involved.

But the onus to take effective initiative to curb this scourge falls more on Nepal, both at the point of origin and final destination. Identifying culprits and partners in crimes both inside and across the border is naturally the first step. Prevention of Nepal's use as a transit point is the second.

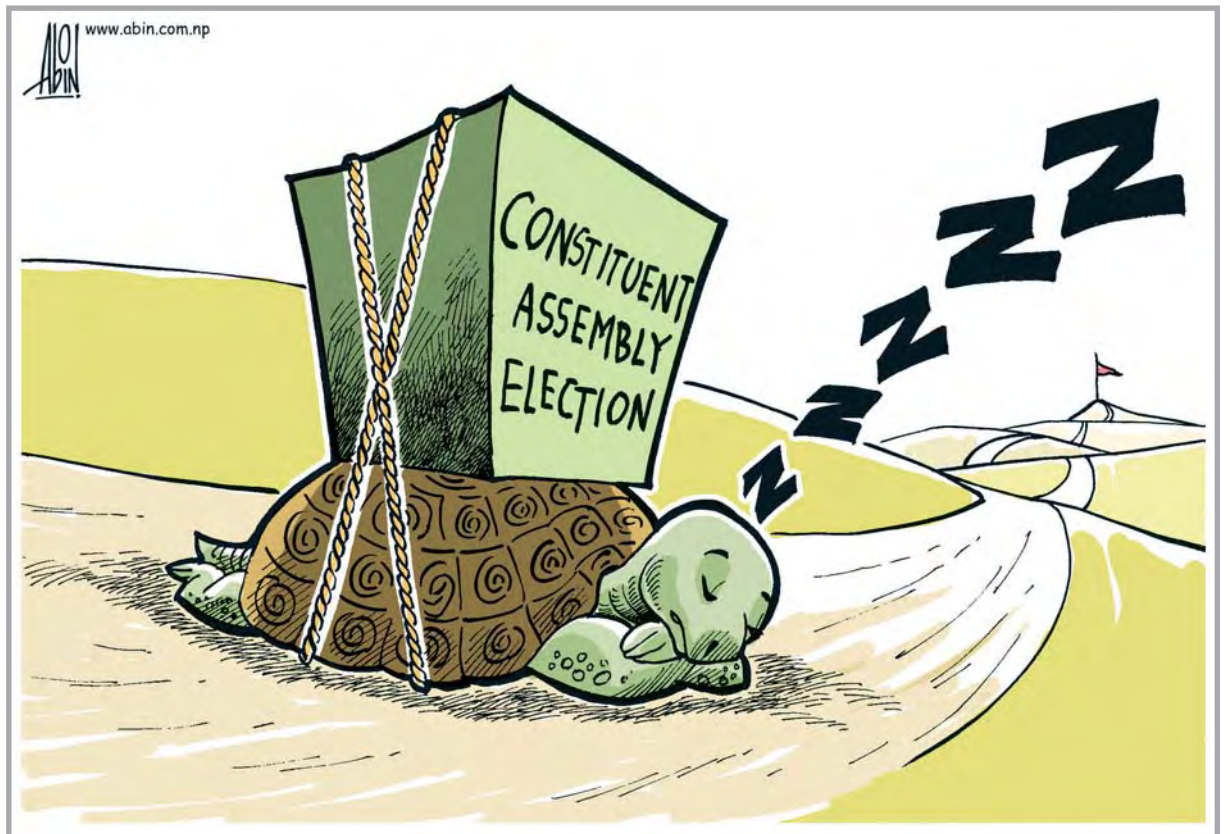
Timber smuggling that is on the increase also gives rise to reasonable suspicion that there is a strong nexus between the criminals, police, politicians and custom officials of at least Nepal and India. Given the scale of money this trade generates, it could also lead to terrorism of another kind.

It is imperative that Nepal initiate mainly with India to form an effective task force to contain this crime within their respective territories. Sharing vital intelligence to pre-empt any covert actions will go a long way towards achieving the desired outcome. Preventive measures at the point of origin and the first transit route will automatically break the ever expanding crime.

Nepal has special reason to worry about such trade. Yarshagumba, a highly prized rare herb has been rampantly smuggled out of the country long before the public got to know about it. The Maoists also got involved in the trade to make fast money without realising the consequences of the depletion.

Forest cover has depleted in Nepal to 30 per cent from 70 per cent coverage in a period of the last 40 years. This shows how vulnerable Nepal has become to flood and drought caused by deforestation. The country is fast moving from having surplus food, to food importing one.

To resuscitate life back into the fast dying natural habitat, the government not only needs to urgently implement strict laws against smuggling of timber, herbs and other natural resources; but also needs to form an effective machinery to deal with this issue as a whole. ■



Letters

Save NAC

"It is shocking to know that Nepal Airlines Corporation is operating with one aircraft in the international sector. I will not be surprised if NAC becomes extinct and grounded for good like the dinosaurs. Just a few years back, the popularly known RNAC had more than 19 aircrafts with international flights to many cities around the world and domestic flights to almost all districts of Nepal. The failure of such an airline, which has so much support from the government, cannot be imagined and forgiven. It is national shame for the nation's flag carrier.

Most common factors in such a failure are - the involvement of unprofessional men at the top management level, planning based on short-term basis without sufficient long term financial support and interference from the government and political parties. My suggestion would be for the government - Ministry of Tourism to immediately decide to discontinue the domestic flight operation of NAC and concentrate only on international flight operation.

NAC has sufficient qualified manpower and bases in all the international sectors which can be operated successfully. Domestic operation has become a financial burden to it, so it should be left to the numerous private airlines operators. The smaller aircrafts, spares and assets at the domestic stations can be sold to private airlines, to acquire bigger aircrafts. Many drastic changes are required to save the airlines and it needs to be done now.

Dorji Tsering Sherpa

Ex- executive director, Skyline Airways
 Kathmandu

Reach Pokhara

Newsfront has done a great job of covering crucial political stories with depth and inside information, especially regarding Maoist's atrocities.

I would like to inform you that newsfront is not easily available in Pokhara where readership of English newspapers is the highest, after Kathmandu. Pokhara being the tourist center, there is high demand for quality English newspapers

like yours. In my opinion it is the age of marketing and advertisement and so proper attention to marketing and distribution system should be given. At the same time please give coverage of Pokhara related issues especially tourism in newsfront. Thanks for the wide coverage of Mount Everest trek.

Abhishek Palikhe
 Pokhara

Conspiracies galore

It is good that newsfront has been giving space to security and police affairs. But the write ups are rather superficial and do not go into details of the level of politics and corruption that exists there. Let newsfront investigate those issues in depth.

There is now an ongoing tussle between the police chief and a senior AIG. Retired Police Chief Achyut K Kharel is all powerful and through his clique in the institution, he has been able to use IGP Om Bikram Rana as a pawn. There are conspiracies being hatched to implicate some very senior police officials in corruption charges by this clique.

Nepal police has long been a political instrument of the ruling party in general and the Home Minister in particular. But now letting extra-constitutional authority to rule the police will be dangerous.

It will be really good for the institution if Home Minister Sitaula were to declare that he will not politicise police force any further. He should remember that he has to own up ultimately to all irregularities and corruption that have taken place during his tenure.

Mahesh Sharma,
 Kathmandu

Readers, your reactions, criticisms,
 comments, suggestions are most welcome.
 Please address it to:

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Spiritual Corner

Ever lasting faith

Sri Sarada Devi (1853-1920) was a great spiritual personality. She came to play an important role in leading the Ramakrishna movement after the death of Sri Ramakrishna, her husband. She taught by setting examples; and was an indulgent mother who knew the best way to educate an erring child was to set an example before the child, which she did. She had seen the worst side of mankind, but she never lost faith, knowing that given affection, sympathy and guidance they could overcome all their limitations.

Sarada Devi was human, yet divine. Her divinity shone through everything she did, even if it was something entirely mundane. She was a simple woman but in thought, speech, and action she was attuned to God. She was a true saint but never claimed to be one.

Extracts from her sayings:

Don't be afraid. Human birth is full of suffering and one has to endure everything patiently, taking the name of God. None, not even God in human form, can escape the sufferings of body and mind.

I tell you one thing my child - if you want peace, do not find fault with others. Rather, see your own faults. Learn to make the world



your own. No one is a stranger, my child; the whole world is your own.

You see, my son, it is not a fact that you will never face danger. Difficulties always come, but they do not last forever. You will see that they pass away like water under a bridge.

As you smell the fragrance of a flower by handling it or the smell of sandalwood by rubbing it against a stone, so you obtain spiritual awakening by constantly thinking of God.

Each has to get the result of the actions one has earned for this life. A pin at least must prick where a wound from a sword was due. ■



YCL set fire engulfs Land Revenue Office in Berdia

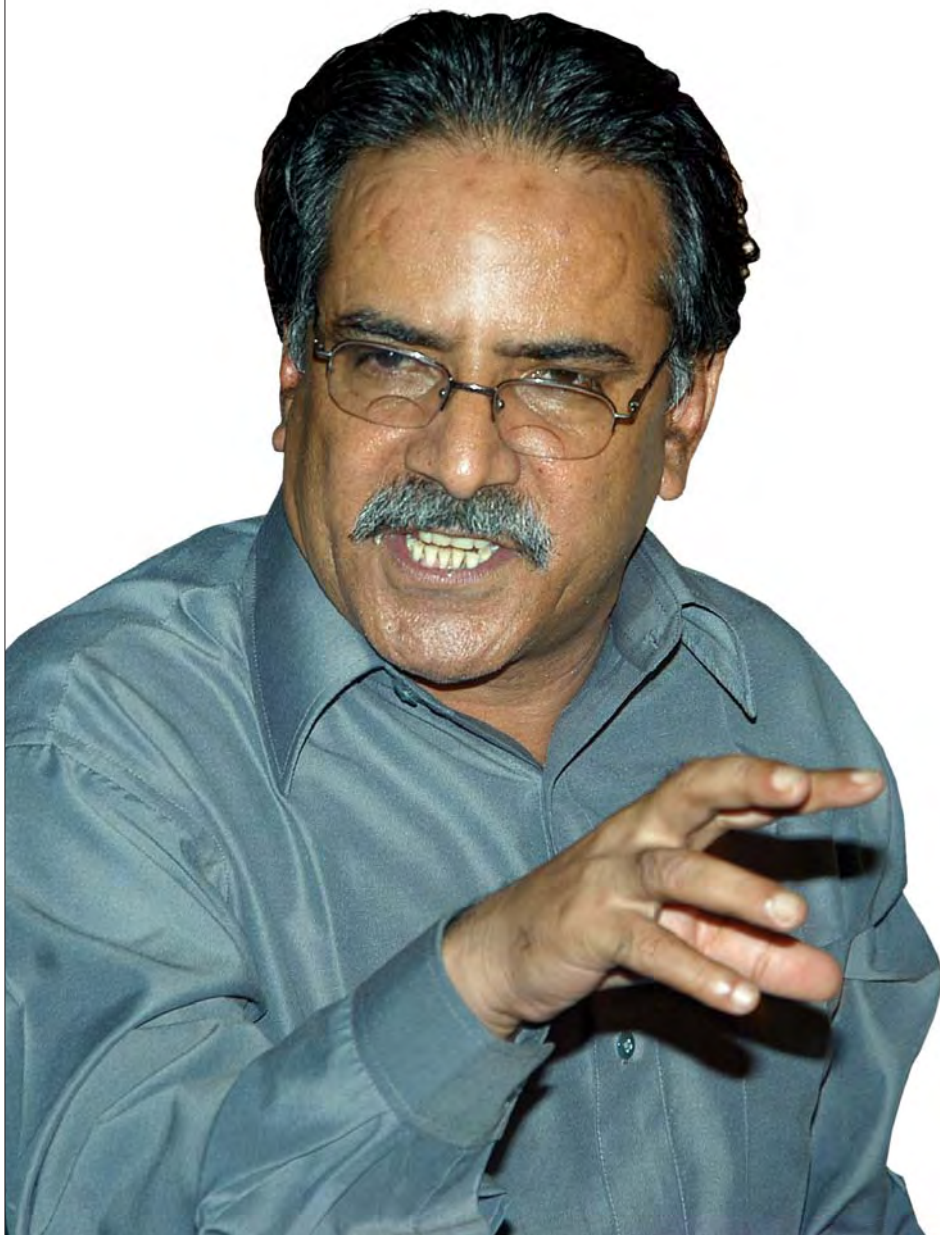
Rule of anarchy and unaccountability cannot be accepted as part of pro-people politics. Nor can it be called activities supportive of the peace process.



■ Yubaraj Ghimire

Required, some integrity

Prachanda or any party's role as a police, prosecutor and judge cannot be accepted



Nepal's peace process and inclusion of the Maoists in the interim parliament and cabinet is a remarkable achievement. It happened in less than 18 months after the Delhi agreement. The basis of establishing peace, democracy and ending absolute monarchy was signed between the seven party alliance and the Maoists. But the formation of the interim cabinet and inclusion of the Maoists into it were mutually acceptable ways of creating state instruments representing all sides so that a fair atmosphere could be created to conduct election to the Constituent Assembly.

Maoists' inclusion in the cabinet was not an act of political submission on the part of the democratic forces. Rather, it was a political process of accommodating diverse views and groups, leaving it to the people in entirety to reject or accept Maoists or any groups as their ruler in the future political scenario, through free and fair elections.

All the eight parties including the Maoists have been party to many written and unwritten commitments that they will honour people and their verdict, and that till then they will remain united in pursuit of three basic goals of Delhi understanding - peace, democracy and end of absolute monarchy.

If the letter and spirit of this understanding is followed, future Nepal will not have any kind of absolutism or landlordism, in any state and non-state structures. After all, the fundamental principle or the sole basis of the post-12 point understanding is that political parties henceforth will accept people's sovereignty and supremacy. Ensuring their safety, security and well-being will be their sole concern and only democracy as a system of governance will deliver that.

In that context, the eight-party unity will remain relevant only if it moves ahead and implements the letter and spirit of previous agreements. Seeking a new basis for unity is both absurd and dishonest. Maoist Chief Prachanda has now been insisting that joint commitment to 'Republican Nepal' will be the sole basis for the eight-party unity.

On May 16, Prachanda asked Dr Shekhar Koirala and Home Minister K P Sitaula, to clarify the position of Nepali Congress on the issue of monarchy. The message he was trying to deliver was that Communist Party of Nepal - Maoists (CPN-M) would have the right to impose and arbitrate on what particular line the eight party alliance constituents would take individually.

This is something which goes totally against the spirit of the alliance, and their right to pursue a particular line on or against monarchy. Each of the alliance partners has to remain committed to the common minimum programme of the coalition government, but they are free to differ on any other political issues including that on monarchy - in its favour or against. Issue of

monarchy or going for a republic Nepal is not part of the Common Minimum Programme of the government.

If somebody forces Nepali Congress or any party to, 'tell me what's your stance on monarchy,' that is only an exercise towards usurping the role and status of a dictator much against the spirit of Delhi understanding - the basis of entire peace process. Eight parties' unity is very vital for success of the peace process, but for that minimum honesty and confirming character is required.

It's entirely for the people, when these parties go to the poll, separately or collectively, to accept or reject their stand on monarchy. Prachanda saying something about it or wanting Nepal's immediate declaration as republican is not only unauthorised, but an exercise towards wrecking the unity of the eight parties.

A sizeable part of the country is now facing serious law and order problems. Maoists affiliated Young Communist League (YCL) is taking law in their hands. Maoists have failed to honour their commitment to return the property they had confiscated earlier as per their pledge to do it by April 15. YCL activists resorted to violence and assault of pro-congress people in Dang in presence of Dr Koirala and Baburam Bhattarai in Dang last week. What happened in Dang is something that has become order of the day in many places.

Rule of anarchy and unaccountability cannot be accepted as part of pro-people politics. Nor can it be called activities supportive of the peace process. A party or leader going against the peace process does not have the right to dictate its political agenda to others. That is a message PM Koirala and all other parties should be courageous enough to give to Prachanda in no uncertain terms.

Violation of the peace process and code of conduct should not be recognised as the strength of the violators. But when it comes to the issue of implementing previous conditions, it is equally applicable to the government on the question of having habitable infrastructures built for the Maoists in cantonment.

For any meaningful journey towards election, an effective peace process and equally effective government has to be in place. Maoist leadership should not be allowed to say, "We will take action against the errant YCL." Rather, the government should take that responsibility. Prachanda or any party's role as a police, prosecutor and judge cannot be accepted. State alone should be in command of those responsibilities. ■

Moriarty's departure and Nepal's democracy

Moriarty, an uncrowned monarch in Kathmandu since 2004



■ J. Sri Raman

There is good news and bad news for the readers of my dispatches on Nepal developments. The good news is that James Francis Moriarty is being replaced as the US ambassador to Nepal. The bad news is that he is leaving after a last burst of diplomacy that may spell a serious setback for the country's peace-and-democracy process.

There is no need to elaborate on the good news for those sympathetic to Nepal's struggle for democracy. Moriarty, the diplomat with the difference, has taken sides against the struggle, against democracy in the historical form it has acquired in the Himalayan state. He has played a public and pro-active role, in particular, against the primary political process leading to the peoples' overthrow of a despotic monarchy and promising restoration of peace after a decade-long civil war and democratic resurgence.

An opponent of the formation of an anti-monarchy front, including the Maoists, even before King Gyanendra's crown was in serious danger, Moriarty has set himself staunchly against their induction into Nepal's interim government and mainstream politics in the post-monarchy phase of the past year. He has let no norms of diplomacy restrain him from launching an anti-Maoist campaign as an extension of Washington's avowed crusade against global terror.

We do not know whether, without Moriarty, Washington might have withdrawn the "terrorist" tag pinned on the Maoists long before they became a leading contingent of Nepal's pro-democracy movement. But even US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher, during his Nepal visit last year, did not quite conceal his embarrassment at the envoy's anti-Maoist extremism. Boucher felt constrained to clarify the US policy on development assistance to Nepal, which Moriarty had made appear conditional on the Maoists being kept out of power.

Moriarty has escalated his undiplomatic activity ever since the eruption of violent agitation by ethnic groups, especially in the southern Terai plains. Combining frequent trips to the disturbed area with fervent calls for federalism, he has not helped the cause of early restoration of peace and elections to a constituent assembly.

Several voices have been raised against Moriarty's role in Nepal and outside. Washington has taken care not to let it appear a weak submission to widespread public opinion, but it has announced that Moriarty, an uncrowned monarch in Kathmandu since 2004, won't be given an extension after the official expiry of his term in a posting he claims to have enjoyed most in his career. The term is due to end officially on July 15, but quite a few in the know do not rule out his earlier departure from the picturesque post, perhaps even later this month.

The bad news is that the fleeing general of the "war on terror" in Nepal is opting to follow a scorched-earth policy - initiating a flurry of moves that, if carried to their logical conclusion,

can prove the undoing of all the post-monarchy advances achieved thus far.

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Last weekend, Moriarty reportedly made the first of these moves by meeting with ailing PM Girija Prasad Koirala. At the meeting, the envoy is understood to have revived his past pet-theme of a "democratic front" against the Maoists. The front, in Moriarty's formulation, would again include the dethroned king, who had just demonstrated his enduring prowess by offering animal sacrifices at a temple in the presence of high officers of the Nepal army. Moriarty wanted the prime minister to carry the move forward.

According to reports, which have not been officially refuted, Moriarty and Koirala agreed upon Nepal Army Chief Rukmangad Katuwal as the go-between with the best chances of convincing Gyanendra. Moriarty followed this up with a meeting with Katuwal. The rest of the story may prove to be sad history, if the moves succeed.

The Bush administration has also, meanwhile, announced the choice of Moriarty's successor: 60-year-old Nancy J. Powell is all set to take over the onerous tasks of the crusader with an incomplete mission. Reports about the ambassador-designate's professional profile should warn Nepal's well-wishers against rejoicing too soon at Moriarty's departure.

Powell comes to Kathmandu from the desk of a specialist on South Asia in the National Intelligence Council (NIC). The NIC brought 16 different US intelligence outfits under a single command in the wake of 9/11. Many observers share the apprehension that the "war on terror" may continue to be waged with far more fervor than any "crusade for democracy" in Nepal, though with greater diplomatic decorum than Moriarty ever displayed.

[* Filter does not support this file format | In-line.PNG *] What worries Indian friends of Nepal is Powell's Indian connection of an "anti-terrorist" kind. As the US ambassador to Pakistan in the 1990s, she is said to have endeared herself enormously to India's establishment - which had even then started thinking of a special and strategic partnership with the US - by talking of Islamabad as providing "a platform for terrorism."

Pro-monarchy political circles recall this as a reassurance of continuity in US policy towards Nepal. They also see in this hopes for a return of New Delhi to its old policy of support for the king as a constitutional authority as well as the parliamentary political camp.

Under pressure from the Left, thanks to whose support it survives, PM Manmohan Singh's government had accepted the advance of Nepal's democratic movement with Maoist participation. The media and the establishment's security "experts," however, are preparing the ground for a pro-Gyanendra and anti-Maoist policy-shift by talking of links between Nepal's ex-insurgents and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), even while the extreme Left in India has ruled out emulating the Maoist example, as was hoped earlier. The departure of Moriarty by itself may not signal a new dawn for Nepal's democracy.

A freelance journalist and a peace activist of India, J. Sri Raman is the author of Flashpoint (Common Courage Press, USA). He is a regular contributor to truthout.





Mohammadi Siddiqui

Discrimination against women begins at home

Mohammadi Siddiqui, 49, is the founder of Fatima Foundation Nepal in Nepalgunj. She has been an active campaigner for, 'Solidarity, peace and women empowerment.' She shared her story with newsfront recently.

How long have you been active politically?

I've been involved with Nepali Congress since the age of 16 when I was still in Purdah. I used to assist my husband, Mohammad Sulaiman Siddiqui in his political activities by stitching flags and printing pamphlets.

What was the idea behind Fatima Foundation?

During my years of work in the area of human rights, I observed this stark absence of attention to issues of Muslim community by political parties and NGOs. I also saw that the community lacked knowledge about their rights, especially the womenfolk. This inspired me to found the foundation with whatever little resources we had with the help of our community members. For the past three years, the foundation has been working to raise awareness of one's rights as a citizen in a democratic country; and encouraging women to take up leadership roles and be politically aware.

Why do you think it is important for women to take up leadership roles and be politically aware?

Without taking women's issues to the political mainstream and making our voices heard, the political parties do not pay attention

to our problems and our needs. I believe that only by taking our voice, our agenda to the political mainstream will the government pay attention to our needs and recognize us for what we are. Only then can we gain access to all the rights that a Nepali citizen should have.

How does your faith impact on the work you do?

When we began our work, the Muslim Mullahs accused us of anti-Islamic activities. With time, they saw the positive impact of our work and now those who used to object to our activities, support us. Prophet Mohammad declared in Koran that all men and women are equal. But since it is written in Arabic and read mostly by scholars, common people have very little knowledge about it. We have striven to take that knowledge to corners of villages around Nepalgunj and beyond wherever there are a significant number of Muslim populations.

I believe that Muslim women can be progressive and contribute a lot to their societies. To do this they need not deviate from their social norms and traditional beliefs. I am an example of that. By balancing our rights and duties, we can progress.

What changes have the work of the foundation brought about in the commu-

nities that you've worked with?

Women who knew very little about democracy and what it means to their lives began asking questions in our communities. This led us to organize an awareness programme. Its positive feedback encouraged us to take more such programmes to other areas to inform women as well as men. Gradually organisations such as - Tewa, CARE, Actionaid and Asia Foundation began to support us.

What would happen if the donors discontinued their support?

We started the foundation at home with very little resource and so we know how important resources are. Even if all support is withdrawn, I am confident that the good-will we have earned so far and the Jakat system where every able Muslim family gives a certain amount of donation for charity work will help us.

What are the urgent issues of Muslim women?

Despite the fact that we have lived in this country for generations we are yet to be acknowledged for our contribution and still treated as minorities. This is the main issue of not just us women but of the whole community. Besides this, discrimination against women begins at home due to ignorance. Due to lack of education and awareness regarding

their rights, women suffer a lot. Keeping this in mind, we are making it a point to educate women and the men about divorce laws; get their marriages and births of their children registered and encourage them to obtain citizenship certificates. Due to lack of any legal papers, the men are not morally bound and tend to exploit women without any fear of the law.

What has been the impact of your work on the Muslim women?

Raising this awareness has served to enhance the security of the women and their children. It has succeeded in lowering instances of domestic violence and divorce cases. Most importantly, the value of education is being understood and more young Muslim women are seeking higher education now.

How has this long journey been for you?

(Sighs) Not easy. I had to endure so much and face so many challenges. Being alone, I had to bear with endless negative comments from different quarters. I raised three children who are all graduates now. I had to fight for my property rights for nine long years after my husband died; I did win finally. All three children are well settled now and that has been a victory for me. But I must say, though alone, I had support from many around me without which I really could not have come so far. ■



Patan Durbar Square



Kathmandu Durbar Square

Rescuing endangered heritage sites

The tag of World Heritage in Danger on Nepal might be removed.

■ Dr. Shaphalya Amatya



Swoyambhu

In 1979 seven monument sites of Kathmandu Valley were inscribed in the World Heritage List as the World Heritage site. Since then both the government of Nepal and the international world have been helping Nepal to conserve, reserve and promote this heritage site. But the honeymooning period was suddenly over in November 1992 when some international experts who came to Nepal to attend an international symposium on wood carving conservation made a hue and cry about the deteriorating situation of urban fabric in these sites.

In 1989, during Janandolan I, many old houses which were a part of the old city's landscape and streetscape were being demolished illegally and replaced by new concrete structures. Because of the fluid political situation at the time, the Department of Archaeology, local administrations and municipalities could not control these illegal constructions.

The international experts immediately on returning home began lobbying against Nepal's present state of heritage conservation. They put pressure on UNESCO / World Heritage Committee and ICOMOS to dispatch a mission to find out the status of the valley. At a meeting of the World Heritage Bureau held in Paris in June 1993, the matter was further discussed and a joint UNESCO / WHC / ICOMOS review mission was sent to Nepal.

This mission unanimously recommended that : Kathmandu valley should be put on the list of World Heritage Sites in Danger; there should be increased international support for the site by UNDP and other appropriate organisations; there should be a guarantee of a permanent UNESCO presence at the site, and the valley should be removed from the

list of World Heritage Sites in Danger after a period of one to three years; and returned to the World Heritage list when a 16 point program was fulfilled by Nepali authorities.

In 1997 the World Heritage Committee, in view of the continued deterioration of the world heritage monument zones, in Baudhanath and Kathmandu affecting the integrity and inherent characteristics of the site, it requested the Secretariat to study the possibility of delisting selected areas within some monument zones, without jeopardising the universal significance and value of the site as a whole. The committee decided to defer consideration of the inscription of the valley sites on the list of World Heritage in Danger until its 23rd session.

In September 2000 a high level mission led by the chairperson of the World Heritage Committee, the director of the World Heritage Centre, Prof. Eduard Sekler and the Chief of UNESCO, Kathmandu office and others visited the sites. This committee presented its report in the 24th extraordinary session of the World Heritage Committee that met in Cairns, Australia in December 2000.

Nepal was also asked to prepare and launch a Comprehensive Management Plan to

improve the conservation situation in the sites and save the historic urban fabric of the sites. But Nepal could not be successful in preserving it in most of the sites and as a result the Kathmandu Valley World Heritage Site was put in the list of World Heritage in Danger in the 27th session held in Paris in June-July 2003.

Nepal took this as a great prestige issue. Just to appease Nepal UNESCO World Heritage Centre sent an expert mission for preparing an inventory of recent constructions and demolitions within Bhaktapur and Pasupatinath monument zones and evaluating the impact of economic and development pressures on the traditional urban fabric of the Pasupatinath and Bhaktapur monument zones in September-November 2003.

This expert mission clearly said that, "We must know that the cancellation of the sites from the World Heritage List will imply a much faster erosion of the heritage that could also become a kind of national reprisal against UNESCO. One has to keep in mind that the delisting, as appeared from most speeches and interviews, is felt as a wound to the national pride. Total cancellation would be seriously felt as an offence to the country." They were right to say that, "A certain degree of alteration is expected in every heritage site in the world, especially in the living city in a developing country's capital city."

Since then, the government of Nepal has been seriously trying to save these heritage sites and is also implementing the recommendations and suggestions of the international organisations. At the same time, inside UNESCO/ICOMOS, a powerful lobby friendly to Nepal started pleading that if the tag of World Heritage in Danger is not removed now, it would make the situation worse than before.

This pro-Nepal lobby thought that since the country has undergone a very big political upheaval and if the tag is not removed now they will be more frustrated and they would not be so careful in preserving these sites as expected. They think that once the tag is removed the country will take it as a big concession and will be encouraged to take more positive actions.

Recently in July a UNESCO/ICOMOS Mission made assessment and evaluation of the whole situation. They think that Nepal is doing its best to preserve the World Heritage sites and they are also seriously trying to fulfill the entire time bound program and other conditions put forth before them from time to time. The recent mission went back home to report in its next session, the 31st session, which will be held in June -July 2007, with a very positive attitude.

Most probably the tag of World Heritage in Danger on Nepal will be removed then. This will certainly help and encourage Nepal to do more positive work in the World Heritage site of Kathmandu Valley.

(Amatya is an archaeological expert.)

Musharraf urges calm



Lawyers across Pakistan have boycotted courts and taken part in rallies - some resulting in violent clashes with police

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has appealed for calm after 34 people died in the country's worst political violence in years.

Supporters of President Pervez Musharraf fought street battles with those of top judge Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, suspended by the president. Mr Chaudhry abandoned plans to address a rally in the city. Opposition groups blamed the pro-Musharraf MQM party of organising the unrest, but it denied the claim.

Speaking at a mass rally in Islamabad on Saturday night, Mr Musharraf ruled out declaring a state of emergency and appealed to the country to stand united.

He blamed "elements who tried to create turmoil by politicising" Chief Justice Chaudhry's suspension.

Speaking behind bullet-proof glass, he said a judicial panel was examining the case. He also criticised Mr Chaudhry, saying the top judge had ignored warnings against travelling to Karachi. Mr Chaudhry flew from Islamabad to Karachi on Saturday morning, planning to address a rally in the city.

But after landing, he was unable to leave the airport, because roads into the city were blocked. After several hours, Mr Chaudhry abandoned his plans and returned to Islamabad.

The president also appealed to the

demonstrators, saying: "If you really feel sorry over what has happened in Karachi, then stop these protests."

Since his suspension on charges of "misuse of authority", Mr Chaudhry has become the focus of widespread opposition to the government of Mr Musharraf, who took power in a coup in 1999. The BBC's Barbara Plett in Islamabad says opposition parties have turned Mr Chaudhry's case into a campaign against military rule.

His supporters say that Mr Musharraf wants the judiciary headed by a lawyer whom he can more easily manipulate. Our correspondent says tension had been building ahead of the judge's visit when the local authorities announced plans for a counter rally. But she says the scale of the confrontation took people by surprise.

In the worst violence, MQM supporters and activists from the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto fought gun battles for an hour.

The private Aaj TV channel showed pictures of its office under fire. "We are under attack," said journalist Talat Hussain on air, sheltering behind a wall. "It is state-sponsored terrorism. The Sindh [province] government is responsible but we are not going to back off," said Sherry Rehman of the PPP.

An MQM spokesman denied his party was involved in the violence at the TV station. A lawyers' spokesman told the BBC that bar association members in Karachi had also been attacked by MQM activists in various parts of the city. The lawyers say that activists attacked them and prevented them from entering the Sindh High Court premises where Mr Chaudhry had been due to speak.

(BBC)

Queen and I, and you

■ Saubhik Chakrabarti

Like politicians, we journalists enjoy the benefits of short public memory. Like most politicians, most journalists don't usually admit this. Like Mayawati, I am shifting a paradigm. In my case, by denying myself the benefit of short public memory. Writing on Uttar Pradesh more than a year back — the commentary appeared on March 10, 2006 and was, I am pretty sure, soon forgotten even by those who read it — I had argued that "Bihar broke a mould UP may not be able to". Also, that UP's politics suggested that in the state "little else matters but the ability to form local social coalitions". "The big picture doesn't matter", I had said, adding, "change can't get a force or a face." O yeah?

My job isn't at risk now on account of having written off UP's voters then — this is an assumption but, I think, a fairly safe one. So let me further say that the motives behind my washing journalistic linen that no longer fits the news are mixed. They are one part self-examination and nine parts wonder.

Wonder — that's the key word for this UP verdict. As our editorial today points out this is the first time in 60 years of independent India that a Dalit leader has won an absolute mandate to rule anywhere. More, the mandate has come because Mayawati, armed with the voters' hope that she will change the status quo, successfully raided others' vote banks. This daylight robbery spread over seven phases shows, at last, that politics in UP can be successfully inclusive. Dalits can and understandably will say Mayawati is our chief minister. But so can others — look at the number of Brahmin MLAs Mayawati has, note that she has made an appreciable dent in the SP's Muslim vote. That really is wonderful, as should be especially acknowledged by columnists who had argued this can't happen.

So Mayawati is, in the deepest democratic sense of the term, the new queen of UP. And I, clearly not so chastened by calling it wrong once, am at it again: perhaps this time she will not just rule but govern. This time, model villages named after Ambedkar will just be the symbol not the substance of her development policy. This time, her significance will transcend UP and reach you.

Why? Because Mayawati gets a message and a clear mandate from UP to govern at a time 8.5 per cent GDP growth is considered conservative in India's public policy discourse. Yes, we know what some Congress politicians think of high GDP growth. But let's



be kind. Let's not talk about the Congress today. The party needs to recover from its interpretation of the UP verdict — had Rahul Gandhi not campaigned the Congress may have got five seats and therefore it has done pretty well in these elections.

The reason India's high GDP growth matters is that it is changing the politics of governance in states. Mayawati should of course, as our editorial also argues, look at Bihar and Nitish Kumar. Right after that she should look just to the north of her and reason out why the BJP, which she reduced to a terrible third in UP, flew in General B.C. Khanduri when it won in Uttarakhand. Khanduri had been an efficient Union minister for highways, the BJP had explained. Mayawati should then look east at Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and Navin Patnaik and look west at Narendra Modi. The first two have been re-elected on the back of fairly sensible economics. The third won a second term on the back of horrible politics. But his status as the firm favourite in elections later this year is based largely on economic governance.

Mayawati knows more than anyone else how UP has denied a longish tenure to any ruler. She has broken UP's jinx of fractured verdicts. If she wants to exploit this chance, if she wants to make her state a bastion the way Bhattacharjee, Modi and Patnaik have made theirs, she must find a variation of what they are doing. And she stands to gain more than they have.

For a variety of reasons, Kumar, Bhattacharjee, Modi and Patnaik are not suitable for the national stage. But Mayawati is. Plus, she's young — just over 10 years older to Rahul Gandhi and 30 years younger than L.K. Advani — smart and fiercely ambitious. Her one problem: poor credibility as an economic administrator. India, let us repeat it, has changed and one result of that transformation is that it is tough for a politician with patently dodgy economics to be credible on the national stage.

(The Indian Express)

Mr Brown is off to a good start

To become leader of an established democracy without facing a public vote is a funny sort of political achievement, but an achievement nonetheless. By doggedness, machination, intimidation and persuasion Gordon Brown disposed of rivals and made his premiership inevitable.

An unchallenged succession might offend some democratic sensibilities, but constitutionally it is proper. Britain elects parliaments, not presidents. When Mr Brown becomes leader of the Labour party he will inherit a legitimate right to govern. But an automatic mandate does not come with reserves of goodwill, a commodity traded by the ballot box. Mr Brown has a lot to prove.

He has made a good start. He launched his leadership campaign with a pledge to serve 'humbly' and to build an administration of 'all the talents', an apparent attempt to rebut the charge that he prefers solitary brooding to wide consultation. His proposal to publish a draft legislative programme ahead of the Queen's speech is sensible. His hints at greater authority for parliament and consolidation of Britain's ragged constitution are promising. That is an area where he can distance himself from Tony Blair without repudiating the substantial achievements of New Labour. Even Mr Blair's friends

admit he was no stickler for the details of constitutional reform, and no fan of Whitehall protocol. Government, Mr Brown appears to be saying, will move off the sofa and back to the cabinet table.

Distinguishing himself from Mr Blair in matters of style is easy. The contrast was obvious enough in the speeches they made last week: Mr Blair was theatrical, effusive,



Gordon Brown

Tony Blair

emotional. Mr Brown was serious, cerebral and, as proved by a misplaced autocue that obscured his face from TV cameras, not much concerned with stagecraft.

Mr Brown believes his gravitas will be a welcome change from Mr Blair's breeziness, and a contrast to David Cameron's bonhomie, which he thinks is a mask over policy-making vacuity. But he is mistaken if he thinks seriousness alone will earn him the trust of voters. Unlike a Chancellor, a Prime Minister lives under relentless media scrutiny. Mr Brown's ability to perform with spontaneous charm and authority has never been publicly

tested by unforeseen events.

Meanwhile, there are foreseeable problems looming. For example, US Iraq policy is caught in a feud between George Bush and the Democrat-controlled Congress, leaving no room for consultation with Downing Street. That is tricky for Mr Brown, who will want to demonstrate foreign policy autonomy from Washington while the reality is that, militarily at least, Britain cannot act alone. His approach so far has been the right one: emphasising the need for economic incentives to Sunni-Shia reconciliation.

On the domestic agenda, Mr Brown faces trouble at the Home Office and its newborn sibling the Justice Ministry. Prisons are full. To make room for new inmates, old ones are being freed on the sly. Meanwhile, there are swathes of prisoners who should never have been jailed: women, most commonly sent down for minor non-violent offences; children - Britain is Europe's biggest jailer of under-21s; sufferers of mental illness, locked up for want of long-term psychiatric care. A new government should radically overhaul penal policy, reviewing what crimes deserve custodial sentences and adequately funding the alternatives.

(The Observer)



■ Binod P Bista

Sovereign Nepal ?

Nepalis wonder whether Nepal is still sovereign

As if the frequent visits of resident ambassadors and UN mission chiefs in Nepal going over to India for deciding on the course of action on Nepal were not enough, PM Girija Prasad Koirala's latest remarks on the Nepali Congress, 'allaying growing fear among international community regarding domination of communist parties' come as a total surprise.

The 12-point understanding reached between the coalition of seven parties and the CPN-Maoists prior to the April uprising (2006) had made it clear to everybody including the international community that the country was headed to the creation of a new Nepal, be it under a communist party or a congress party or both in coalition. This point was made crystal clear after the success of the movement, which was followed by the formation of an interim constitution as well as parliament that gave space to most political parties. What then might be the need of the Nepali Congress party to allay fears of the international community?

Since the decision has been left in the hands of Nepalis in regard to the system of governance under which they are willing to be ruled, there is no question, whatsoever, of any country not agreeing to the sovereign decision of the Nepalis. Recent statement made by a leader of CPI-Maoists in Kathmandu that, 'India would have no objection even if there is republic in Nepal' can be taken as his personal views as it has no bearing on either the current compact or its outcome. By a similar token, why would the international community object or not agree to a government led by a communist party if the people of Nepal were to vote for them?

Asian Development Bank warning of pulling out of the multi-million dollar drinking water project, however, does not come under encroachment or pressure tactics by a regional bank as the precondition for loan approval hinged, among other things, on a foreign private sector company managing distribution of



Bhasor Ojha

water supply. In fact, ADB could have simply informed the government of its inability of following through the agreement as the government would have breached the conditions of contract with the bank.

At a recent conference in Brussels held with a view to helping improve the conditions of the poorest for ensuring continuity of the peace agreement, British socialist MP seemed to have stressed that the eight parties need to work constructively, share power equally and learn from past experience. Overall, the call was made to all involved that there was a need for cooperation, understanding and working together.

Unwarranted and unsubstantiated remarks can cause lot of problems to the fragile peace process achieved after lots of sacrifices as well

as immense support received from friends all over. It would be better if the leaders of the present unity government acted with full consideration to the common objective: conduct of CA elections under a free and fair atmosphere.

Current events and activities, mostly illegal in nature and outside of the code of conduct agreed by all, within the country does not instill enough confidence in the general public on the forthcoming elections and the future of Nepal. Whether such acts are perpetrated by groups associated with the CPN-Maoists or other political groupings which have agreed to abide by civil norms, they can only destabilise the administrative and legal systems of the country.

Breakdown of law and order in a country harms it in many ways. Recent travel advisory

issued by the American Embassy on travel to Nepal not only affects the tourism industry but it would also present a picture of uncertainty and chaos in Nepal. Any hope of rapid economic development either through attracting more FDI or fostering tourism industry for providing employment en-masse would be lost in mid air.

Caught by internal and external forces that are freely curtailing their sovereign rights as citizens of Nepal, Nepalis wonder whether Nepal is still sovereign. The onus of proof is not on the general public but on the government and its leaders. Will the eight party unity government headed by PM GP Koirala assure the Nepali public that Nepal is indeed independent and sovereign? The actions of the government would naturally speak louder than their words. ■

Power fantasy in Bangladesh

■ Shashanka Saadi

Bangladesh is going through a much expected transitional period in terms of economy, culture and politics. Since the war of independence in 1971, people of Bangladesh have suffered from different illusions and been lured in the name of 'movements of masses for changes.'

The recent movement led by major political parties such as Awami League, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Workers Party, Liberal Democratic Party of the Mahajot or 'great alliance' is a unique example of another power struggle of the individual leaders and their followers that tried to win by selling non-philosophical and under-achievable dreams to the masses.

Historically it has been tested and proved that without a philosophical orientation and a progressive theory no movement can achieve its final desired changes even though it reaches its highest form and creates some element of socio-political changes. The mass-struggle of 80s against the military rule and ruler General Ershad is the perfect example of such a failure in Bangladesh.

People of Bangladesh, especially the student groups and working class reacted

against General Ershad when he captured political power overthrowing an elected government in 1982 using the armed forces. It took nine long years to overthrow Ershad out. All those years speak of a history of torture and suppression by the military regime and so called 'military democracy' on one hand and mass movement, sacrifice, betrayal, achievements on the other.

However, all the sacrifice by the masses for an effective democratic political atmosphere has been proven futile and failed to create any platform for the social democratic process in the

Without a philosophical orientation and a progressive theory no movement can achieve its final desired changes.

country. The reason behind the failure is mainly lack of a social democratic philosophy and politically literate critical masses.

Another bigger cause was the absence of an educated class which could retain the sense of social democratic theory and lead the process. As a result, individual level capital accumulation mainly through extortion and corruption became the primary objective of the political leaders of

the most parties within the power structure.

The political leaders also used anti-liberation forces and many religious extremists to gain and remain in power and maintain exploitation. It led to the growth of religious fanaticism, military wings of religious parties and also created an illusion of power fantasy among those extremists. Above all, the power struggle of the parties has become dependent on the external support from USA, European community and the big neighbours of Asia.

The Kansat1 movement or the Fulbari2 movement where women played a vital role has not gained any support from major political parties like Awami League and other opposition Islamist parties. It clearly indicates that these parties lack philosophical vision and do not have any vision regarding nationalist social democratic environment. All they want is to grab and hold on to power at any cost.

They do not raise their voices about serious issues regarding judiciary, police or exploitative treaties in the energy sector with foreign firms. They are silent on the blunder they made by promising the 'Shariah rule' to the Mullahs, the very issue which has been prevented by the women of Bangladesh for the last 30 years. They also fail to understand that the present negotiating

roles of the external countries, especially the western world, is not for conservation of democratic process but is there to protect their own financial interests in Bangladesh.

People of Bangladesh have again witnessed the rise of an undemocratic government backed up by armed forces in power in early 2007. There are lots of changes going on in Bangladesh for the last five months. A number of political and high profile bureaucrats have been arrested on charges of corruption and accumulation of assets. The generals and the present government are talking strongly against corruption, promising better system in administration and bureaucracy etc. But at the same time, people have witnessed price hikes in essential goods which are directly affecting the poor.

There is no economic safety-net for the poor and middle class in Bangladesh. Since all kinds of political processes have been banned, people cannot raise their voice regarding these or other issues. The media is also under a threat. Now, emergence of a progressive force in Bangladesh to lead political, economic and cultural struggles is urgently needed. Can the political parties of Bangladesh come together, show such courage and vision to the people of Bangladesh? ■

Marshland Flowers

The lineages of Buddha's immediate disciples still exist unbroken

■ Acharya Mahayogi Sridhar Rana Rinpoche

While dealing with various interpretation or more aptly misinterpretation of Buddhism made by non-Buddhist yogis and the like it seems apt to point out some of the more common ones before continuing with the lineage issue. One of the oft repeated concepts is that the Buddha actually taught the same thing as the Vedanta of the Vedic system but his disciples did not understand him. Now a lot of non-Buddhists believe with ease such blatant fallacies. First of all, as we have seen, the Buddha himself validated the scholastic and experiential understanding of all his immediate disciples and their lineages still exist unbroken.

So to say that the Buddha's disciples who walked the breadth of North India with him and studied with him for forty years or more and were validated by the Buddha himself, that they fully understood what he taught, did not understand him while non-Buddhist swamis and yogis really understood him and that too after two thousand five hundred years afterwards is indeed a bit far fetched to say the least. No rational person could possibly agree with such flagrant distortion of reality.

A corollary to the above misconception is that the Buddha actually taught what was in the Vedas but his disciples either did not understand his teaching or distorted them. An aspect of the above mentioned misconception has already been shown as totally absurd. But there is another aspect which needs to be dealt with. As the Buddha's immediate disciples had experienced in their own mental continuum what the Buddha meant, there could not possibly have been any distortion.

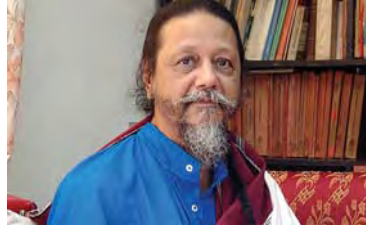
And as the living enlightened lineages continue to date, which means that each generation experienced in their mental continuum, the exact meaning of the Buddha's teachings, to claim that the

Buddhists distorted the Buddha's teachings and that is why it has become so different from the Vedic teachings, is the height of naivety.

And this brings us to another similar misconception about Buddhism. Most Hindu scholars or otherwise, would like to believe that the Buddhism is a branch of Hinduism. This misunderstanding is rampant amongst educated Hindus and is a correlation of the story fabricated in the 16th century and later in the Shiva Purana and its likes, that the Buddha was an incarnation of Visnu. First of all Hinduism as it is known today did not exist at the time of the Buddha, so there can be no question about Buddhism being a branch of Hinduism.

In fact, according to historical records and anthropological studies, what we call Hinduism is 75% derived from Buddhism and is the offspring of the impact of Buddhism on the Brahmanic system. What existed in the Buddha's time was a form of Brahmanism that was quite different from what is known as Hinduism today. From ancient times there were two streams of spiritual quest in the Indian sub-continent. One was Sramanism and the other was Vedic Brahmanism. These two streams did interact with each other as is seen clearly in the Upanishads of the Brahmanic systems and the sutras of the Buddhists and Jains who were both members of the Sramanic system.

It should be kept in mind that both the Buddha and Mahavir called themselves Mahasramans, which is a clear indication that they did not subscribe to the Brahmanic systems. In one of the most famous mantras of Buddhism 'ye dharma hetu prabaha hetustathagato hyevadat tesancha yo nirodho evam badi mahasramana,' Aswajit, the famous Brahmin disciple of the Buddha called the Buddha Mahasramana. Sramanism was probably older than the Vedic



Brahmanism that, according to many historians came into India when the Indo-Aryans transmigrated into the Indian sub-continent from Central Asia. But there are many who do not agree to this view. However, Sramanism is definitely an indigenous spiritual tradition of the Indian subcontinent, and there are no two thoughts about this.

We see the transactions between the Sramans and Brahmins in the Brihadaranyak Upanishad 3.6.1 where we find Gargi challenging the Brahmin Yagyavalkya. We know that Gargi was a Sraman by the fact that she stuck a twig of the rose-apple (Jambu tree) as a sign of challenge. And also the style of questioning of Gargi is a shade different from the questions put forth by the many other Brahmins in that same text.

The Brihadaranyak is thought to be at least 2-3 hundred years older than the Buddha if not older. So Sramanism was an equally old (if not older) stream of spiritual system as Brahmanism and the Buddha has clearly called himself Mahasraman. This would clearly imply that Buddhism is definitely not an off-shoot of Brahmanism, what to speak of Hinduism which is a product of Brahmanism's interaction with Buddhism and thus something that developed in the Indian sub-continent after the Buddha.

We could give scholastic quotes to validate this but it is not necessary in an article like this. Vedic Brahmanism metamorphosed drastically due to the catalytic influence of Buddhism and others and became the multifarious system under the generic name of Hinduism. (To be continued...)
(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master.)

Insight

Fragile yet fascinating

Life then becomes fascinating, full of possibilities...



■ Sushma Amatya

What would be a greater mistake than to take life for granted and assume we will live till our eighth or ninth decade if not more? If there is one thing that could strike us any moment without any notice and against which we humans have no protection against, it is death that comes calling at its own time. Sudden death of family members, relatives and friends comes as a shock and reinforces one's belief on the impermanence and uncertainty of life. Death may not be a pleasant topic of discussion and is avoided by most of us as something to be ignored and only to be dealt with when it happens. But it is an eternal truth that any of us could encounter any time, in any form, regardless of age, state of health and life situation.

Death is another face of life. Where there is life, there is death and where there is death, there is life - in ways that are not visible to us. Death is not an easy thing to face. Fear of death is a primal fear, that keeps us safe, that keeps us from making mistakes that could endanger our lives. But to be able to live fully, one needs to recognise it for what it is and use the knowledge for one's benefit.

The deeply rooted fear of change, fear of the unknown, attachment to what we like and aversion to what we don't, and the inherent clinging to our ego gives death that fearful dark image. No matter how we take it, death is out there doing what it has always been doing, each and every day.

When we lose somebody close to us, it causes incredible pain that lasts for a long time. But like anything else, this pain too is impermanent. Difficult as it may be to believe when in mourning, this gnawing ache in your whole being, the emptiness, the overwhelming sadness too passes away with time. The intensity lessens, the attachment loses its grip gradually, the prints of memories in your mind fade a shade, and you become more accepting of the reality as it is. We have no other choice but to accept it in anyway we choose that comforts us the most - as a twist of fate, a pre-destined event, will of god, a brief stopover before another journey ahead, a biological fact, so on and so forth.

Ideas abound regarding death, depending on one's background, social conditioning, religious beliefs, intellectual and or spiritual evolution. This is one huge topic that we could go on arguing about till our very last day and we wouldn't be better off than when we started. Even if we are die hard atheists, the fact remains that we have just this life at this point of time.

Awareness of death each and every day, in a positive sense definitely gives a fresh new lease on one's life. It helps us appreciate every morning as yet another opportunity to live life fully, happily and do the best we can, so that at the end of the day we surrender to sleep without a tinge of regret for any actions performed in the day. What matters the most is how we live while we live and I daresay then, death will naturally take care of itself.

The essence of what many spiritual paths say about death as I understand it, is that - life, that has been true to ones' conscience, that meticulously refrained from hurting and harming others, worked for other's benefit and did its best to purify all one's negativities is truly a life well lived. Such a life has no fear of death.

Once deeply aware of our mortality and uncertainty as to when we will depart from this life, it adds to our determination and commitment to make the most of the time available today. Then, although everything outside, all problems remain the same, our attitude towards it changes; and minor and major irritants, disappointments; petty squabbles cease to cast their dark shadows on us.

Gradually, with consistent effort, alertness and awareness, we can truly be freed from shackles created by inner and the outer world. This calls for a life full of compassion and striving constantly to be free from all attachments and aversions. It means practicing this awareness constantly and striving to stay on the road not so easily traversed. It means practicing what we preach.

It also requires us to be aware that everything we perceive with our sense organs is impermanent and heading towards dissolution. With that knowledge and sense of equanimity we can live a peaceful, happy life, under any circumstances. Life then becomes fascinating, full of possibilities, exuding positive energy, bursting with light that embraces one and all. ■



It is important to keep children away from the drug addicts

Counseling by drug therapist, Ragina Shah

How can we as teachers help those students who are on drugs?

Shambhu K.C., Ghattekelo
Most children are exposed to drugs at an early age in schools.

Concerned teachers like you can play a vital role in helping such students and guiding them towards the right path. First, you must be able to recognise whether any student is taking drugs or not. You can spot them by their appearance since generally their faces look dull, they are very thin and look dirty. Most of them also tend to grow their hair long and have tattoos and pierced rings almost everywhere on their body.

Children on drugs tend to behave differently and their

attitude shows that they have a problem. Such children become sad or happy without any reason and they become very aggressive if something does not go their way. They are unstable and cannot sustain their interest in anything. They frequently miss school, lose interest in studying and their grades drop down.

Other signs are: they frequently get involved in fights and want to portray themselves as heroes or martyrs; they always want to be the center of attraction and have no respect for their seniors. These are symptoms to watch out for and once identified, such children must be encouraged to go for treatment immediately. The addicted as well as other children must be educated about the effects of drugs, diseases that can be contracted after

drug use such as gastric problems, ulcer, hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS, etc. It is also very important to keep other students away from the ones who are addicted.

All children must be made aware of avoiding the company of addicts since drug addicts can exert their influence on their peers and others. Addicts convince others about the 'advantages' of drugs for selfish reasons. For effective handling of these matters it is very important for all teachers to be aware and educated regarding drug addiction.

Please address any queries you have about drug addiction to:
newsfront@bhrikuti.com (Your identity will be protected.)



Michael Moore

Moore in strife for Cuba film

FILMMAKER Michael Moore, whose upcoming documentary features ailing Ground Zero workers he took to Cuba for health care, is being investigated for travelling to the communist country without permission.

A letter from the Treasury Department, arriving a week before Sicko is scheduled to premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, warned Moore that Americans were banned from travelling to Cuba without US Government consent.

The letter also demanded that Moore hand over the names of his travel companions and those who

arranged the March trip.

In response, Moore sent Sicko to a "safe house" in Canada, "given the concerns about efforts by the Bush administration to confiscate or censor the film", said a source close to Moore.

"President Bush and the administration should be spending their time trying to help these heroes get health care instead of abusing the legal process to advance a political agenda," producer Meghan O'Hara said. Moore was not available on Thursday and his lawyers were "exploring their options", the source said.

A Treasury spokeswoman would not say why officials wanted information about the people who accompanied Moore, or what penalties he could face for travelling there without a licence, for which he applied in October.

The department "issues hundreds of letters each year asking for additional information when possible sanctions violations have occurred", Brookly McLaughlin said.

New York Congressman Jose Serrano, a Democrat, sent Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson a critical letter on Thursday. "This action was taken solely to harass a filmmaker pursuing his journalistic occupation," he wrote.

Travel restrictions to Cuba are part of the 1962 US embargo of the island.

An industry analyst said the investigation's timing was "great news" for Moore, whose well-oiled publicity machine thrives on his criticism of US President George W. Bush.

"They are playing into his hands," said Chad Hartigan of Exhibitor Relations. "I don't know what could come out of it on the Government's side other than proving whatever point he's trying to make in the film."

(news.com.au)

Movie review:

'Life in a Metro'

On the right track



Cast: Shilpa Shetty, Konkona Sen Sharma, Irrfan Khan, Kay Kay Menon, Shiney Ahuja, Sharman Joshi, Kangna Ranaut

Direction: Anurag Basu

Finally, a film that uses an ensemble cast the way it should be done, with each having his or her own space to grow and yet connecting at various points in the film. Truly, 'Life in a Metro', helmed by the otherwise edgy Anurag Basu ('Murder', 'Gangster') is a slice of life in a metro, more so Mumbai.

The characters are easily recognisable—the homemaker Shikha (Shilpa Shetty), whose marriage to philandering Ranjeet (Kay Kay Menon) has lost all meaning. She briefly finds solace in the stranger she meets every Saturday Akash (Shiney Ahuja), who has let life pass him by as he struggles to make it on stage.

Then there is her sister Shruti (Konkona Sen Sharma) and her room mate Neha (Kangna Ranaut), one who is searching for love at 30 and the other caught up in a loveless relationship, and Rahul (Sharman Joshi) intelligent, ambitious, and unable to express his love for Neha. There is also Debu (Irrfan Khan) searching for the perfect partner on shaadi.com. All caught up in the relentless pace that comprises big city life.

The relationship that is awkward though not unbelievable is that of Shikha's old dance teacher Shivani (Nafisa Ali Sodhi), who lives in an old people's home. An old flame Amol (Dharmendra) comes back into her life and they find happiness together. It is her son's reaction to the news though that rings most true. Unconcerned about his mother all he is worried about is whether she has signed any property papers over to her friend.

As the many emotions in the many lives play out, as they all try

to find that special someone even as they go about living mundane lives, there is a certain hope that the director works relentlessly and that's what continually absorbs you. You hope Ranjeet will understand Shikha, Neha will realise what she means to Rahul, Debu and Shruti will connect. It is the process that is engaging.

'Metro' may be touted as Shilpa's film given her new international status, and she turns in one of her better performances too, but the ones to watch for are Konkona and Irrfan as they go about their mismatched lives till reality dawns on one and then the other. Their getting together is accomplished in a hilarious sequence. Kay Kay Menon's slime-ball act is competent. Shiney, Kangana and Sharman are good too; Nafisa and Dharmendra are somewhat awkward though it's lovely to see the older Dharmendra acting romantic.

The tedious moments of the film are the songs, not because of their composition but because all four are filmed in the same way. Pritam, the music director, and two cronies lip-sync the songs like three fakirs while the film's characters battle their way through their crises.

And finally a word for Anurag Basu. There is no way you can get to Churchgate on a bus that is marked headed for Vihar Lake. Forgot your directions wot? ■



Shilpa Shetty

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Bhrikuti Publication Pvt. Ltd.
Lazimpat, Kathmandu, Tel: 4443888, Fax: 4411912

Kasthamandap Distribution Pvt. Ltd.
Teku, Kathmandu, Tel: 2010821

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