



Courage & Conviction

newsfront

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What does new Nepal have for me ?

Lollypop

PM dangles carrot to save Melamchi project

■ nf correspondent

No one knows if it was an outright or a tactical surrender to conquer but PM Koirala did it. He agreed to hand-over the task of building all houses and infra-structure in the cantonment areas to Hishila Yami, Minister for Physical Planning and Works; overruling his cabinet colleagues.

It could be a ploy to sweeten up Yami to extract her endorsement for the multi-million dollar Melamchi Drinking Water Project that is on verge of being abandoned now. Koirala government runs the risk of losing Melamchi and other projects as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has threatened to pull out if Koirala fails to honour his cabinet decision to hand-over the management of drinking water supply for the capital to a British Company, the Seventh Stern International. The deadline for signing the contract expired on May 15 and the

persuade Yami to support Melamchi project, as otherwise she would be defeated in the cabinet. "Yami will have to be prepared to give in or face defeat on Melamchi when the cabinet meets next," a Congress minister told newsfront, adding, "other coalition partners are with the Prime Minister on this."

As per the new agreement on 'combatants', those who leave the camps will be paid Rs 1000 a month against the demand of Rs 3,000 by the Maoists. At least half of the 31,000 living in the camps at present are not likely to be qualified as 'combatants' when the UN begins the stalled verification process soon.

Construction and allowances together would cost 500 million Rupees, according to the official sources. PM asked Finance Minister Mahat not to make an issue of it when the minister suggested that Maoists should first furnish details of 900 million Rupees which was given to them earlier. ■

Koirala okayed a proposal to entrust the construction works that will involve building about 1,000 houses for Maoist.

whole issue is in limbo after Yami wrote to the cabinet to review the award of the contract.

"We will still try to settle the issue and save the project," Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat told newsfront, but

he feared that the country was likely to lose many bilateral and multilateral international projects. Mahat's two meetings with Yami, the last one on Saturday, failed to change her mind.

But in contrast, Koirala okayed a proposal to entrust the construction works that will involve building about 1,000 houses for Maoist combatants lodged in seven main camps and 21 sub-camps to Yami who will have the sole authority to decide on the type of construction and the way money will be spent. She assured that she will begin the work right away and complete it before monsoon starts.

Surprisingly, Koirala took this decision after the senior most Maoist Minister, K B Mahara, expressed his inability to influence Yami on the Melamchi issue. Koirala had asked Mahara to

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Inside PM feels Maosits not trustworthy on page 3

Stalled

The fate of over 7.5 million students hangs in balance since 35,000 plus schools across the country are locked out with pro-Maoist teachers holding their keys. The indefinite lock-out followed a threat by teachers who have formed a Pro-Republican Front; declaring that they would not let the schools operate if their demands that includes free education up to class ten, regularisation of all temporary teachers and re-absorption of sacked teachers in the past, are not met.

PABSON, a representative body of parents and teachers of private and boarding schools retaliated against the strike by announcing that they would not pay any salary to the teachers during the indefinite strike. "We are doing all this because teachers as well as guardians and

parents of the affected children need to play a role when the right to education of the children is in danger", Umesh Shrestha, Chief of PABSON told newsfront.

Agitated teachers and parents are waiting for the return of Education Minister, Pradeep Nepal from Male to intervene. PABSON representatives have already met PM G P Koirala and Maoist leader, Baburam Bhattarai to inform that, "they would fight rather than succumb to the blackmail tactics of some teachers."

There are about 27,000 government schools and 8,500 private schools in the country which have been closed since last week. The group of teachers who have called the strike also refused to negotiate with a Joint-Secretary level committee formed by the government.

On Sunday, ANFSU (R), student wing of the Maoist Raided the Budanilkantha school and forced its indifinate closure in solidarity with the teachers on strike.

In fact, the Maoists-schools relation has

always been bad during the years of conflict, with Maoists using private schools as a source of securing money. The relationship has only worsened now with various organisations affiliated with the Maoists continuing to disrupt the institutions on some pretext or the other. Maoists had forced closure of hundreds of schools causing damage to many schools, mainly private owned, in the country. The decade long conflict incurred a loss of lives of more than 400 children, mostly students.

"This is unfair since even schools which have nothing to do with the demands of the pro-republican teachers are suffering," said chairman of one of the private schools in the capital, adding, "Maoists are using politics of intimidation and blackmail by targeting children."

"This is something that the United Nations should be looking into since what the Maoists are doing violates the concept of - schools as zone of peace, and amounts to violating children's right to education," PABSON Chief Shrestha said.

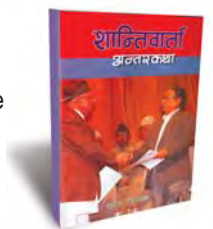
Stories unfold

Journalist Subash Devkota has tried to tell the story of the entire peace process including the 12-point pact between Seven Party Alliances (SPA) and Maoists in his recent publication, 'Shanti Varta: Antarkatha' (Peace Talk: Insight Story). The book that is based on interviews of the leaders, who had actively played prominent roles in the peace process, is a well researched account of the entire peace process, SPA and the Maoists.

The 200-pager is Devkota's second publication on recent Nepali politics after his first book 'Loktantrako Batoma' (On the Road to Democracy) published a year ago. The author has presented the political chronology after the 12-point pact between SPA and Maoists; and untold stories of each major political event in the book.

Devkota displays objectivity that speaks for his more than a decade-long experience in journalism. Interesting are several events highlighted such as instances of Maoist attacks at different points during the royal regime, during which time the king was busy being entertained by folk singers.

The writing displays a deep understanding of the author of the ongoing politics and events preceding it.



Unfair

Rayamajhi Commission was not unbiased

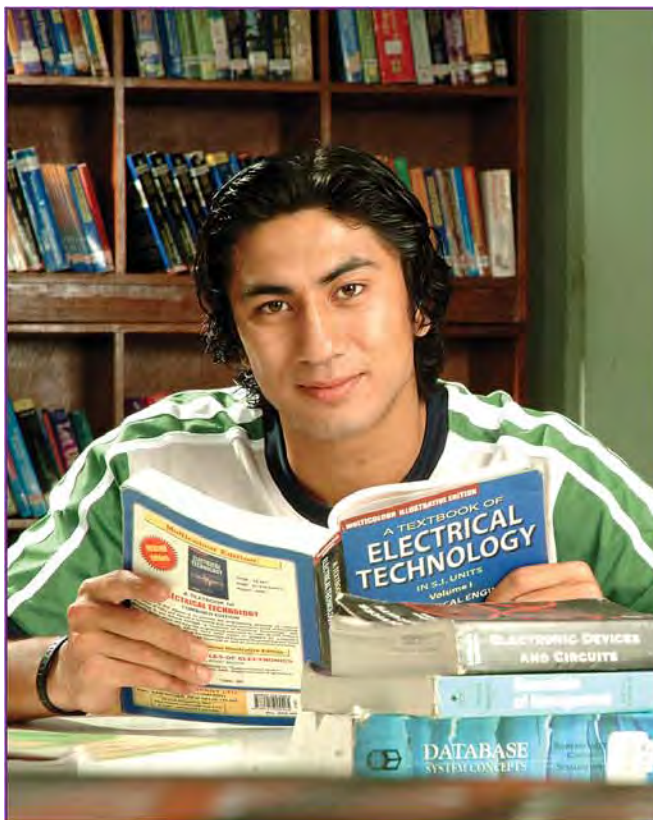
The Rayamajhi Commission got a slap on its face on Friday when former deputy Prime Minister K P Oli lamented that not only its report was biased and unfair but it also made no recommendations to initiate any action against the king for his alleged role in suppression of the pro-democracy movement last April.

That nails the claim of Justice Rayamajhi, who headed the commission that probed use of state power and funds to suppress the movement; and which claimed to have recommended action against the king. The commission simply said that the king made an atonement of his action by reviving parliament and handing over power to the political parties through a royal decree on April 24 last year - said Oli while speaking at a function organised by the Madan Bhandari - Jibaraj Ashrit Foundation on the occasion of the duo's 15th death

anniversary in the capital on Friday.

"As a result, no action could be initiated against the king," Oli, who headed the cabinet committee to study and suggest action on the basis of the Rayamajhi commission report, said. He further claimed that the Rayamajhi Commission acted in a manner that could not be called fair and unbiased; and added, "It did not do its investigation properly... In many cases, it has held the pro-democracy civil and police officials as guilty for the movement's suppression." Oli did not mention the names of 'implicated innocent officials,' but that gives credence to speculations that the commission acted as a persecution wing of the government.

Oli's comment drags the commission into further controversy as there have been comments and questions on its political composition, conduct and the manner it found certain people 'guilty' even without ever calling them to respond to the charges labeled against them. In an equally mysterious way, the commission gave clean chits to about 90 people who appeared before it, to record their statement. The government has not yet given a copy of the report to the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner (OHCHR) despite its repeated requests.



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Return assets first

PM feels Maoists not trustworthy

■ nf correspondent

Prime Minister G P Koirala has taken an assertive posture, at least for now, since the Maoists are increasingly getting defiant and becoming disrespectful to their earlier commitments. Koirala wants captured assets returned by the ex-rebels as a condition for fulfillment of any other conditions by the government. Koirala's assertion follows his conclusion that enough is enough and the peace process cannot be carried forward based on the conditions laid down by the Maoists.

"Nothing would move forward now without you returning the illegally captured property," Koirala is believed to have conveyed to the Maoist chief Prachanda recently. "Yes, the PM has conveyed the message and we are hopeful that Maoists would act upon it sincerely," Dr Shekhar Koirala, Congress working committee member and an aide to the PM told newsfront.

Not satisfied with Prachanda's statement last week that he has instructed his party workers to return the land illegally occupied by the Maoists, Prime Minister sent a stern message saying he wants, "report of action taken, and not mere statement of cunningness."

As a result, Prachanda on Saturday asked his cadres to vacate occupied land of 83 people in Dang releasing around 90 per cent of the 3,000 Bighas of land. "We are negotiating for the release of 15 more owners' land," a Maoist source said. Those whose land has been released include that of the former Home Minister Khum Bahadur Khadka. Return of other confiscated property/land in other districts will follow.

"Privately, Prachanda requests me to understand his predicament since his cadres are tough. But when he goes to them, he speaks in a different tone as if there is no way they would agree to return the confiscated assets. Enough is enough. I will not do anything without their returning it," Koirala told party's some senior leaders individually and in group recently.

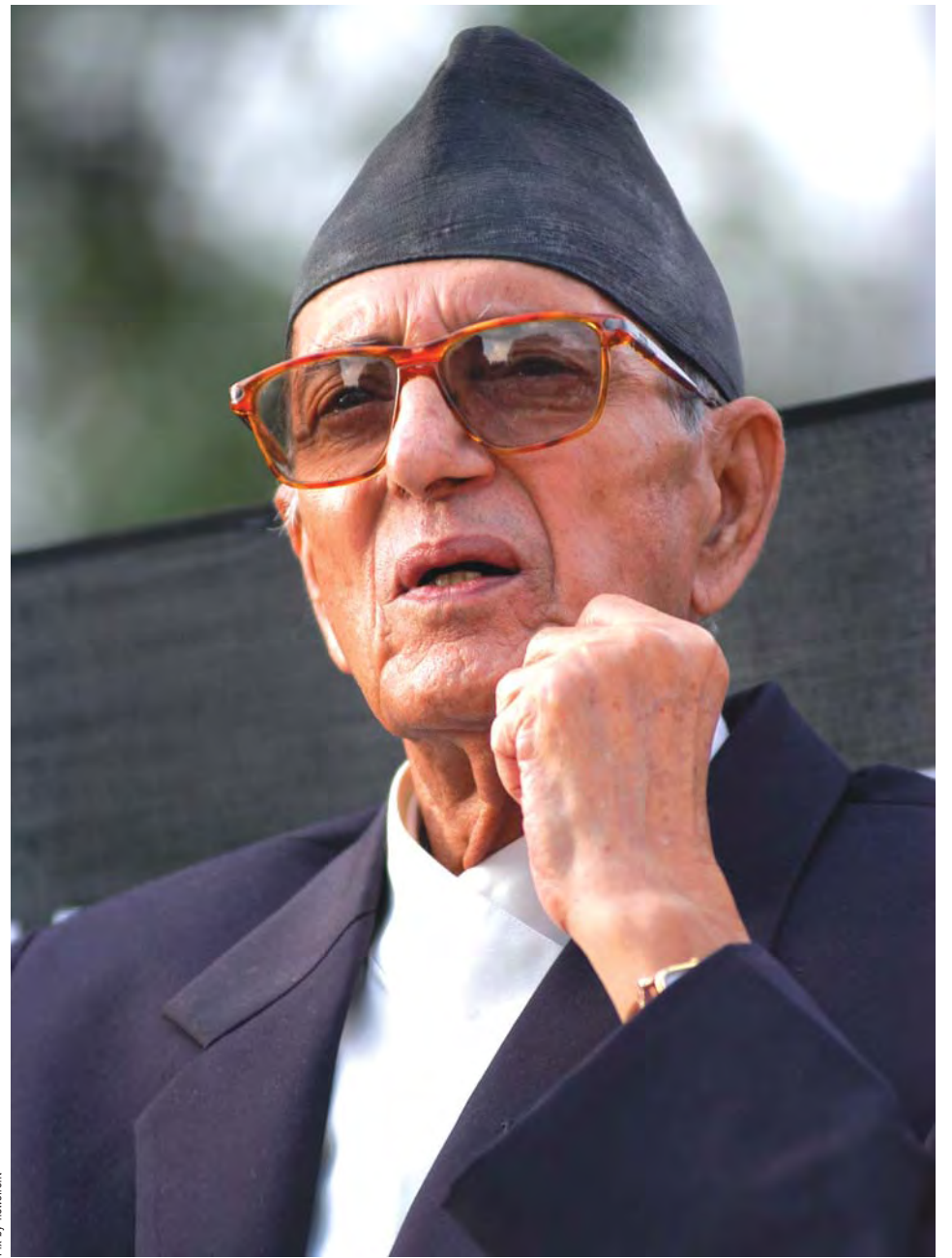
Koirala's stern message follows mounting pressure on him from his party leaders with two suggestions. First, the government should not release any concessions to the Maoists including release of funds to their cantonments if the confiscated assets are not returned, and secondly, outlawing Young Communist League (YCL) for their acts of continued terror.

Some diplomats including from the United Nations have been expressing concern, in private with Koirala, that neither the government nor the Maoists own the peace process and sometimes their activities are much against the code of conduct that both sides have signed.

Koirala's latest bout of anger against the Maoists was visible in public when a team of parents and teachers of the private and boarding schools met him on Friday seeking government intervention to end the indefinite lock-out of schools all over the country by a group of teachers affiliated with the Maoists. "Break the lock," Koirala told them promising full support from the government.

Koirala's orders were however, not carried out after Home Minister K P Sitaula pleaded with the PABSON team to settle the issue through negotiations and not to do anything that would aggravate the situation.

As a result of the indefinite lock-out since



Pix by newsfront

Thursday, more than seven million children and their parents are agitating against the Maoists. "You send your child abroad and have crippled the educational system here," a PABSON delegate yelled at Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai on Friday.

However, sources say that how much the Maoists comply with the PM's wishes will be measured by two things - physical return of all confiscated assets to the rightful owners and cooperation with the U N in the process of verification of combatants. ■

News Brief

Magic wand

Maoist Chief Prachanda's claim may not have been taken seriously by any one, when he said, "Give me the authority, I will solve Terai problem within a fortnight." He did not elaborate what kind of authority he was seeking but said he would be both persuasive as well as retaliatory while seeking the solution.

Prachanda was talking to the media representatives in Pokhara on Saturday.

Violence and retaliation became part of the Terai movement for more political rights after a Maoist leader shot dead a pro-Madheshi rights worker on January 19 in Lahan. More than sixty people, fifty percent from the Maoists side, have lost their lives so far. The government has not yet formed a probe commission despite repeated promises.

Prachanda earlier suggested to the Prime Minister that Madheshi Janadhikar Forum and other Terai outfits should be outlawed and that Nepal Army as well as the Maoists guerrillas should be set loose on them.



Badu Out



Congress leader and former Minister of State for Communication, Dilendra Prasad Badu is likely to lose the second round of battle as well. This time, he is all set to lose the chairmanship of the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) - current version of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation

(KMTNC).

In less than two months of his having forfeited the cabinet berth to K B Mahara, Badu may soon cease to be the chairperson of the NTNC as Forest Minister Matrika Yadav has set his eyes on the post. He was dropped from the cabinet on April 1, as a result of the Maoists joining the government; and his communication portfolio was handed over to Maoist minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara.

Even after he was out of the cabinet, PM G P Koirala had retained him as chairman of the NTNC until recently. But last week Koirala is believed to have yielded to the demand of forest minister Matrika Yadav that he should be heading the Trust.

An amendment in the statute of the KMTNC after last April not only changed its nomenclature, but also made PM the patron in place of the king. The patron was also given the right to nominate a chairman. When the contemplated change comes into effect, a Maoist leader will be delving into affairs of an organisation earlier patronised and headed by the king and the crown prince.

South bound

Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal is likely to visit India in near future.

Nepal who is to arrive in Delhi on June 1 is likely to meet high level Indian politicians, both in government and outside. The visit comes at a time when he is exploring a republic front with the Maoists and also been challenging the leadership of G P Koirala.

UML despite it working for republican Nepal is not comfortable with the Communist party of India-Marxist (CPM) moving much closer to Nepali Maoists.



Refugee affairs



The move to have Bhutani refugees settled in the third countries is likely to get a fillip soon. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres's 3-day mission to Kathmandu this week, is an apparent indicator. US has pledged to settle 60,000 Bhutani refugees in their country.

This is his first official trip to Nepal that will have the highest UNHCR authority face to face with over 107,000 Bhutani refugees living in eastern Nepal based camps for more than 15 years.

During his three day visit beginning Tuesday (May 22), Guterres is expected to meet PM Koirala, high level government officials, heads of UN agencies and UNHCR donors - with some details about the settlement plans that has been endorsed by the United States, European Union, Australia and the Nordic countries.

The refugee situation in Nepal is one of the most protracted in the Asian region. During his visit the High Commissioner will focus attention on current efforts to alleviate the long-standing plight of the refugees and the need for comprehensive solutions. UNHCR has been much encouraged by the efforts of a group of interested countries to assist in resolving this situation - Nini Gurung, spokesperson and External Relations Assistant of the UNHCR country office said.

■ nf correspondent



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Point to Ponder

At his best, man is the noblest of all animals; separated from law and justice he is the worst.

- Aristotle

Unjustified curb

In a democracy, everyone is deemed to be equal in the eyes of law. That means no matter how high and mighty, one cannot enjoy impunity. It also means every citizen and institution has a right not to be vilified by the arms of the state; and mere investigation does not confirm charges against any citizen. Over-reacting and undermining prestige and dignity of individuals and institutions through any actions of the state are not acceptable in a democracy. But unfortunately, the government has done just that by stopping Bijaya Nath Bhattarai, Governor of Rashtra Bank, from going abroad on an official trip. This might invite serious and sometimes dangerous response not at all palatable for the state.

This happened a day after the government prevented former Chief of Army Staff, Pyar Jung Thapa from boarding a flight to London to attend a ceremony at Sandhurst. Thapa apparently had obtained a green signal to travel abroad from the Prime Minister. The Commission on Abuse of Authority (CIAA) which is investigating him and others on the charge of suppressing the last year's pro-democracy movement required that he appear before it in a month's time.

Both individuals have been listed as having been involved in, "misuse of government funds to suppress the people's movement in 2006," by the Rayamajhi commission that was not only biased but acted in a politically motivated manner in the course of its investigation. The commission's conduct was unfair and biased to such an extent that it did not even honour minimum norms of giving some of the officers it declared 'guilty' a chance to depose.

It is yet to be seen how Nepal Army will react to its former leader being meted out such a treatment. At the same time, the government does not seem to realise that by stopping Bhattarai from representing Nepal's Central Bank in the international meeting, it is damaging its own image. Bhattarai continues to be the Governor and so is the highest authority that controls the national treasury. By retaining him in the post and yet not letting him go on an official visit clearly indicates how confused the government is. This clearly is a violation of human rights as well as institutional rights of the individuals concerned. Freedom of movement is a fundamental right of any individual and any restrictions if needed should be done in a transparent manner through due process of law. Mere investigation by the CIAA does not merit such an extreme infringement on the fundamental rights. ■



Letters

Errors and inaccuracies

The opinion column, "Moriarty's departure and Nepal's democracy" (Newsfront, May 14-20) was replete with errors and inaccurate suggestions.

The United States wholeheartedly supports Nepal's peace process and has backed that up with financial assistance and other forms of support. We have consistently called for the Maoists to enter mainstream politics. However, while the Maoists continue to engage in extortion, intimidation, and violence, they cannot be considered a mainstream political party — and they will remain on the U.S. terrorist list.

Ambassador James F. Moriarty has nearly completed the standard three-year tour of duty for an American ambassador. He never sought an extension, as the column claims, and will depart Nepal in July on schedule.

Ambassador Moriarty, speaking on behalf of the U.S. Government, has clearly and repeatedly stated that the future of the monarchy is a question for the people of Nepal to decide.

The column refers to "reports, which have not been officially refuted," concerning a plot apparently involving the government, the U.S. Embassy, and the Nepal Army. I am pleased to officially refute such nonsense. Additionally, the Ambassador was out of the country from April 28-May 10, so it is unclear what the author means when, writing in your May 14 edition, he refers to a meeting between the Ambassador and the Prime Minister "last weekend."

Finally, Ambassador-designate Nancy J. Powell is a senior U.S. diplomat who has dedicated her career to advancing U.S. relations with the countries of South Asia. Her record and reputation stand for themselves and should not be drawn into absurd regional conspiracy theories. To correct another error, she was Ambassador to Pakistan from 2002-2004, not during the 1990s as was wrongly reported in the column.



The United States wishes to see a peaceful, prosperous, and democratic Nepal. Our Ambassador and the diplomatic mission he heads are dedicated to this effort. It will continue to do so under his successor.

Sharon Hudson-Dean
 Acting Public Affairs Officer
 U.S. Embassy

Routine measures

Your report "Unsafe Nepal", which appeared on the front page of Newsfront on 14 May, gives your readers the precise opposite of the truth in stating that UN security measures in Nepal are "unprecedented". They are in fact entirely routine, as Newsfront would have been informed if it had asked UNMIN instead of relying on an unnamed "UN source".

UNMIN's mandate to monitor the management of arms and armed personnel and to support the Constituent Assembly election means that we have deployed personnel to offices in the five regional development regions and the seven divisional Maoist cantonment sites, and that prior to the election we will deploy teams to all 75 districts. It is a normal requirement of any UN peace support operation that there are regular assessments of the security situation and contingency plans, including for evacuation if necessary.

Contrary to your report, UNMIN has not prepared any special or unprecedented measures, and it is not contemplating evacuation of personnel. Further, UN security plans and assessments are entirely independent of security assessments and travel advisories of individual countries.

UNMIN will continue its support to the peace process with the deployment of personnel across the country, at the same time as taking all necessary measures to ensure the safety of its personnel, both national and international.

Kieran Dwyer
 Spokesperson, UNMIN

Spiritual Corner

self-knowledge is real happiness

Real happiness abides in self-knowledge alone.

Ramana Maharshi was born in 1879 in a village called Tirucculi about 30 miles south of Madurai in southern India. At an early age he had a profound experience in which he became acutely aware of the mortality of the body. This led on to a profound insight that he was not the body, but spirit. After this experience he became absorbed in deep meditations, in which he began to experience his real self, which transcended ego.

Extracts from his teachings:

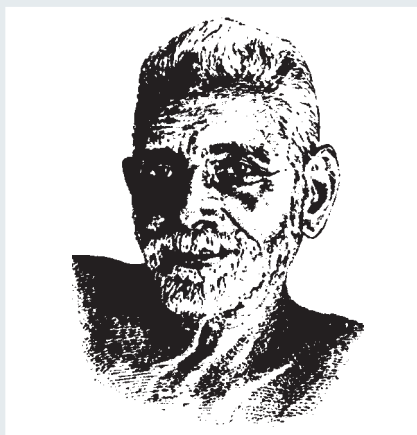
Nearly all mankind is more or less unhappy because nearly all do not know the true self.

All else is fleeting.

To know one's self is to be blissful always.

You are awareness. Awareness is another name for you. Since you are awareness there is no need to attain or cultivate it. All that you have to do is to give up being aware of other things - that is of the 'not-self'. If one gives up being aware of them then pure awareness alone remains, and that is the self.

All beings desire happiness always, happiness without a tinge of sorrow. At the same time everybody loves himself the best. The cause for love is only happiness. So, that



happiness must lie in oneself. That happiness is daily experienced by everyone in sleep, when there is no mind. To attain that

natural happiness one must know oneself. For that, self-enquiry, 'Who am I?' - is the chief means.

When you talk of love, there is duality, is there not - the person who loves and the entity called god who is loved? The individual is not separate from god. Hence love means one has love towards one's own self.

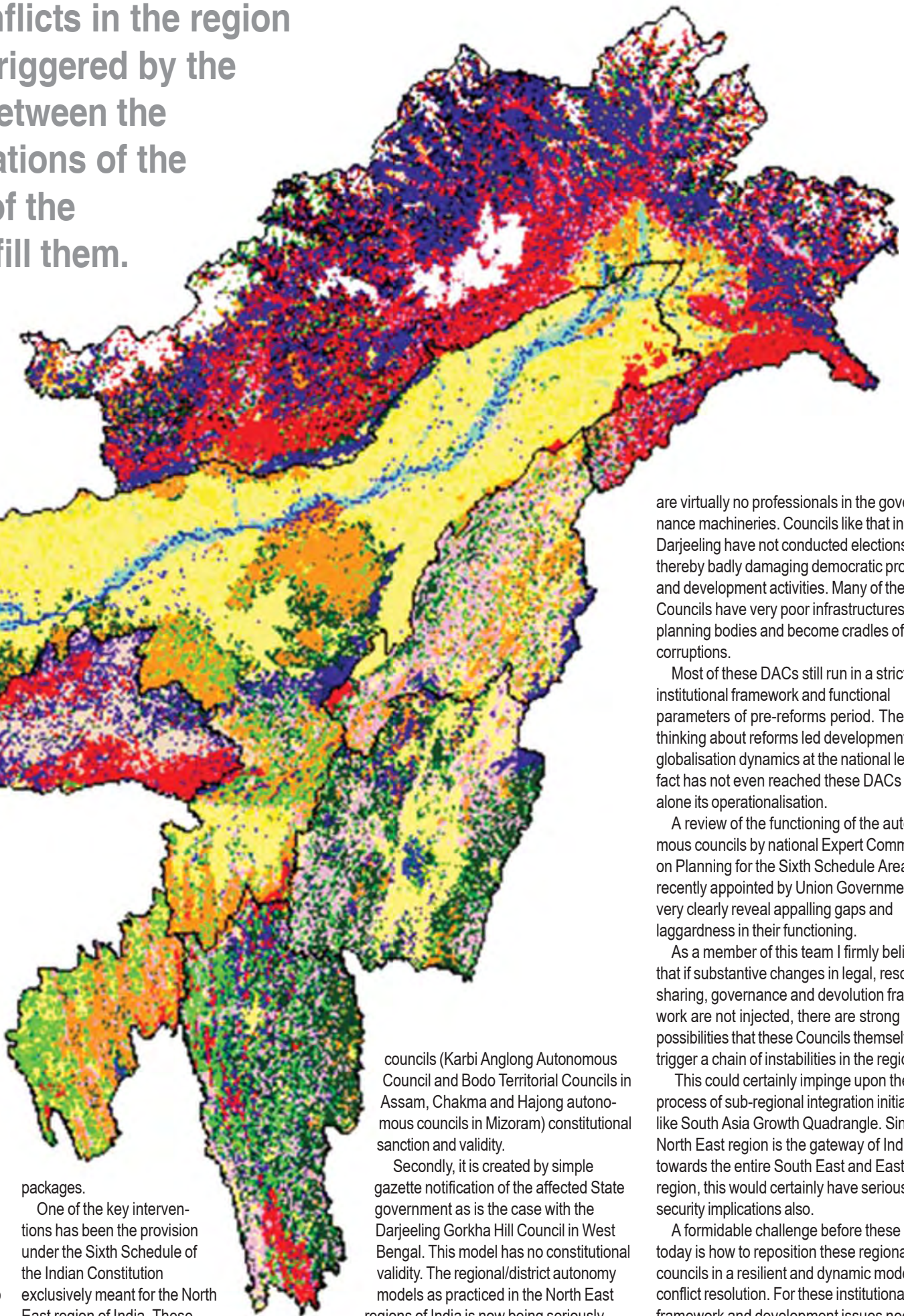
Only if one knows the truth of love, which is the real nature of self, will the strong entangled knot of life be untied. Only if one attains the height of love will liberation be attained. Such is the heart of all religions. The experience of self is only love, which is seeing only love, hearing only love, feeling only love, tasting only love and smelling only love, which is bliss. ■

Relevance of autonomous councils in NE India

The large scale conflicts in the region have been mostly triggered by the burgeoning gap between the development aspirations of the people and ability of the governments to fulfill them.



■ Prof Mahendra P Lama



The North Eastern Region of India comprises 8 states (Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura) and occupies an area of 2.62 lakh sq.km with a population of over 40 million. Over 98% of its border-line is shared with neighbouring countries [Bangladesh, Myanmar, China (Tibet) and Bhutan and Nepal].

The approach paper to the 11th Five Year Plan (2007-2012) of the Government of India mentions that this region had the highest growth rate in the pre-independence India. This region has been described as the most potential areas in the development agenda of the country. However much of the region has remained underdeveloped and conflict-ridden for long.

The large scale conflicts in the region have been mostly triggered by the burgeoning gap between the development aspirations of the people and ability of the governments to fulfill them. These conflicts have a range of genesis that vary from tribal assertion to remain totally aloof and excluded from the mainstream political development to conserving individual tribal identity. They also vary from threats of displacement arising from a steady flow of migrants from across the border to the behavior of State authorities particularly in handling the security issues.

Union Government has adopted a range of approaches to resolve these conflicts. Besides providing regional/district autonomy in terms of running the local affairs to various districts and accepting demands for full fledged statehoods, the Union government has signed peace accords and poured huge development

packages.

One of the key interventions has been the provision under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution exclusively meant for the North East region of India. These provisions relate to District Autonomous Councils (DACs) have been in vogue since 1950s. Under these provisions many of the districts have been provided with functional and development related autonomy including legislative, executive and judicial power under the broader umbrella of DACs.

Even in the last decade wherever there are ethnic and local conflicts (like the Bodos in Assam, the Hmars and Kukis in Manipur and Gorkhas in West Bengal) a ready made solution extended to rebel parties is that of regional autonomy within the existing state apparatus.

This is done through two distinct ways. Firstly, it is carried out under the Sixth Schedule which provides these autonomous

councils (Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and Bodo Territorial Councils in Assam, Chakma and Hajong autonomous councils in Mizoram) constitutional sanction and validity.

Secondly, it is created by simple gazette notification of the affected State government as is the case with the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council in West Bengal. This model has no constitutional validity. The regional/district autonomy models as practiced in the North East regions of India is now being seriously studied by other neighbouring countries including Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal that have remained conflict ridden at both local and national levels.

Despite these generous provisions there are serious issues of gap in very development thinking at the national and local levels, restricted devolution both administrative and financial powers, hurdles in autonomy in legislative functions and also serious impediments in larger political participation.

There are constant threats from the State government on the possible dissolution of the elected councils. Most of the councils complain that the State government has been very slow in handing over the agreed departments and budgetary allocations to the Councils. There

are virtually no professionals in the governance machineries. Councils like that in Darjeeling have not conducted elections thereby badly damaging democratic process and development activities. Many of the Councils have very poor infrastructures, no planning bodies and become cradles of corruptions.

Most of these DACs still run in a strict institutional framework and functional parameters of pre-reforms period. The thinking about reforms led development and globalisation dynamics at the national level in fact has not even reached these DACs let alone its operationalisation.

A review of the functioning of the autonomous councils by national Expert Committee on Planning for the Sixth Schedule Areas recently appointed by Union Government does very clearly reveal appalling gaps and laggardness in their functioning.

As a member of this team I firmly believe that if substantive changes in legal, resource sharing, governance and devolution framework are not injected, there are strong possibilities that these Councils themselves will trigger a chain of instabilities in the region.

This could certainly impinge upon the process of sub-regional integration initiatives like South Asia Growth Quadrangle. Since North East region is the gateway of India towards the entire South East and East Asia region, this would certainly have serious security implications also.

A formidable challenge before these DACs today is how to reposition these regional councils in a resilient and dynamic mode of conflict resolution. For these institutional framework and development issues need to be reassessed and re-examined with new approaches. The perception about the borders and border regimes need to be made liberal and widened so as to recognise the criticality of their interaction with cross border economic institutions and social networks.

Since most of these regional councils are located in the border areas, could these councils be allowed to make a much more meaningful and substantive cross-border interaction in areas like tourism, energy, biodiversity, trade and investment? Would this also mean a major change in national security perception?

(Lama is Chief Economic Adviser to the Government of Sikkim and Professor in Jawaharlal Nehru University, N.Delhi.)



Protect women's sexual rights

The oft repeated ABC model that adopts the strategy of Abstinence, Behaviour and Condom makes mirth of the situation where women have no control over these aspects.



■ Pankaja Bhattarai

A comprehensive report, issued by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in October 2006 entitled "In-depth study on all forms of violence against women," confirms that Violence against Women (VAW) by spouses, family members and employers is a human rights violation.

This report acknowledges at the highest level of the UN system what human and women's rights advocates have maintained that violence against women is both a cause and consequence of deeply entrenched inequality between men and women. It also acknowledges the fact that states have been largely ineffective in addressing VAW in spite of strong laws; the major reason being the impunity that perpetrators enjoy.

The report recognises that unless entrenched inequalities like lack of space for women's voices, women's representation, women's control and access over land and property are not taken into account, initiatives to address VAW will remain incomplete.

Given that control of women's bodies and sexuality is an insidious component of gender inequality, the women worldwide are experiencing its extreme consequence -the twin and fatal pandemic of violence and HIV/AIDS. This pandemic is now seeing an increasingly feminine face as women now comprise half of all people living with HIV/AIDS.

In Zimbabwe, South Africa and Zambia,

75% of the infected people in the age group 15-24 are females. In South Asia, young women account for 62 % of infections in the 15-24 year old age group. Closer home in neighboring India, 40% of those infected are housewives. Yet a recent research in Indian rural areas shows that only 46% of women were aware of the disease. In Nepal 50% of the infected women are housewives as per government data.

HIV programs cannot work in isolation without addressing gender-based abuse and violence; increasing capacities of women and adolescent girls to protect themselves.

Research establishes that one woman in four worldwide will experience sexual violence in an intimate relationship during her lifetime. Women are two to four times more likely to contract HIV during unprotected sex than men; because their sexual physiology places them at a higher risk of injuries and because they are more likely to be at the receiving end of violent or coercive sexual intercourse (UNAIDS 2001).

Studies like (Moreno 2003) state that women's first sexual encounter itself is likely to be forced. In South Asian societies like Nepal child marriage is a social sanction to allow forced sex. A recent study supported by

Actionaid Nepal revealed a pattern that such child women not only endure repeated forced sex but also bigamous relationships of their husbands. Women's ability to control her body and sexual relationship is linked to her psychological and emotional state. Therefore in spite of recent legislations on marital rape, domestic violence is a fact of life that women endure on a daily basis from their intimate partners and husbands.

Physical and sexual violence and HIV/AIDS have a symbiotic relationship and the study highlights that women are in no position to refuse or negotiate safe sex and thus suffer abusive relationship on a continuous basis. The risk of transmission increases exponentially in case of gang rape when the risk of HIV infection becomes very high. Similarly trafficked girls and girls working as sex workers are at the mercy of customers, law enforcers and have very less control over safe sex.

The cycle of violence continues when women become HIV positive. Most women hardly ever get tested; nor have the means to access or continue treatment even when their husbands do so. They choose not to disclose their status as they risk further violence within family and community. Many of those whose status becomes known have been forced into sex work for sheer survival for lack of any alternatives. Women have been overly burdened as caregivers in AIDS response but have no support system for themselves.

It is high time women's right organisations speak out on state and donor apathy to make women central to the HIV/AIDS response- a response which is based on the percept that there is no gender inequality and men and women are in a level playing field. The oft repeated ABC model that adopts the strategy of Abstinence, Behaviour and Condom makes mirth of the situation where women have no control over these aspects. It closes its eyes to the fact that for women marriage does not guarantee safety from HIV. In fact marriage could well turn out to be a death trap for women in the face of the South Asian obedience culture and their husbands' sexual freedom. HIV programs cannot work in isolation without addressing gender-based abuse and violence; increasing capacities of women and adolescent girls to protect themselves from the risk of HIV infection; and without putting into place support systems that address their dependence on men.

In the AIDS movement women should be seen as agents requiring protection and promotion of human rights and not as mere recipients receiving benefits as and when they trickle down. Once they (including HIV positive women's groups) become one of the primary stakeholders of the AIDS response- women focussed prevention measures will automatically become the central fulcrum of the response; including availability of female condoms and immediate administration of Prophylaxis for rape survivors.

With increasing feminisation of the pandemic there is an urgent need for women's rights to be at the centre of any response. This focus is impossible without women leading the process from the front. Let us act starting this "Global week of Action on HIV & AIDS" - 20-26 May, 2007. ■

Ani speaks out

When you do something different, and are different, you invite all sorts of comments naturally.

Ani Choying Drolma, 36, popularly known as the singing nun has been a subject of much curiosity and controversy in the Nepali society where her being and acting different from the fixed norms stands out. After a phase of much introspection that followed a personal tragedy, she talked about her tribulations and dreams with newsfront. Excerpts from the interview:

In retrospect, how has your journey been from the first time you sang in public in 1998?

After my singing career took off and I became, 'successful' - I feel I have added responsibilities in my life. I started my school for nun children, Arya Tara School in Pharping with seven students in 2000 which has grown to 53 students now. Six students have already passed out and have gone on to Benaras University for their further studies. That makes me happy.

Along the way, there were challenging times that called for more effort but on the whole, I think I have been lucky to have my wishes fulfilled. Looking back on how my life was, I consider it a miracle to be where I am today, and that would not have been possible without the blessings of my late Guru, Tulku Orgyen Rinpoche.

Do you think you being a nun invited more scrutiny from the public?

Yes, people try to fit me within a conventional framework just because I am a nun and they think a nun should behave and live in a certain way. They have increased expectations from me and they always expect me to look cheerful and behave in a saintly way. I am just a human being following a certain life style and that does not make me better or worse than anybody else. I do what I feel is the right thing to do. I listen to my conscience. I do not follow rigid conventions and I guess that makes me the target of many speculations.

Does that bother you?

At times, my sense of well being is challenged when I hear baseless judgment, negative comments, and shocking rumours

about me. I still am not so successful in maintaining my composure when provoked too much; but I am learning to not to let it disturb me. I have realised that no matter what others say, deep down inside, I am confident that I am not lying to myself. I tell myself that when you do something different, and are different, naturally, you invite all sorts of comments. My favorite consolation is what the Buddha told Atula:

"They blame you for being silent, they blame you when you talk too much, and when you talk too little. Whatever you do, they blame you. The world always finds a way to praise and a way to blame. It always has and it always will."

How do you raise funds for your projects?

80 percent of my income comes from the sales of my CDs internationally, and from the sale of souvenirs - made by Nepali women that I put up outside the halls during my concert tours. The rest come from individual sponsors who believe in me and the work I'm doing.

What other projects are you involved in?

A recently completed one was the water project where we set up a water reservoir tank that supplies water to nine VDCs in Seti Devi in Pharping. A new one is a Thanka painting school for girls, an area that has mostly been dominated by males. Till date, we have one



people try to fit me within a conventional framework just because I am a nun and they think a nun should behave and live in a certain way.

teacher for ten artistically inclined girl children.

One building for Arya Tara School has been completed now after three years. I also have to keep in mind the welfare of the children's future just in case something were to happen to me. Now I am planning to help establish a kidney hospital building where the sick can avail of the expensive treatment at lower costs. I've been in touch with Dr. Kafle regarding this.

Was the idea of a kidney hospital inspired after the demise of your mother recently?

Yes, she suffered a lot with kidney problems. Her passing away has been a great loss to my life. She was someone who loved me unconditionally and never judged me. During her treatment I saw how the poor suffer when they don't have enough money for the treatment. I wish to do something to lessen their pain.

How do you see yourself today?

I see myself as somebody who has found spiritual and financial freedom and leading a life of carefree dignity. There are different ways, methods towards enlightenment. Helping others is my Tapasya, my way towards it.

What are your future plans?

As I progress, I guess there will be more ideas, more things to do and I believe that with proper motivation and intention, I will be able to carry them out. And I am grateful for all that I've been able to achieve through my songs.

How does it feel to be well known?

I miss my privacy and I guess that is the price you pay for fame. And really, I did not seek fame. It just happened.

What is your dream?

I lived my dreams through my potential. I wish that all women in Nepal realise their inner potential and use it for their benefit; and to see each and every girl get the best education without any problems. I wish that all women would be able to live their lives free from fear of any kind. ■

Perennial Begging?

Present problem faced by Nepal on account of oil supply is neither new nor sudden.



■ Binod P Bista

When Gazprom, the leading Russian company controlling 16% of world gas reserves and ranking third in oil behind Saudi Arabia and Iran, cut off gas supply to Ukraine after failing to reach an agreement on the price level, it made world news as this action not only soured relations between the Russian federation and Ukraine but also prevented many European countries receiving energy especially during winter.

Later, Gazprom had difficulty in convincing Byelorussia to raise prices commensurate with current market prices as that country would have raised prices for servicing the pipe line that carried Russian gas to Europe. Notwithstanding the arguments of both sides whether a company had a right to increase prices for its supply or if that had been sudden and unfair to receiving countries, the main problem has remained with the practice of subsidy. Earlier Russia used to supply gas and oil at highly subsidised rates to her friends.

In spite of repeated reminders of the international financial institutions, most developing countries have been subsidising the prices of oil and gas. The key difference between countries like Nepal and other relatively better off developing countries lies in the capacity to sustain the subsidy and yet manage to grow at a fairly desirable rate.

Since Nepal is poor and less developed, her capacity to sustain the subsidy on oil is much less even though her people, similar to all of developing Asia, would face similar problems on account of oil price rise. At this juncture, Nepal is in a spot as neither her future direction is clear nor her

present is secured. Like many other transition countries, Nepal needs massive support from all friends.

Present problem faced by Nepal on account of oil supply is neither new nor sudden. Ever since the price of oil surged in the global market, reaching as high as nearly 80 US \$ a barrel, the gap between the purchasing price and selling price widened enormously as many countries including Nepal stuck to their policies of subsidy. The loss sustained by national oil corporation has not diminished in spite of notable changes in the succeeding governments including the present all inclusive democratic government.

Although there were attempts in the past to discredit the employees of the government owned company as inefficient, the basic problem is of structural nature than anything else. It does not require much imagination to understand that any good that is sold below its cost price is bound to incur losses. The lesser the selling price the higher the losses.

The other problem is clearly the lack of management. As long as the government feels that it is essential to continue with the subsidy on oil and its products, then it has to also equip the company with adequate financial resources to perform the task as assigned. How can the NOC run with ad hoc releases of partial amount that is owed to Indian Oil Company? The result being that the government has to intervene at the highest level for such a trivial matter. What a shame!

The solution to this problem has to be found on a longer term basis. However, recent information provided by a senior minister reveals that the government might be preparing a new petroleum act with a view to involving the private sector of Nepal. Considering that importation of oil requires huge amount, running into billions, and if the government had found it difficult to raise the required amount in time, which particular private company (in Nepal) or its group has the capacity to invest that amount?

Unless the government is pondering to invite foreign multinationals having proven resources for oil importation, local exercise would hardly rescue the government. Moreover, since it is the



Hit by fuel crisis

government that provides subsidies it needs to be ready to settle the amount due to the importer in good time. Or else, the oil will be stopped time and again.

There seem to be two clear options available to the government at this stage: gradual phasing out of subsidy over a period of three years or so in order to provide sufficient ground to Nepal and ensuring that required funds are available with the NOC or to discuss the matter at higher level with India so that a moratorium on full payment can be obtained for the next three-year period.

Since India has increased its financial support massively to Nepal, particularly after the April uprising, it would not be a great matter for her to accede to Nepal's request at this hour of need. Placing NOC at an utterly disgraceful position and humiliating the company before its Indian counterpart can serve no purpose. Perennial begging policy should be made an outcast forever. ■

(Bista is a development economist, works with Boao Forum for Asia in China.)

Legitimation Crisis

Eight party alliance has developed an authoritarian and totalitarian tendency.



■ Bhim Prasad Bhurtel

The delayed Constituent Assembly (CA) election now creates problems of political legitimacy as well as a crisis. Politics is a game of power and players are expected to follow a certain set of rule and standard in conduct. Politics is not a random variable that assumes a random action.

Power, authority and legitimacy are inseparable and an integral part in politics. The current political development is based on the people's power that was expressed in *Janaandolon II*. The people's verdict to the Seven Party Alliance and Maoist are: interim or transitional management of state affairs and the



transitional justice and; to conduct constituent assembly election within the timeline and make a democratic and inclusive constitution which could reflect the actual pluralism in the land.

Legitimacy is the belief that political parties or leaders possess the quality of rightness or moral goodness; and therefore their commands should be accepted by the people because of this quality, regardless of the specific content of the called for acts.

Legitimacy is considered a basic condition for rule. Without a minimal amount of legitimacy, no one can rule. Regimes in all the states require the assent of a large proportion of the popula-

tion in order to retain power. The most common source of legitimacy today is the perception that a government is operating under democratic principles and is subject to the will of the people because democracy is based on the will of the people. Governments often claim a popular mandate to exercise power; however, how this mandate is derived is of paramount importance.

Democratic states claim democratic legitimacy on the grounds that they have regular free and fair contested elections in which political parties participate without any fear and intimidation. But the EPA has been trying to run the state without such a popular verdict.

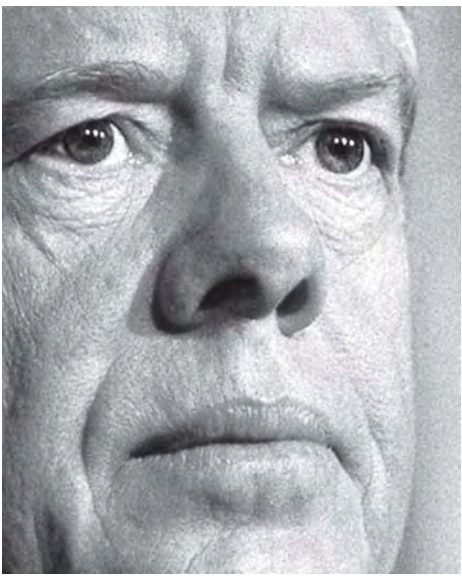
Every dictator claims that he is a democrat and has a virtual 'roadmap' of democracy. King Gynendra also had a roadmap for democracy in February 1, 2005. Nepalese and international community opposed him because it was against the consent of the people. Nobody has rights to run the regime without people's mandate. In the name of people, now EPA has developed an authoritarian and totalitarian tendency.

EPA has made a mockery of the interim constitution and the parliament. Major decisions are taken at the supreme leader meeting of the EPA. Is this proving their faith on the written constitution and the rule of law? A system of checks and balances and control of one organ of the state by another is also prevalent in democracy. Has state organs been able to function without influences of EPA leadership till date?

The most popular theory in democracy is consent of the governed. This theory states that the people consent to the constitution, like any other contract and are later bound by its terms. If they are unable to declare the date of poll, the terms of office set by *Janaandolon II* will be over. Nobody is legitimate in office without consent of the people.

Eight party leaders claim they are peoples' representatives, but what are its parameters? If their claims and mass rallies are the parameters then how different are they from king Gyanendra who also had massive sponsored crowds to support him? ■

(Bhurtel is an academician.)



Carter blasts Blair, Bush

The almost undeviating support by Great Britain for the ill-advised policies of President Bush in Iraq has been a major tragedy for the world.



FORMER US President Jimmy Carter blasted George W. Bush's presidency as "the worst in history" and denounced British Prime Minister Tony Blair's loyal relationship with Mr Bush.

"I think as far as the adverse impact on the nation around the world, this administration has been the worst in history," Mr Carter, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, told the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.

"The overt reversal of America's basic values as expressed by previous administrations, including (those of) George H.W. Bush and Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon and others, has been the most disturbing to me," Mr Carter said.

In an interview on Britain's BBC radio, Mr Carter slammed Mr Blair, who leaves office next month, for his tight relations with Mr Bush, particularly concerning the Iraq war.

"Abominable. Loyal, blind, apparently subservient," Mr Carter said when asked how he would characterize Mr Blair's relationship with Mr Bush.

"I think that the almost undeviating support by Great Britain for the ill-advised policies of President Bush in Iraq have been a major tragedy for the world," Mr Carter said.

Mr Carter, who was president from 1977-1981 and won the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize for his charitable work, was an outspoken opponent of the invasion of Iraq before it was

launched in 2003.

In the newspaper interview, Mr Carter said Mr Bush had taken a "radical departure from all previous administration policies" with the Iraq war.

"We now have endorsed the concept of pre-emptive war where we go to war with another nation militarily, even though our own security is not directly threatened, if we want to change the regime there or if we fear that some time in the future our security might be endangered," Mr Carter said.

Mr Carter told the BBC that if Blair had opposed the invasion he could have reduced the ensuing harm by making it tougher for Washington to shrug off critics, even if the

British prime minister had not been able to stop the war.

"It would certainly have assuaged the problems that have (arisen) lately," Carter said.

"One of the defenses of the Bush administration in America and worldwide ... has been: 'Okay, we must be more correct in our actions than the world thinks because Great Britain is backing us,'" Mr Carter said.

"I think the combination of Bush and Blair giving their support to this tragedy in Iraq has strengthened the effort and has made opposition less effective and has prolonged the war and increased the tragedy that has resulted," he told the BBC.

(news.com.au)

Afghanistan

10 killed in suicide bomb

Kabul, May 20: In a rare attack in Afghanistan's relatively calm north, a suicide bomber detonated himself next to German soldiers shopping in a crowded market, killing 10 people and wounding 16, officials said.

The Taliban claimed responsibility. The attack Saturday in the city of Kunduz came after two German vehicles on a security patrol stopped in the market and soldiers got out on foot to do some shopping, said Kunduz provincial police chief Gen. Ayub Salangi.

Three German soldiers were killed and two wounded, said Gen. Noor Mohammad Omarkhail, the province's deputy police chief. Seven civilians were killed and 13 wounded, including seven seriously, said Azizullah Safer, the director of the provincial health department. One translator working for the Germans was also wounded.

A statement from NATO's

International Security Assistance Force confirmed three ISAF soldiers were killed and two wounded.

A purported Taliban spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, said a Taliban militant named Mullah Jawad from Baghlan province carried out the attack. The claim could not be independently verified.

Germany's 3,000 troops here are responsible for northern Afghanistan, which sees relatively few attacks and is considered a much safer region than southern or eastern Afghanistan, where most of the country's fighting takes place.

In Berlin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel vowed to continue with reconstruction efforts in the country following the blast — the worst attack against Germans since a car bomb exploded near a bus carrying German peacekeepers in June 2003, killing four soldiers.

"These perfidious murders fill us all with disgust and horror," Merkel said in a statement. "The German military is carrying out an important mission

for the reconstruction and stabilization of Afghanistan. It is the goal of the attackers to destroy the established successes of this rebuilding process."

Last month, a suicide bomber blew himself up on a police training field in Kunduz, killing 10 Afghan policemen and wounding 40 others. The Taliban also claimed responsibility for that attack. The attack brings to 53 the number of international troops killed in Afghanistan this year, including 25 Americans.

Elsewhere, militants attacked U.S.-led coalition and Afghan forces about 75 kilometers (60 miles) northeast of Kabul, sparking a rare gunbattle close to the capital that killed about 20 militants and three civilians, officials said Saturday. Afghan and allied forces were on combat patrol late Friday in the al-Asay Valley in Kapisa province, which borders Kabul province when they were ambushed, the U.S. coalition said.

(The Hindu)

Iran tells US to admit 'failure' in Iraq

Iran said on Friday the United States should admit to the "failure" of its Iraq policies at the upcoming Tehran-Washington meeting on Iraqi security if it wants the talks to make progress.

"If the Americans admit to the failure of their policies in Iraq, have a serious will to correct the current situation, and help the Iraqi people and government to implement security there, these talks can progress and create hope," Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki told reporters.

US and Iranian envoys are to meet in Baghdad on May 28 for talks on Iraq's security in what is believed to be the first official ambassadorial encounter between the arch-foes in three decades.

Iran will send an "experienced diplomat who has been an ambassador" to meet US ambassador to Baghdad Ryan Crocker, Mottaki said.

Both sides insist the talks would be limited to the security of Iraq and Mottaki said they would not discuss the release of seven Iranians seized by US forces in northern Iraq in January.

"The May 28 talks will only revolve around the issue of Iraq and a step towards helping security there," Mottaki said after meeting the families of the detainees who Iran insists were diplomats working for a consulate.

He said it was up to Iraqi officials to press for the release of the men accused by the United



Iranian President

States of being intelligence agents.

Mottaki noted that Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari during a visit to Tehran last month had signalled the detainees could be freed in the Iranian month of Khordad (May 22 to June 21).

"Mr Zebari said the Americans would seek to release them in Khordad."

Mottaki added that the Iranian foreign ministry was preparing "to claim compensation from the Americans for raiding the consulate in Arbil, the detention of diplomats and the losses caused by the closure of the place."

The United States accuses Shiite-majority Iran of stirring sectarian violence in Iraq. It also charges that Tehran is supplying Iraqi fighters with roadside bombs, which have killed and maimed large numbers of US soldiers.

Iran denies the allegations and blames the US "occupiers" for the insecurity and instability of Iraq.

(africasia.com)



A German Soldier

The Maoists' true intentions has been exhibited by their unmatched penchant for violence, which is opposed to peace time politics as practiced by other parties in and outside the parameter of this coalition. Today, nearly a year after the conclusion of the Loktantric movement, it is depressing to observe that the Maoists still operate well outside the constitutional parameter and continue to function as an extra constitutional force.

One of the sublime paradoxes of the peace process is the resentment met by writers and public figures who have taken the courage to go out in public and spell out the meticulous plan envisioned by the Maoist leadership to gain political dominance.

The centre stone of the Maoist agenda is to take ownership of the democratic schema and maintain a monopoly vis-à-vis the democratic agenda by using jargons of democracy as a catalyst while vilifying any political opponent that does not concur with their school of thought.

The Maoists' strategy to gain political dominance has been forwarded through the tacit use of varying mediums: street, parliament, government, media, and the hollow understanding of Nepal's actual problem in the international arena. After sensing that the use of armed violence will lead to the collapse of the eight party unity and minimise their probability of attaining political dominance, the Maoists have had to unleash a series of calculated moves to attain their ultimate goal of political dominance.

Although the Maoist leadership has spelled ultimatums and threatened to wage a fresh series of armed struggle, it is highly unlikely that they will ever do that. Any recourse from the peace process or use of violence will only lead to their isolation both domestically and internationally and, consequently diminish their chances of a purposeful safe landing into

Act now or lose freedom

Any recourse from the peace process or use of violence will only lead to Maoists' isolation both domestically and internationally.



■ Siddhartha Thapa

mainstream politics.

Now as UNMIN prepares to verify the actual PLA strength for the second phase, the Maoists are preparing to deal with any possible embarrassment that will arise from the discrepancy; and have proposed the idea of releasing seventeen thousand of their registered combatants while exerting pressure on the government to pay six months wages to the released recruits.

As election draws near, the Maoists intend to manipulate the seventeen thousand strong youthful force, as paid loyal volunteers for election purposes and to provide a parallel

support force for the Young Communist League (YCL). Although credit must be given to the Maoist for outdoing other political parties in virtually every front, their biggest failure was their attempted move to destabilise the Nepal Army.

Various media houses and political personalities who favor a republican form of government know for a fact that the establishment of a republic in Nepal hinges on the success of the Maoists in the present peace process. On the other hand, the republican charade has come at a cost; politically motivated media houses and short sighted political allegiances have failed to highlight the increased Maoist violence in recent days.

Nepal has tragically become an ideal turf for foreign interference. Unfortunately, Nepalis are shirking from the responsibilities of defining their own political culture. Yet, instead we find our leaders dictated by foreigners, who not only set the pace of our politics but in tangent, set

The Maoists' strategy to gain political dominance has been forwarded through the tacit use of varying mediums: street, parliament, government, media, and the hollow understanding of Nepal's actual problem in the international arena.

expectations that ironically do not often correlate with the ideals of the INGOs, Nordic and European democracies.

The stance of some embassies during the present peace process is an elaborate example of foreign bulldozing in the internal affairs of Nepal. It is interesting to observe the silence of these foreign embassies when the violence perpetrated by the Maoists and the YCL is gaining momentum.

The establishment of a liberal democracy will be restricted if the media, political personalities, civil society, the international community and ordinary Nepali citizens remain silent. It is the palpable fear of a total Maoist takeover that has prevented the institution of monarchy from meeting an end. In order to counter balance the inevitable leftist onslaught, it would be prudent for Koirala to use the centrist forces' strategic wisdom in preserving the institution of Monarchy as a possible buffer. ■

Young Speak

EXPLORING NEW NEPAL

■ David Bross

Lastimi Lama, 20 yrs, was born in Kathmandu. She works as a cleaner in a hotel. Asked about politics in her country, she said she does not know much but she hopes that the government would guarantee workers like her a fixed salary, meaning a secure job.

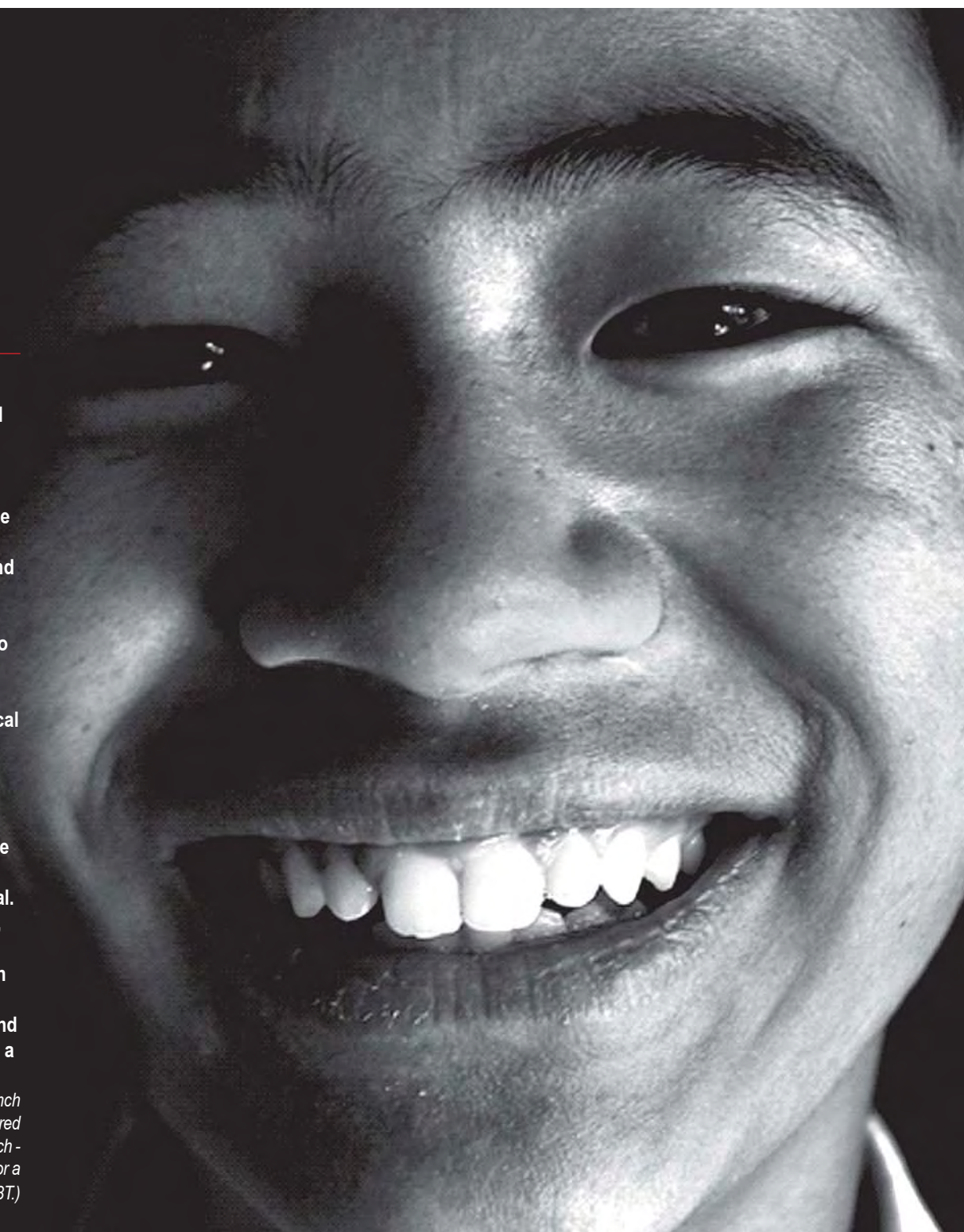
When I asked her about her personal vision of new Nepal, she said she would like new Nepal to be a place where women like her can feel free and not be restricted so much by traditions and culture. She expressed, "I don't feel free in this society."

Saroj Lama, 14 yrs, was born in Makawanpur. He has been working for the past three years in Kathmandu. He went back to school only this year. Since he comes from a poor family, he gives a part of his earning to his parents. Saroj says he is not really interested in politics and does not understand the political situation in Nepal.



I felt that behind his smile, there lurked a feeling of being imprisoned by his work, but the work was something necessary for his survival. After he finishes school, he hopes to become a business man. His vision of a future Nepal, is, "Nepal without guns", and "a peaceful country with a good leader."

(David Bross, 20, is a French photo reporter who has authored a photo book in French - *Forgotten Tibet*. He works for a French newspaper - 33T.)



Marshland Flowers

There were still Mahasiddhas like Naropa, Tilopa and many others till the Muslim invasion.



■ Acharya Mahayogi Sridhar Rana Rinpoche

But of course, we cannot say that Buddhism was not influenced by Vedic Brahmanism and later by Hinduism at all. That would be too naïve. However, in the give and take context which is inevitable in any culture within a space of time (and Buddhism covered 75% of India and 75% Asia for sixteen or so hundred years), it was Hinduism which took mostly from Buddhism and not the other way around.

Another interrelated myth is that it was Sankaracharya who defeated the Buddhists all over India and that is how Buddhism vanished from India or as the former President of India Dr. Radhakrishnan Sarvapalli put it – "Hinduism embraced Buddhism and in the process killed it." Again these are myths running wild amongst Hindus of the Indian sub-continent; but they do not have any historical validity.

This notion is given further

credence to Nepalese, including Buddhist Newars by the Newari legend that Sankaracharya came to Nepal and defeated all the Buddhists, converted the kings and beheaded the Bhikchhus. First of all the Adi Sankaracharya lived around the 7th century and the great Mahavihars like Nalanda and Bikramashila were still running strong till the 12th /13th century when the Muslims over ran India and destroyed them.

Secondly there were still Mahasiddhas like Naropa, Tilopa and many others till the Muslim invasion. So, Buddhism was still running strong five centuries after Adi Sankaracharya. And furthermore, the stories of Sankaracharya as written by Ananda Giri and Madhava etc. do not contain any element which mentions that he debated with Buddhists all over India and defeated them. In fact those stories show Sankaracharya debating mostly with

other non-Advaita Hindus and rarely with Buddhists.

So, the misconception that Sankaracharya went up and down India defeating all the Buddhists and this is how Buddhism vanished from India seems to be baseless and fabricated by uneducated non-Buddhists. Thirdly, the Sankaracharya that came to Nepal seems to be of the 11th-12th century or later and not the Adi Sankaracharya. He seems to have entered Nepal when Buddhism was beginning to decline in Nepal as a result of its having declined in India due to the Islamic invasion which literally destroyed Buddhism in India.

So he did not find any match for his debates and was able to convert many people in Kathmandu. He may possibly be the same Harinanda who was defeated by the Great Tibetan Guru Sakya Pandit. However this is not conclusive. But the stories do say he died in Tibet. However he did not die before he created havoc amongst the Buddhists of Kathmandu Valley, who still do not seem to have recovered from the shock.

Big learning houses like Nalanda, Bikramashila etc were razed to the ground, monks beheaded and the books in the libraries burnt to cinders by the Islamic invaders like Bakhtiar, Khilji etc. It is said in the diary of Khilji's General that, when the books of the library of Nalanda were burnt, it took six months for the cinders to die and nine months for the smoke to settle down.

So much destruction took place all over the Indian subcontinent. It said one of the reasons why the Buddhist monasteries were specially picked out by the Islamic invaders was that they mistook the monks in uniform monk dress as uniformed army men and the books in the library as books on warfare. This happened in the 12th/13th century, almost five centuries after Sankaracharya. Till then Buddhism was still flourishing strong in the Indian subcontinent.

(To be continued...)

(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master.)

Insight

Fate of future

Teachers need to reflect on their roles as role models, motivators, guides...



■ Sushma Amatya

Over 7.5 million students in Nepal today are languishing at homes since their schools have been shut down due to the nation-wide call for closure of all government and private schools by pro-Maoist teachers association. Though some of their demands may be valid and justified, using it as a weapon to garner sympathy or as a tool to blackmail is injustice to the entire country.

By immobilising the education sector nation wide, the agitating teachers are proving that they are playing with the fate of the future generation. For the young minds, every day lost is precious irretrievable time lost, is one more step towards regression and builds up boredom and frustration.

A sane approach towards resolving the teachers' demands would be to embark upon a bi-lateral agreement with all schools failing which, government intervention should be sought. The steps towards resolving the issues should be one that ought to be kept separate from that of the rights of every child in the country – to study sans any disturbances. It should also be demarcated from any teachers' first and foremost duty, that of imparting quality education consistently.

Quality education is a serious issue today in Nepal where there is a big disparity in the quality of education in government and private schools. The gap between the government school education - mostly a rural, lower income phenomenon and the private school education - mostly an urban, higher income phenomenon, is huge. If the quality of government education was equally good, if all the teachers were as qualified and well trained as those in private schools, the visible difference in exam results would definitely have narrowed down. The results produced by government vis-à-vis private schools are there for all to see.

Private schools by competing for profit through quality teachers contribute to the nation by producing quality students. Any parent would want to send their children to best schools known for its quality of education that combines academic skills with all round personality development of a child. And most parents do sacrifice a lot for their children's education. Only by being equipped with multi-faceted education based on knowledge, life skills and awareness can a child grow up to be a happy, secure human being and contribute to the society.

The Maoists' systematic campaign of destroying and creating anarchy has also been targeting private schools thereby totally ignoring the sector's long term benefits to the nation as also the commercial role it plays in enhancing the national economy. One visible proof of it is that ever since a number of quality private schools began operating, the 'student drain' towards schools in India has reduced significantly. An estimated two billion rupees have been held back in the country which otherwise would have followed the students across the borders.

Of course there is enough scope for reforms in the private school sector by getting the ones making profit to contribute part of its profit for enhancement of quality of rural education and physical infrastructure. But destroying education system and seeking a reform are opposite issues, and the Maoists are resorting to the former.

If disruption in education continues, it is but foreseeable in near future that a large number of harried parents will be compelled to send their children to schools outside the country; even at the cost of the economic burden, just for the sake of their children's future. Teachers' apathy, insensitivity towards their duty directly affects all parents of the huge number of students. It is but obvious that if this stalemate is not resolved quickly, the government might have to face combined wrath of parents who feel exploited and vulnerable for no fault of theirs.

It is there for all to see the consequences that the Maoist leadership (some of whose children are studying in quality/expensive schools abroad) might have to face if it continues to axe the education sector in such a short-sighted, insensitive way. It has a wiser choice of leading the country forward by keeping students safe from political bickering and negotiating teachers' issues in a more effective and disciplined manner.

Teachers too need to reflect on their roles as role models, motivators, guides; and the duties they naturally assume once they decide to teach. They need to be confident that they are giving back to schools as much if not more than they are demanding for themselves. Benefits naturally ride on competency, skills and quality. A piece of pie for everybody sounds good but one has to work equally hard as the others to deserve it and to get it. ■



Drug addicts lie easily and can be very persuasive to get what they want

Counseling by drug therapist, Ragina Shah

Why are drug addicts called, 'junkies'?

■ Om Prakash, Lagankhel

The word junkie originated from the word 'junk' which means useless or worthless articles. According to Oxford dictionary, a junkie is described as, "a person who cannot stop taking hard drugs." Junkie is a drug addict.

Drug addicts are always busy preparing for their next 'fix', 'trip', 'dose' to kill their craving or sickness. Such people are unable to maintain their daily routine as

they used to before using drugs. They spend most of their time finding ways to get more drugs and other substances such as blade, cotton, vitamin C tablets, syringe etc. They lie easily, can be very persuasive and find ways to get what they want.

The addicted people become unable to go to school or work. Since most of them do not have any source of income, they are dependent on their family members. To buy drugs, they resort to stealing from home, robbing others and could even commit murders. This is how they

become dangerous to themselves and to others around them.

An addict's ability to communicate, confront, to be stable, to control oneself is weakened; and so they cannot maintain good relationships with others. Their lives get out of control and they gradually get ignored by their family and friends. Drug addicts thus end up becoming a burden to the society and the nation and become akin to junk.

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



Actors Jude Law and Norah Jones pose together for the premiere of their movie "My Blueberry Nights."

Hour" -- which proved disappointing to critics expecting a film similar to "An Inconvenient Truth", the documentary fronted by Al Gore and presented at Cannes last year -- and talked over environmental issues with reporters.

The "Titanic" star was especially touchy over insinuations that his jetsetting life was hypocritical in view of his "green" commitments -- a

Cannes Film Festival

sensitivity whose roots go back to 2000, when environmental activists claimed his film "The Beach" damaged part of a Thai national park during shooting.

In 2005, DiCaprio bought Blackadore Caye, an island off the coast of Belize, with the aim of building an eco-friendly resort.

Asked whether he had taken a fuel-guzzling flight on his way to the French Riviera, the Hollywood heartthrob was sarcastic. "No, I took a train across the Atlantic," he said, adding: "We're all trying the best we can, truly, we really are."

Although neither of the films are competing for the Palme d'Or, others that were contenders also sallied forth with political messages.

"Four Months, Three Weeks and Two Days" used the premise of the horrific events surrounding a prohibited abortion in Romania under the rule of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu to look at the repression Communism inflicted on lives, and to promote feminism.

Director Cristian Mungiu said the message was simple: "Fear cancels out freedom."

The legalisation of abortion after the fall of the Iron Curtain was seen as the "ultimate freedom," she said.

In "Tehilim," a family drama set in Jerusalem and made by French director Raphael Najari, politics initially seems absent from the sparse story.

But, little by little, the viewer is introduced to a world that is stuck between modernity and tradition, between spirituality and pragmatism, a world where a father figure -- maybe a representation of God -- is missing.

The socio-political themes are to continue with the festival, which ends May 27.

On Wednesday, an exiled Iranian living in Paris, Marjane Satrapi, will be exposing religious repression in her homeland in humorous fashion in "Persepolis," an animated version of a series of popular comic books she has made. ■



Abhi-Aish at Cannes film festival

Politics

the big issue

Michael Moore, who won the festival's Palme d'Or three years ago with "Fahrenheit 9/11," and A-list star Leonardo DiCaprio, who this year unveiled an eco-documentary he made, led the charge at the weekend.

Moore presented "Sicko," a harsh look at America's deficient, privately run health system, and seized the opportunity of the media spotlight to take potshots at his favourite target: US President George W. Bush.

"This is an administration that flaunts the law, flaunts the constitution," Moore said, as he blasted a US

government probe into a trip he made to Cuba for his latest film.

"The point was not to go to Cuba, it was to go to American soil, to Guantanamo Bay and to take 9/11 rescue workers there to receive the same medical care given to the Al-Qaeda detainees," he railed.

"Sicko," likewise, smacks down US politicians -- including Bush -- depicted as having been bought off by big business, and laments the fact that the United States rejects the "socialist" model that provides effective state health care in other Western countries.

DiCaprio screened "The 11th

Moore presented "Sicko," a harsh look at America's deficient, privately run health system, and seized the opportunity of the media spotlight.

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