



Courage & Conviction

newsfront

Kathmandu | 20-26 August, 2007 | # 30 | Price Rs. 25 | www.newsfront.com.np

Yes but 'if's: "Nepal can hold the constituent assembly election as planned on 22 November, if there is unity and confidence among parties in the government; if the issues of inclusion, adequate democratic space for all are ensured; if the law and order is restored around the country, particularly in Terai. The Eight Party Alliance has the primary responsibility in ensuring timely election," said UN Under Secretary General for Political Affairs, B Lynn Pascoe while talking to media before his departure to New York.



Bhaswar Ojha

Unity diplomacy

Swiss diplomat's initiative to unite UML-Maoists fails

■ **nf correspondent**

At a time when one or the other diplomat keeps prescribing pills for curing Nepal's political ills, at least one diplomat has gone a step forward. He actually initiated to bring the two major left parties, and arguably the bitterest foes together.

It was Guenther Bacchler, Peace and Policy Advisor to the Swiss Government who has taken the initiative for the left unity; but a meeting held at a prominent hotel in Kathmandu about a fortnight ago is inconclusive.

Bacchler's unity formula that the two parties should unite on 60:40 basis suggested that UML will have an upper edge in the united party with similar proportion to be accepted at the time of choosing candidates during the election to the constituent assembly. Both UML

General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal and Maoist Chief Prachanda were present in the meeting that took place in a prominent hotel in Kathmandu in Bacchler's presence.

"Although the two appeared agreeable to Bacchler's formula, Maoists soon began criticising the UML in a much more strident way than before. It seems that the unity move has been rejected by the Maoists now," a UML source told newsfront.

In fact, the Bacchler initiative confirms Prachanda's claim during his visit to Geneva, that Swiss authorities were also in close contact with the Maoists. Prachanda and his key aide, Baburam Bhattarai had visited Geneva, and the trip was facilitated by the Swiss government. Although Nepali Congress leader Shekhar Koirala was also part of the team from Nepal, Dr Prakash Mahat, a leader of the Congress (D), a party that Maoists love to hate the most, was excluded from the team at the last minute.

A UML source refused to divulge details about the talks, but he said that the party general

secretary, Nepal shared some details of the meeting with his senior colleagues in the party. "Despite the hostile posture that the Maoists are adopting towards us, we may be meeting again once Comrade Nepal is back from Norway," he said.

The Swiss initiated unity move comes almost as a parallel exercise to the one for unity of the two Congress parties. While most countries including India and United States have extended a 'principled support' to the Congress unity attempt as a fruitful exercise towards consolidation of democratic forces, the left unity move is unique in the sense that it took place at the initiative and presence of a diplomat with much lesser interest in Nepal. ■

The Swiss initiated unity move comes almost as a parallel exercise to the one for unity of the two Congress parties.

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Betrayal

'Upper caste supremacy' in Maoists party.

Chhatra Karki

The much hyped overhaul of the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) which saw the rise of anti-Prachanda faction within the party, has also established the hold of the Brahman-Chhetri clan over the organisation on an unprecedented scale.

While the three of the five recently formed Central Bureaus have gone into the hands of fast emerging trio consisting of Ram Bahadur Thapa (Badal), CP Gajurel (Gaurav) and Mohan Baidya (Kiran) who are considered rivals to Prachanda-Baburam Bhattarai axis; the hold of the upper caste, nevertheless, remains intact. All except Badal heading these bureaus belong to the Brahman community.

Emergence of Badal as the head of the all powerful organisational bureau is something that many think will see a new power shift within the party. Prachanda and Bhattarai, both Brahmins, respectively head the military bureau and that of the frontal organisations respectively. The Young Communist League (YCL) will also be reporting directly to Prachanda as per the decision of the plenum.

Maoist sources attribute accommo-

dation of Badal, Baidya (school bureau) and Gajurel (foreign affairs bureau) to the massive criticism of the party leadership and pervading culture of luxury and corruption; which many delegates have named it as Pajero Sanskriti. There is an undercurrent of resentment over many hill upper castes dominating the party's newly formed state or provincial bureaus. Except in the Newakhala (a state of the Newars) and Kirat bureaus, all other state bureaus have been headed by the upper caste Brahman and Chhetris.

Disgruntled Matrika Yadav has been further downsized as he has been made the convener of Mithila area, one of the three regional units under the proposed Madhesh bureau which will be headed by Post Bahadur Bogati, a Chhetri from Nuwakot.

Similarly, Shakti Basnet will be heading Tharuwan bureau while Hemant Prakash Oli (Sudarshan) will be the head of Magarat bureau.

Heetaram Pandey has been given the charge of Tamuwan bureau while Tamashaling bureau will be headed by Agni Sapkota. Ram Karki has been made the head of Limbuwan bureau and Haribol Gajurel will be the

Maoist leaders at a press conference



Photo by Bhaskar Oli

head of Kochila bureau. The two provincial bureaus -Newakhala (Kathmandu valley area) and Kirat Bureau are the only two bureaus which will be headed by the insiders. Hitman Shakya with Minister Hishila Yami as his deputy will be heading Newakhala, Gopal Kirati will be in charge of Kirat bureau.

Seti-Mahakali and Bheri-Karnali are the only two bureaus based on geographical backwardness and they will be headed respectively by Lekharaj Bhatta (Rakesh) and Kadhga Bahadur.

Barshaman Pun, Prachanda's latest blue eyed boy who is likely to takeover as party spokesperson

figures as a member in both military bureau as well as the organisational bureau; while the only other person that finds place in two committees is Baburam Bhattarai, who apart from heading the bureau of frontal organisations of the party, will also be the member of the school bureau headed by Mohan Baidya.

Minister Poudel



Tampering TRC

■ nf correspondent

The Minister for Peace and Reconstruction, Ram Chandra Poudel has always had the reputation of being a moderate. And true to his reputation, he is busy moderating the proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

After UN-OHCHR came out openly against the provisions in the draft of TRC bill, Minister Poudel tried to put the blame on few human rights groups he had consulted. "We never suggested that the TRC should have the right to recommend a sweeping amnesty," a HR leader who had participated in the Poudel sponsored meeting told newsfront.

"Poudel's representative only heard us out. Our opinion was not taken into account," INSEC Chief Subodh Pyakuryal said. He added, "I have sent in writing what we all wanted in the TRC bill."

A source in the ministry of peace and reconstruction told newsfront that the minister

had instructed the concerned officials many times that he was clearly looking forward to a unity mechanism, and that the proposed TRC should act towards uniting the two sides of the conflict.

"It seems that the minister does not understand the meaning and purpose of the proposed TRC. While unity is a political move, the TRC's job is altogether different," the official said, asserting that officials at the senior level are finding it quite difficult in interacting with the UN and other international human right bodies given "the lack of understanding of the issue on the part of the minister."

Poudel however, has assured UN-OHCHR that he would honour the international practices and legislation while defining scope and responsibilities of the TRC. Apart from heading the ministry of peace and reconstruction, Poudel also heads a high-level official committee that will explore integration of the Maoist guerrilla outfits which they call the 'People's Liberation Army' with the Nepal Army.

Koirala succumbs to Prachanda's threat

The Young Communist Leader (YCL) activists who assaulted the students of Engineering Campus in Thapathali will be released soon and they will face no trial. This was communicated by PM Koirala to Maoist leader Prachanda at Baluwatar on Saturday evening. About three dozen YCL activists had been arrested by the police after they raided the campus and attacked many students most belonging to pro Nepali Congress student union, last week. At least half a

dozen students are still undergoing treatment following severe injuries in the YCL attack.

Koirala succumbed to Prachanda's threat to paralyse all educational institutions if the YCL activists were not released immediately. Koirala is believed to have told Prachanda that this is a one time gesture and that Maoists should not take it as weakness of the government. In return, the Maoists are likely to call off the strike in the educational institutions which was

to come into effect from Monday.

Last week, student leaders belonging to pro-Maoist and pro Nepali Congress parties had a few rounds of meetings following the Thapathali incident but they could not come to any understanding after YCL insisted that their leader should be released once they had apologised for the act of violence on their part. Police had also recovered arms and ammunitions from the YCL activists in the Engineering Campus.

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Newsbrief

Lambasting UNMIN

Dr Ram Sharan Mahat and Ian Martin share similar predicaments. Mahat presides over the state coffer which as everyone knows is quite depleted. Martin's writ should run at least over the 27 camps and sub-camps where the Maoist guerrillas and their arms are supposed to be lodged, but going by what Mahat says, these camps are as empty as the government coffer.



For the first time, the UNMIN has come under the government's grill at a time when the UN under secretary general for political affairs, Lynn Pascoe is on a visit to Nepal. It is not yet known what provoked Mahat's outburst, but he cited a plethora of grievances that led him to conclude that UNMIN is not doing its job properly.

He complained that half of the guerrillas supposed to be inside the cantonments were out on excursions while many real combatants were in the Young Communist League (YCL), which has been accused of taking law into their hands. Mahat asserted that their being out of the cantonments was much against the letter and spirit of the agreement that UNMIN had entered with the government and the Maoists.

Minister Mahat was also angry with the Maoists for not having furnished details of the expenditure of Rs. 26 Crores which the Ministry of Finance had handed over to the Maoist Minister K B Mahara for building houses and infrastructure in the cantonments a few months ago.

Systematic retreat

Maoists first patched up with the owners, and then with the employees of the media.



In a mid-night exercise, Maoist leadership decided to call off the strike in the Himalayan Times and Annapurna Post, pledging that in future they would not obstruct printing and distribution of newspapers and magazines.

Cycle boys, whose cause the Maoists had ostensibly put first while demanding 'dignity of the labourers' got to know only in the morning that a deal had been signed at mid-night with the owners.

Similarly, the pro-Maoist labourers who had given a 22-point notice to the Kantipur group of publication demanding, among other things, regular employment to 400 cycle boys decided to put all that on hold.

Although Maoist leadership may have first signed the deal with the owners, they also tried to prove that they had not forgotten the case of the ordinary employees. On Saturday, following an instruction from the information and communication minister, KB Mahara, the Gorkhapatra Sansthan decided to renew contracts of all the 49 employees, most of them district correspondents, literally withdrawing its earlier threat to discontinue their services.

Privileged handshake!

Guess who is arguably the first Nepali 'terrorist' to shake hands with the US ambassador Nancy Powell? This however, is no indicator of the change of US policy towards the Maoists in post Moriarty Nepal.



Nand Kishore Pun aka Pasang grabbed Powell's hands even before she could realise who he was. But the moment she did, she avoided any conversation with the once most feared commander of the Maoist army.

A reception hosted by UNMIN chief Ian Martin in the honour of the visiting Under Secretary General, Lynn Pascoe had the Maoists and several other representatives of the political parties and the diplomatic corps under one roof at the Summit Hotel on Saturday.

Maoists continue to be on the 'terrorist list' of the US government; and the US embassy has avoided any meeting with the Maoists even after their joining parliament and the government in April.



Position vs. pre-condition

■ nf correspondent

Despite Maoists having publicly pledged that a 'republic Nepal' is only their positional stance and not a pre-condition for constituent assembly being held in November, their latest stance demolishes the thin dividing line between their 'position and the pre-condition.'

This became apparent on August 18 when Maoist Chief Prachanda told representatives of the eight political parties to state their position on monarchy in writing at the earliest. He challenged the Congress representatives including Prime Minister G P Koirala to state their position even if they are in favour of the monarchy.

"It was a cunning political trap that Prachanda was going to lay for all of us," a left party participant told newsfront, adding "although no party can afford to support the monarchy in today's political context, we cannot be coerced into taking any stand in a Maoist dictated process."

The 8-party meeting on Saturday, however, remained inconclusive after PM Koirala who was there barely for five minutes appeared tired and short of breath, an insider said. He however, managed to make an appeal to the Maoists and other participants that, "we all can go together up to the constituent assembly elections despite positional differences."

Prachanda said in the meeting that he had a tough time in dispelling impressions of his delegates during

the recent plenum about the sincerity of the seven parties to conduct election to the constituent assembly. "As long as the king remains, election will not be held," He told the meeting.

And he handed over a 18-point charter of demands asserting that the government must fulfill it immediately in order to create a conducive poll for the election. The demands included - immediate declaration of Nepal as a republic, nationalisation of late King Birendra's property, formation of the commission on disappearance and immediate compensation at the rate of one lakh rupees to every family that lost its member during the 'people's war'; but it is silent on whether any compensation should be given to the families who have lost their members as a result of Maoists' attacks. The charter also demands a round table conference on electoral system with Maoists clearly wanting only the proportional representation system adopted for the CA election.

UML, Congress and Congress (D) members were more or less one on advising Maoists that they should not put forward any conditions for the election. "We have decided to go for a 8-party meeting in Kathmandu soon, as a symbolic joint commitment for CA poll on time," Congress leader Arjun Narsingh KC said. "We hope that the conference would create an atmosphere of trust for the election and lead to the solution of Madheshi, Janajatis, Dalits and other regional issues," Maoist leader Nanda Kishore Pun aka Pasang said.



Maoist cantonment at Dudhuli, Sindhuli

Discharging disqualified

After a prolonged negotiation, Maoists have finally agreed to let 'disqualified combatants' to leave the cantonments. The government, UN and the Maoists are negotiating the modality to discharge them soon.

The Maoists had agreed to let the stalled verification process begin last week after UN reminded them of their obligation under the peace agreement. Although, UNMIN has kept the number of disqualified a closely guarded secret, there are indications that there was not much

variation in the number of those disqualified in Chulachuli where the stalled verification took place recently.

Cantonment insiders have been discharged either on grounds of their being under-age or their having been recruited after May 6, 2006; the date peace process formally began. While UNICEF and several other organisations are involved in the rehabilitation and reintegration of 'child soldiers' in their community and their families, it is largely the government's responsibility to

rehabilitate the non-child category of disqualified 'combatants.'

The UNMIN is believed to have asked the ministry of peace and reconstruction to make necessary arrangements for reintegration and rehabilitation of the discharged Maoists. Minister for works and physical planning, Hishila Yami has also spoken to finance minister R S Mahat to earmark necessary funds for this so that the process to discharge them from cantonments could begin without delay.



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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

Violence is the last refuge of the incompetent.
 - Isaac Asimov

Stop Bandhs

Strikes, Bandhs and other forms of protests, violent and non-violent, are not so uncommon in Nepal. Political parties and organised groups have not been able to discard such weapons of protest despite all of them preaching that all this will have a negative effect on country's economy and productive activities. It only exposes dual standards of our leaders whose actions are not directed by their beliefs.

This needs a long debate whether there should be a moratorium on such violent protests for a specific time period, especially to promote the peace process and create a production friendly atmosphere in the early phase of post-conflict Nepal.

But what happened in the country recently in the name of protests almost demonstrated how heinous political breed can be in carrying out such protests, and how helpless a government that is supposed to protect life and dignity of its citizens can be.

Honourable Member of Parliament, Som Pandey was attacked, near fatally, by a pro-Maoist group last week. The parliament completed the ritual of condemning the incident. and the Home Minister almost made a show of shedding his tears when he declared in the House that an attack on any member of the parliament would be taken as an attack on the entire parliament itself. But do his words carry any meaning?

There is no point condemning the Maoists alone for this incident, as that will continue so long as organised violence will have its influence on the country's politics. But at the same time, this parliament and the government would lose their relevance completely if those who target its members walk away freely. A minister cannot simply mislead the House and promise some action with the intention of pacifying its members agitated over the attack. If the minister does not come back to the House with action matching his words, that should be taken as his complicity with the perpetrators of the crime.

In this case, special responsibility lies with the Speaker of the House. He has every responsibility to keep reminding the Home Minister in particular and the government in general that, "indeed an attack on one member is an attack on the entire house itself." It will be a great achievement if the comment pricks the conscience of the Home Minister and he would at least own the moral responsibility for the attack.

At the same time, this incident which merits all round condemnation, should come as a lesson to all political parties, Maoists included, that strikes and Bandhs with violence as its means need to be abandoned.



Letters

Kudos to Puri

It was heartening to know that there is at least some determined campaign by someone to preserve the arts and architecture which not only represents our history and culture, but our heritage and legacy as well. Rabindra Puri, the person behind all this, deserves full support from the government as well as the UNESCO and other institutions that have an obligation to preserve such heritage.

But it was equally sad to hear that Puri has apparently got no cooperation from the government and the local bodies.

Rabindra Kayastha
 Bhaktapur



Koirala conspiracy

Congratulations newsfront for exposing the grand design of Prime Minister G P Koirala who apparently wanted to snatch people's right to vote. The conspiracy to stall elections and have the current un-elected parliament converted into the constituent assembly exposes Koirala's authoritarian ambition. How is Koirala different from King Gyanendra?

No Nepali will accept or endorse this conspiracy. It is a very good sign that leaders like Arjun Narsingh KC and KB Gurung have spoken out openly in the party against such a move. But what are leaders of the UML, Congress-D and the Maoist party doing? Are they also going to stick to power without going to the people? This will invite serious backlash in the country, and Koirala and the current coalition regime will suffer an irreversible moral and political set-back.

Roshan Thapa
 Lainchour, Kathmandu

Blind leading blind

Not long ago newsfront carried an opinion piece, 'Blind leads the blind,' by Jaswant Singh, India's former Foreign Affairs Minister and Senior Bharatiya Janata party leader. The piece was marvelous as it reflected how confused India's policy towards Nepal is. But there is another side to it as well. Nepal government simply does not have its policy even on conducting election as scheduled.

The comment by Indian Ambassador, Shiv Shankar Mukherjee, to the effect that Nepal must hold elections in November and that no excuse will be acceptable comes as total 'imposition' by the 'blind on blind'. Are we going to have the election because the eight parties together are committed to hold it, or

because his Excellency wants it? Has Nepal government and leaders of the ruling eight-party coalition simply lost its character and ability to react to such unwarranted comments on something which purely falls within domestic arena?

Preeti Baskota
 Chababil, Kathmandu

Truth cartoon

Abhin is an outstanding cartoonist who brings the bitter truths of the nation in such a pleasant manner.

His cartoons on Rayamajhi commission and Prime Minister Koirala's oft-repeated pledge to hold elections were superb. He did not spare king Gyanendra when he was at the height of power. He is doing the same to G P Koirala in exactly similar circumstances.

Vivek Adhikary
 Naya Bazar, Kathmandu

Spiritual Corner

All things within you

Saint-poet, Kanakadasa (1509-1609 A.D.) belonged to the tradition of Haridasa literary movement which ushered in an era of devotional literature in Karnataka, South India. 'Haridasa' stands for 'servant of Hari', and is another epithet of lord Krishna. No biographical details of Kanakadasa are available but he is said to be a member of shepherd (Kuruba) community who worked as a chief of security forces under a local king. Kanakadasa threw away his sword when the 'inner call' came. He wrote about two hundred songs (Kirtans, Padas, Mundiges or philosophical songs) besides five major works. Kanakadasa's poems:

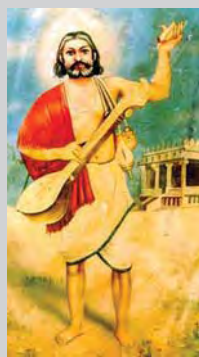
Maya
 O Lord, are you in the maya, or the maya is in

you?
 Are you in the body, or is the body in you?

Is the view in space, or the space is in the seen?
 Or are both in the eye?
 Is the eye in buddhi, or the buddhi in the eye?
 O! Hari! Do both exist in thee?

Is the sweetness in sugar or sugar in sweetness?
 Or are they together in the tongue?
 Is the tongue in buddhi, or the buddhi in the tongue?
 O Hari! Do both exist in thee?

Is the flower in fragrance or the fragrance in



the flower?
 Together are they in the smell?
 O Aadikeshava of Kaginele, of incomparable prowess!
 These are beyond my grasp! Isn't all in thee?

Nee Mayeyolago
 Are you a creature of illusion or illusion your creation?
 Are you a part of the body or is the body a part of you?

Is space within the house or the house within space?
 Or are both space and the house within the seeing eye?
 Is the eye within the mind or the mind within the eye?

Or are both the eye and the mind within you?

Does sweetness lie in sugar or sugar in sweetness?
 Or do both sweetness and sugar lie in the tongue?

Is the tongue within the mind or the mind within the tongue?
 Or are both the tongue and the mind within you?

Does fragrance lie in the flower or the flower in fragrance?
 Or do both the flower and fragrance lie in the nostrils?
 I cannot say, O Lord Adikeshava of Kaginele,
 Oh peerless one, are all things within you alone?



Govt. and NFIN team in a dialogue

Grave ethnic issues

...A nation-state remains intact and sovereign as long as its center of gravity is undisturbed.

■ R.D.Limbu

The issues raised by the ongoing political movements of the ethnic people are closely related with the election to the Constituent Assembly (CA), which will write a new constitution for the country. To simplify the complex road to the CA election and the formation of a credible CA, this issue needs to be resolved as soon as possible.

History provides relevant and meaningful insights into the gravity and implications of the ethnic movements. The Sri Lankan Tamil problem began with the election in 1956 of SWRD Bandaranaike on a "Sinhala only" platform, and continued with the abandonment of the two-language policy in 1960, and adoption of the 1972 Constitution that gave Buddhists the foremost place in national life.

Such discriminations against Tamils led to the formation of extremist separatist movements. However, the then governments overlooked the issue. As a result, the situation deteriorated over the years. Presently, Sri Lanka is facing the most difficult time in her history and is on the brink of disintegration.

The case of Eastern Pakistan provides another relevant example, where the government was not serious enough to address in time the genuine demands – integration of Bengalis in higher civil and military bureaucracies, greater autonomy, non-

discriminatory policies etc for the Bengalis. Consequently, the Bengalis launched armed revolt that resulted in the birth of Bangladesh in 1971

In both these cases, situations so developed that the external military forces intervened in the name of regional peace and security. History presents numerous examples of this nature where: the governments were not sensitive, wise and farsighted enough to sincerely address the ethnic problems in time; and governments' intolerance, indifference, apathy and oppressive strategies resulted in untold suffering, irreparable loss, foreign military intervention and the disintegration of countries.

In Nepal's context, Janandolan-II had mandated the leadership to hold a free and fair election, which would write a new constitution to restructure the nation-state. More than 15,000 Nepalis sacrificed their lives for this hoped-for constitution. But, it is quite certain that before resolving the ongoing ethnic issue peacefully, the upcoming CA election cannot be conducted in free and fair environment as mandated by Janandolan-II, and as desired by international community.

The fundamental demands of the ethnic movement in Nepal; that of establishment of cultural identity, proportional representation in the national politics, and proportionate share in important organs of the government, seem to

be justified.

What the Nepalis want is a new constitution, which will address their hopes, beliefs and aspirations that were ignored for centuries. All Nepalis should have faith, a spontaneous feeling of true ownership, commitment and loyalty to this constitution. Otherwise, the whole exercise of holding elections could be futile and counterproductive. In this sense, the elections, though very important, is only a means to an end. But, as long as the means remains dubious, the end cannot be good and justified.

This vital issue is what the Madhesis, Janjatis and others want the government to sincerely address before the elections. To ensure that their voices are heard loud and clear, and heeded during the writing of the constitution, they want the CA represented by all the ethnic people. Whatever the modus operandi of the election, the Madhesis and Janjatis want the final composition of the CA to be proportionately represented by all ethnic people.

If the government, however, adopts 'winners-take-all' policy in the elections, the composition of the CA is most unlikely to be balanced and representative. The constitution prepared by such an unrepresentative and unbalanced CA will not bear or internalise the spirit of the people and therefore, will be rejected, thereby plunging the country into darkness.

Though the eight party government has allotted high priority to resolving the ethnic issues and the conduct of CA election, it has not matched its words with concrete actions. The government must overcome its inertia, apathy and partisan politics, and face the ground realities squarely. As time is the most critical factor in the present context, the government must accelerate its pace to resolve this issue so that CA election can be conducted on time. The agitating parties must reciprocate in the same spirit, bearing uppermost in mind the unity, integrity and sovereignty of the nation-state.

In fact, an enduring racial/ethnic harmony among the Nepalese serves as the 'center of gravity' of Nepal. This implies that a nation-state remains intact and sovereign as long as its center of gravity is undisturbed. And the center of gravity in Nepal is its ethnic people. Moreover, we must learn from the history of our neighbors, or else, we will have to pay a heavy price.

We must free ourselves from the vicious psyche of Duryodhana, who, when urged by sages and seers to follow the path of righteousness expressed his helplessness in the following words: "I know very well what righteousness is, but my mind does not want to follow it. I know very well what unrighteousness is, and yet I cannot come out of it." ■

Thais Vote on New Constitution

The referendum is about the credibility of coup makers



BANGKOK- Millions of Thais went to the polls Sunday to vote on a new constitution proposed by the ruling junta. The vote is a crucial first electoral test for the generals who led last September's bloodless coup.

If a widely expected yes vote is delivered by the 45.6 million eligible voters, the generals who have been in power for the past 11 months are bound to hold general elections in December. The government has sent copies of the 149-page document to all 18 million homes in Thailand.

A no would delay the polls and allow the military to pick any of the country's previous constitutions and make it the law of the land. For Thais, who have lived through more than a year of turmoil surrounding billionaire premier Thaksin Shinawatra and his

ouster in the coup, the referendum was their first chance to vote since the military takeover.

Polling, which began at 8 a.m. (0100GMT), was scheduled to end eight hours later, with unofficial results expected at about 9 p.m. (1400 GMT) Sunday. Political unrest was not expected, but thousands of troops and police were deployed across southern Thailand to prevent attacks on polling stations by insurgents. Political analysts say that will make the result as much a verdict on junta as it is on the constitution.

"The referendum is about the credibility of coup makers," said political analyst Ukrist Pathmanand of Chulalongkorn University. Election officials say they expect to announce

the result late Sunday. The junta leader, General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, appeared on television early Sunday to urge people to vote. "I would like to ask people to come out to vote in the referendum. Today is an important and historic day," he said.

Opponents, including Thaksin supporters and democracy advocates, have been campaigning against the charter, warning it will only empower the nation's bureaucracy and military at the expense of elected leaders. If voters pass the army-backed charter, it will be Thailand's 18th constitution over the last 75 years.

Campaigning has been tilted heavily in the government's favor, with half the country still under martial law and a new law threatening prison for anyone convicted of obstructing the referendum. The army-installed Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont has toured the country, including a visit last week to Thaksin's northern stronghold of Chiang Mai, to urge people to vote in favor of the referendum. Analysts warned that a rejection could reignite political tensions, delaying elections and injecting fresh uncertainty into Thailand's wobbly economy.

(Alalam.ir)

Vote counting in Maldives polls

Voters in the Maldives were waiting for results Sunday from a referendum on how they want to be governed in future, after the tiny Pacific nation got an unusual taste of democracy.

Ruled by Asia's longest-serving leader Maumoon Abdul Gayoom since 1978, residents voted Saturday on whether to adopt a US-style presidential or British-style parliamentary government in the mostly Sunni Muslim country.

Political parties have only been legal in the Maldives, a chain of more than 1,000 coral islands and one of the world's most exotic tourist spots, since 2005 -- when Gayoom announced a series of political reforms.

Gayoom, who has campaigned for a presidential government which would be a stronger central executive, has promised an independent judiciary and police and broader fundamental rights to citizens under a new constitution. Opponents have been pushing for a British-style parliamentary model.

With results trickling in to the capital Male from across the islands, some of them by fax, the



presidential campaign was ahead with just more than 50 percent of the votes counted, election commission officials said.

The DRP is backing a presidential system under a new constitution where the president could serve two five-year terms. Gayoom is already in his sixth term under the present charter and has said he would run again under the new system.

Protestors led by the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) have taken to the streets in recent years to demand greater civil rights and protest Gayoom's rule, described by opponents as autocratic.

(TurkishPress.com)



thumb to thumb thumb!

नेपाली रिङटोन्स

रेशम फिरि रेशम फिरि





THT Live

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Ringtone	Album	RT ID
Resham firiri	Folk songs	N2005
Changu Narayan	Various Artists (Lok)	N2050
Trishulima buneko	folk songs by Kumar Basnet	N2006
Joban Sorako	Various Artists (Lok)	N2066
Meri aamai	folk songs by Mira Rana	N2009
Basa Tanma	Mann	N2104
Ishwor Taillee	Muna Madan	N2121
Sapana Ki Pari	Gajal	N2144
Ukali Jyaan Ko	Basai	N2152
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Ludmilla Hungerhuber was one of the prime contributors to the creations of architectural delights that have come to life in Bhaktapur, in Patan museum and now the natural wonder that is the Garden of Dreams in Kaiser Mahal in the heart of Kathmandu. An eye catching plaque in the garden reads: The advice of Candide - The garden still needs cultivating - the most famous line in Voltaire's Candide (Paris 1759)....

Sitting in the tranquil surrounding where nature has been tempered to enchant the senses and every inch of space has been turned into a visual delight, Ludmilla shared her experiences of work in those projects with newsfront recently.

Tell us about your shift from working with children to architecture and gardens.

I came to Nepal in 1979 and worked as an Assistant Manager in Bhaktapur development project for four years. Then for the next few years, I worked in Patan museum. In both the projects my work was related with administration and finance. But in this garden project, I took over the entire management. Although I was trained as a social pedagogue, and I worked with children in Germany, my interest for arts and architecture attracted me to these projects.

How have the experiences been?

I gained a lot of experience while working in the Patan museum. From working with children to administration and now management of the garden, the work grown on me and I have enjoyed working on all these projects thoroughly. I enjoyed the efficient team work and now feel happy watching the garden grow. But the most difficult part is dealing with the government.

What is the problem there?

The agreement was that this project has a manager and an executive director before the garden opened to the public. Nothing happened and we went ahead and opened the garden to the public but till date there is no executive director. The board is now due to take over the project in six weeks, the first of October and I really don't see how they are going to do it. They are already a year and half behind their schedule. People at the ministry concerned are changing frequently and nobody at the ministry knows what it takes to run a place like this. Or perhaps the government is not the right body to run a garden like this. Maybe I've already said too much.

How is the garden being maintained?

The odd one and half lakhs Rupees that is earned through the entrance fees is spent on staff and maintenance; but we have managed to accumulate some extra money for low times. Besides that we have staff that has been trained over the past six years.



Ph: by Susma Amatya

Creating dreams

Theatre is so transitory, unlike gardens that do not last for an eternity but it does stay longer than a stage play.

In a place like this, running a restaurant is very crucial to cover expenses. The infrastructure for a restaurant is ready, we just need someone to start running it but it can't be done till the board takes over the responsibility of running this garden, invites tenders and then chooses someone to run it.

What other challenges did you face in creating this garden?

We did not pay much attention to gardening since none in the team had a gardening background. We just thought we plant and it will grow but though what we planted did grow, it dawned on us pretty soon, that we need an expert to handle all the major and minor details. Since then we have had two garden experts who designed and planned the garden and trained the local staff. The local gardeners here have been trained extensively and maintenance manuals have been created both for gardeners and for technical side for the running of the garden.

What keeps you here?

My love for the country keeps me here. I like the people who are open, tolerant and friendly. I know it's a big chaos at the moment; negative things are all over the newspapers but we have to go forward with the good things. I like the architecture, the country side, the nature and love to watch the mountains from afar. Out of the valley, people are different, are much more open and simple. I live in Bhaktapur and enjoy it there.

Any realisations after having spent 25 years here?

After a year you think you understand the people and the country but after 25 years, I realise I

really do not understand anything. In the past 17 months, I've seen two revolutions, second one more vivid because you watched it live on TV. It impressed me a lot, the people on the streets, from all walks of life, something I never expected. Things appear in order but nothing is in order and it took me a lot time to see this.

You handed over the management of the garden last year. What occupies you now?

I only act as advisor now and come in at times. I keep busy with Studio 7, the theatre group at Vajra hotel where I have been involved since its very beginning, 25 years ago. Recently we also received an international award for our work.

I do the sets and am involved with the whole production – costume, props etc and I also act. Every spring we do one production. We start working in April and perform from second half of October. It's a lot of work and fun. If I had my way, I would love to spend all my time in theatre. I did theatre only for children in Germany but here working with

Sabine who is trained in Berlin, I learned as we went along.

What changes have you seen regarding theatre?

The last few years have seen a growth of theaters here and Gurukul is a competition since it performs in Nepali and it takes away a large section of Nepali audience. People are more interested in going to theatres now and we see more Nepali audience in our plays than in the earlier years. We perform in English and mix it with Nepali, Newari and Sanskrit also. Our theatre is very much into movements and expressions and can be understood easily.

Which is the best role you have played on stage?

My favorite one is the one where I play the role of a musician, one of the two main characters in a play by Satyajit Ray called Gopi and Bagha. Stage play is unique in the sense it takes so much preparation, it appears and then disappears. It is so transitory; unlike gardens that do not last for an eternity but it does stay longer than a stage play.

What is important to you now?

The garden is important to me now. It's a baby we as a team created and do not want to see it run into any problems. Tending a garden is not easy. If you ignore it for a week, it starts overgrowing. It needs good team work. I'd like to see it running as efficiently as the Patan museum. ■



I like the architecture, the country side, the nature and love to watch the mountains from afar. Out of the valley, people are different, are much more open and simple.

Girija's grand design



■ Siddhartha Thapa

In yet another shocking revelation, increasing Maoist atrocities were in fact planned to derail the elections in November, so as to convene the parliament into a CA.

Nepal has transcended from one authoritarian regime to another. The predicament surrounding the possibility of elections in November has triggered a wide-spread debate. However, given the prevailing state of lawlessness in the country; elections are impossible. But that does not give any space for the eight party leadership to convene the present parliament into a Constituent Assembly (CA).

While the international community and the general populace have been assured that the elections will be held this November; Machiavellian political pundits in Baluwatar are busy chalking out alternatives to the polls this November. Out of the many designs in the grand scheme being planned, the first is to convene the present parliament into a CA. Except for the UML, two of the other major players; Girija and Prachanda have reached a conclusion to translate the present parliament into CA.

Secondly, the prime minister is all set to become the first president of Nepal. The Maoists have convinced Koirala to make history by taking the top job of presidency as soon as possible. Therefore, the latest move by Koirala to prompt the baby king theory is because the Koiralas in Baluwatar and the Maoists speculate that the king might not abdicate in favor of Prince Hridayendra because the government will not be in a position to guarantee the baby prince's succession to the throne. Gyanendra's insecurities will be capitalised upon by these forces as 'non-cooperation' and will serve to pave the way for an immediate declaration of a Republic.

Shekar, the Prime Minister's nephew is being perceived as heir apparent to the Koirala family. Sujata has been sidelined,

while Shashank has remained aloof from politics. Taking advantage of the feud within the Koirala family, the Maoists have quite cleverly given the illusion to Shekar that the Koirala family is very much a dynastic component of the institution of democracy in Nepal. And as a consequence, after Girija, the Maoists will wholeheartedly support Shekar for this top post. Perhaps this is why Shekar has been backing the Maoists in an effort to consolidate his place as the future politico of the Koirala family.

Last but not the least, the home minister's role remains controversial. It has come to notice that the home minister has forcibly manipulated reports prepared by the home ministry and the intelligence department to falsely charge perceived political opponents. KP Sitaula remains busy pocketing hefty commissions. What is alarming is the fact that when the Maoists captured former PM SB Thapa's land in Dhankuta, it was Sitaula who urged the Maoist on in a bid to demoralise Thapa.

Bashing of UML cadres in Jhapa, Sitaula's constituency, by YCL cadres in the past clearly suggests that the minister is working in tandem with the Maoists and vice-versa. If not, why did not the State take action against YCL? It also raises questions as to why only those individuals who failed to toe both Sitaula's and the Maoists' line of thought, have received physical and mental assaults from YCL.

In yet another shocking revelation, increasing Maoist atrocities were in fact planned to derail the elections in November, so as to convene the parliament into a CA. The master planners remain Sitaula and Shekar. The question arises what might have

prompted Koirala to explore the possibilities of translating the present parliament into a CA?

Initially after assuming the responsibility of a Prime Minister, Koirala had genuinely believed that it was possible to solve all issues through the peace process and conduct elections that would provide a lasting solution to Nepal's problems. Unfortunately, Koirala's policy to appease the Maoists to humiliate UML and NC-D has backfired.

Today, the Maoists operate as an 'extra-constitutional force' and the government still has not been able to generate adequate political will to contain the Maoists within the realm of the constitution. Therefore, the greatest obstacles to the elections in November are the Maoists who have consistently breached the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

Nonetheless, the most important facet that can help describe Koirala's intention to convene the present parliament into a CA is purely for his political security. Today, almost over a year after the reinstatement of a multi-party government, the Koirala government's survival is being questioned from all quarters including his allies. Perhaps Koirala had genuinely believed in the baby king theory and perhaps he actually thought elections could be held.

However, the law and order situation has taken a nose-dive and the environment will be remain unsuitable for elections as long as the PM fails to generate political will. Therefore, as a consequence Koirala might have been made to believe that in order to secure his political survival, he has to reconcile with the idea of convening the present parliament into CA if conducting elections in November is a distant reality. ■

Marshland Flowers

The purpose of Shila is to open the mind to become gentler and more compassionate, not to see other's faults and gloat over it.



■ Acharya Mahayogi Sridhar Rana Rinpoche

As for styles, although the Buddha himself never conducted intensive group retreats, he often did tell his disciples to sit under a tree, or an abandoned house and spend their time meditating. But today, intensive group retreats have become common in both Mahayana systems like Zen Tien Tai, Vajrayana and Theravada.

However, there are Theravadin Acharyas like Achan Jha of the Laos Forest Mountain tradition of Theravada who decry such intensive retreats as unnatural, not conducive to enlightenment and not taught by the Buddha. He emphasises a more relaxed and natural, unforced style of gaining insight (Vipassana) into the nature of all Dhammas. Before I go into some of the various styles of meditation within Theravada itself, I would like to elucidate a little on what the Buddha taught. Even though, as I said, he taught many varieties of teachings according to both the Theravada and the Mahayana traditions, they can all be subsumed into what is called the Tri Shikchhya; often translated as the three teachings or three trainings.

The Tri Shikchhya are: Shila, Samadhi and Pragya. Shila means living a life according to moral precepts. All Buddhist householders must take the five Shilas (Pancha Shila). There is also the taking of eight or ten Shilas during special ceremonies like Uposatha (fasting) etc. Then there are the 253 Shilas taken by the Bhikkhus.

Shila is taken basically to purify the mind to some extent by not allowing the mind to remain in an emotionally defiled state. The purpose of Shila is to lighten the mind of emotional defilements (Klesha) to some extent, and not to suppress the emotional defilements back into the subconscious mind. In Mahayana, the meaning of Shila is to help lighten self-oriented behaviour and the like.

Shila should develop selfless behaviour. If following a rule is selfish in a context, then following that blindly is no

more Shila but Shilabrataparamarsha i.e. grasping to Shila and rites and rituals, no matter what the case. While Shila helps in liberating the mind, Shilabrataparamarsha only binds the mind more and more.

Shilabrataparamarsha is to cling to ideas that following this ritual or that strictly sticking to precepts and rules will automatically liberate you, while Shila if followed properly can be liberating, if not properly understood and followed blindly can produce neurotic people who tend to be fundamentalists. The purpose of Shila is to open the mind to become gentler and more compassionate not to see other's faults and gloat over it.

In modern psychotherapy those who

The Tri Shikchhya are: Shila, Samadhi and Pragya. Shila means living a life according to moral precepts.

pin point others' faults or lack of Shila by that very act show that they are not free from that defilement but rather have repressed those defilements into their subconscious so well that it is projected onto others. That was not the purpose of the Buddha making these Shilas. If a mind has genuinely followed the Shila in the correct way, it opens up to the suffering and mistakes of others. It empathises with the difficulties of being a human. Such a mind does not criticise others.

But if in the name of Shila, one has only suppressed ones emotional defilements, then one tends to only see others as Shila breakers, one only sees others' faults and think one is pure. And this definitely was not the purpose why the Buddha considered Shila as one of the three Shikchhya. Shila called Tsul Trim in the Tibetan tradition means 'cool'. It should cool the mind.

(To be continued.)

(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master.)

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For workers' well-being

It is high time to address the problems of South Asian workers working abroad.

The global liberalisation process has increased the movement of people, knowledge and technologies worldwide. But, in no way has it made the globe a common space where the rich and the poor can mutually benefit. There is a vast difference in working and living conditions. The income differentials are enormous. In this context, the increased access of South Asian lower middle class workers to international resources and opportunities has helped them to escape from the conditions of deprivation and insecurity and roll uphill seeking liberty and prosperity.

The regional countries are the recipients of huge remittances from their workers. In 2006 the World Bank reported that the South Asian region annually receives around \$ 32 billion remittances. In Pakistan, remittances increased four-fold from just over \$1 billion in 2001 to over \$4 billion in 2003; in Bangladesh, it increased from \$1.9 to \$3.3 billion; in India, it increased from \$12 to \$21.7 billion and Nepal receives \$1.5 billion. If this trend grows then in the future its contribution to gross domestic product will outpace both foreign direct investment and official development assistance.

Except Bhutan and the Maldives, all the South Asian countries are labor surplus and labor is exported mainly to Malaysia, the Gulf region and East Asian countries. The outflow of regional workers and inflow of remittances have significantly aided the economic development of the South Asian region. The migration from labor surplus to labor deficit



■ Dev Raj Dahal

rich countries is so massive that it has become profitable to both sending and receiving countries.

The steady flow of foreign exchange that remittances have delivered continues to improve these countries' balance of payment situation, stabilised the exchange rate, availed foreign exchange for imports and provided creditworthiness for external borrowing. But, these benefits

The explosive growth of manpower recruitment agencies in various countries of labor origin has become a new business enterprise.

are not without social costs for the workers, their children and other family members. And the changing demands of the workers have not been properly investigated.

The liberalisation of regional economies has facilitated workers' social mobility but the level of workers protection that is conducive for sound labor market has not been sufficient. The wages

and employment conditions equally affect the quality of life of the workers. In South Asia, labor market regulations and standards are being applied to industrial and organised sectors.

The workers employed in the informal sector do not have strong political agencies for free collective bargaining to demand for their legitimate rights, social security, safety nets and adequate social opportunities.

The explosive growth of manpower recruitment agencies in various countries of labor origin has become a new business enterprise. Workers who are sent abroad by overseas companies without formal agreements with the governments face a number of disadvantages such as low pay, overwork, passport seizure by

companies, unhealthy working conditions, sexual abuse, torture, kidnapping and are even exposed to terrorist attacks.

Often workers are ill-advised by the local recruiting agents. When they go abroad they are forced to work in those areas other than was mutually agreed upon. Similarly, low wages, long working hours, lack of social security, deceptive visa practices too are common. There are no regional agreements or dialogues either for the mitigation of these ills or any policies towards a closer integration of labor markets.

So far the hard earnings of workers abroad

have neither been estimated by South Asian policy makers nor the political and social implications of increasing migration of the youth been properly analysed. Likewise, South Asian governments have not formulated a coherent regional policy regarding labor market integration within the region and abroad and common negotiating position and policies about migrant workers as well as labor agreements with receiving countries.

There is a need to create South Asian task force on migration to review the existing national policy documents and formulate a model policy. It is high time to address the problems of South Asian workers working abroad, analyse domestic policy deficits, upgrade training and capacity building skills, develop policy coordination among the regional countries and build their skill and capacity as per the provisions articulated in core labor standards of ILO and global rules. The donors, market institutions and regional civil society can contribute to these efforts.

The World Bank's Global Economic Prospect (GEP) has urged developing countries faced by a large exodus of these skilled workforce and educated people, to improve working conditions in public employment, invest more in research and development and help identify job opportunities at home for returning migrants with advanced education. There is a need for governments of South Asia to regulate illegal recruitment and if possible have a policy on the regional level regarding their protection, security and safety. ■

As the elections for Constituent Assembly draws near, doubts if this mega event would at all take place is being raised everywhere. In Terai, questions are raised not only for the elections, but for the very survival of the State; where barring a few urban areas, there is no sign of State presence. The rural areas are under the control of forces which do not belong to the State machinery.

Although Kathmandu is well aware of this fact, little or no steps have been taken to reverse the situation. Despite their dislike for armed groups, the capital's insensitivity to Madhesi problems has compelled the common people to toe the insurgent line. The absence of genuine political intentions to thrash out outstanding issues has also created a general mindset that talking to Kathmandu is a waste of time.

The Madhesi movement was one among the many cementing processes of strengthening democracy. It never intended to disintegrate the nation. Instead it was a movement to evolve Nepal into a stronger, accommodative and inclusive nation. That the Madhesi took to streets with Lathis (bamboo batons) and not with guns, also amplified their peaceful intent. It not only symbolised their identity, but also reflected their acceptance of the Gandhian method of peaceful agitation. All that Madhesi were asking for was a considerate

Feeling the Madhesi pulse

The MJF is as confused and directionless as other parties. They have no clear agenda how to lead the Madhesi people.



■ Chandrakishore Jha

In the changed scenario, particularly regarding political developments in Terai, India would be well advised to note that simply insisting for conducting the elections before Kathmandu attends to the mess in Terai will be counter productive.

attention from the government and nothing else.

The government's response to the Madhesi upsurge, to say the least was lukewarm in nature. Even as every passing day saw deaths of demonstrators, the Prime Minister opted to view Terai from far end of a telescope, reportedly on the advice of some who did not want the issues to be resolved. By the time the government's offer for talks ultimately came in, the situation was already hijacked by armed groups.

The importance of dialogue to resolve the issue was underscored by all, but it remained as mere publicity stunt and never got translated into action. Not only did the government dilly dally on talks, but the Madhesi Janaadhikar Forum (MJF) which was leading the movement also played immature politics. They got carried away by rhetoric from some national and international players and played cheap politics, placing personal interests ahead of community interest. Hence, the forum drew a blank, with nothing to show as their achievement.

Today Terai is in turmoil. The total absence of law and order in most places has been fully exploited by the armed groups. The Madhesi civil society is not bold enough to persuade these armed groups to be flexible and come for talks. Leaders representing Madhesi in mainstream political parties are confused and indecisive.

The MJF is as confused and directionless as other parties. They have no clear agenda how to lead the Madhesi people. The armed groups, which may be broadly divided into four categories: those who think that the problem cannot be solved through peaceful means; Maoists deserters who believe in ethnic cleansing; those involved in criminal acts in the guise of political activities; and those who are interested in militarisation of Terai - all hold divergent views. Although they all agree that Madhesi are exploited, they have no common agenda for solving the problem.

In the midst of all this, it is the common Madhesi who are suffering, and they eagerly want some kind of

steps taken to resolve the outstanding issues. Frustrations loom large and so unless timely action is taken, the very unity and integrity of the nation may itself be in jeopardy. Instead of trying to please some individual Madhesi leaders, the State must reach out to the people and show genuine intentions. The armed insurgent groups should be engaged in talks; and adopting military method to suppress the movement must be avoided.

In the changed scenario, particularly regarding political developments in Terai, India would be well advised to note that simply insisting for conducting the elections before Kathmandu attends to the mess in Terai will be counter productive. Such a move would be a mistake and would be akin to the one committed in Sri Lanka. The best favour that India or any other country can do for Nepal in the present situation would be to persuade Kathmandu to first end the Terai imbroglio and create atmosphere for election.

The Madhesi, the marginalised people are most interested in having the election. Without creating a congenial atmosphere for the elections, no community should be accused of creating hurdles in holding the elections.

(Chandrakishore is a Birgunj based journalist, Editor of Terai Khabar Patrika)

I believe that in our own right we are all 'schizophrenics' and have multi-personalities.

Light and dark

■ Sanchita Sinha Roy

Lotus

I did this painting as a tribute to the Lotus Sutra which I was studying at that time. The Lotus Sutra's philosophy and wisdom edifies the positive within the negative. Like the beautiful Lotus flower that emerges from muck so does everything else in life. How would there be good if there was no evil, how would there be light if there was no darkness, how would there be life if there was no death. This painting signifies the possibility and the finality of the positive within the negative.



I have used texture white to give it its texture. Done with acrylics on canvas board, it consists of two panels. I call this phase of mine the panel phase. Perhaps I have resorted to using small panels as my health does not allow me to stand and lean for hours over a big canvas, it is easier for me to work with smaller panels on the table. Again and again I find myself breaking down my artwork to their simplest forms omitting all details, almost like one would find in any animated work, like comic books for example. I enjoy this style of work very much specially the textures and the pure colours.

Ravan

This pen and ink illustration was inspired by a very ugly incident with an acquaintance which got me thinking on the dual and multi personalities we maintain with ourselves and in front of the world. I believe that in our own right we are all 'schizophrenics' and have multi-personalities. Psychiatrists and psychologists may give it fancy terms and terminologies but we deny ourselves this truth.

We are all senile in that the line between sanity and insanity is very slim. We behave differently with different people be it our friends, colleagues, neighbours, relatives, siblings; we behave differently in different situations. We alternate egos and personalities to suit ourselves and others.



I based this painting on a combination of the Indian rooted Malaysian puppetry known as 'Wayang Kulit' or shadow puppet play performed by a 'Tok Dalang' or puppet master accompanied by his assistants and an orchestra playing local traditional instruments. Stories of the Wayang Kulit originated and emerged from the great epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata. These shadow puppet plays were a form of entertainment before the advent of television and cinema in the villages and towns of Malaysia. Nowadays one is privileged to actually catch a Wayang Kulit Show.

The art of making the puppets is a dying



culture as is the rarity of a Tok Dalang and the accompanying musical troop. The stories of the Ramayana and Mahabharata have been replaced by stories of local historical figures like Hank Jebat and Hang Tuah. I have used the character of Ravan for he is the perfect man and the perfect villain.

Instead of illustrating a Wayang Kulit puppet, I have chosen to make Ravan a dual masked personality representing the alter ego. I have tried my best to be true to the Wayang Kulit traditional representation through the experimentation of line and colour. This is a three panel artwork done on handmade paper using pen, ink and coloured pencil.

Sirih

Sirih, the Malay word for Betel leaf or Paan (in Hindi), or Beeda (in Tamil), or Kun-ya as it is known in Myanmar, is a type of digestive, which consists of fillings of sweet spices or tobacco, wrapped in a triangular package using leaves of the Betel pepper (*Piper betel*), held together with a toothpick or a clove. The filling is generally a mixture of various spices like cardamom, saffron, roasted coconut, cloves, fruits, sugar and also tobacco.

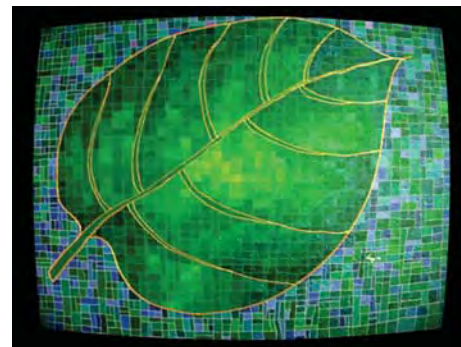
Many types of Paan contain Betel nuts as a filling, many other types do not. Although the tradition of having Paan was very common in the Malay and Indian cultures of Malaysia earlier on, it is now a dying tradition in Malaysia. The present generation of Malaysians can find evidence of it in the museum showcasing the special boxes or caskets (mainly silver), with several compartments where the Sirih, the spices and the tobacco were stored and conveniently carried around for use at any given time and the instruments (clippers) used to clip the betel nut and the spittoons to spit the Paan juices.

Some Malaysian Indian communities still do maintain this traditional dish for temple ceremonies, weddings and other special occasions. In

the sub-continent (India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) and in Myanmar however, the tradition lives on with 'Paan wallahs' or shopkeepers finding innovative and new methods, fillings and names to make it a very popular after meal digestive.

Sirih is chewed as a palate cleanser and a breath freshener. It is also offered to guests and visitors as a sign of hospitality and eaten at cultural events. In fact, in many earlier South and South East Asian cultures, gifts to kings, priests and officials, would have as a necessary item the betel leaf besides perfume, tea, tobacco, spices, cotton and silk. Of course, the Sirih in my painting looks very different from real Betel leaf ... ah well... all goes in the name of artistic license.

I have enjoyed the various shades of acrylic greens I have worked with. The gold outline of



the leaf was an after-thought which worked out pretty well. The boxes have been inspired by the Malaysian paddy fields which go on for miles and miles and by a very common check box design of the Malaysian sarong worn both by men and women. This painting took me five months to complete.

(Sanchita, 43, painter and writer currently works from her studio at Gurgaon, Haryana, India. She can be reached at: sanchitasroy@gmail.com and sanchitasroy@yahoo.com; phone: 91-9818803916)



Nature will win, of course...

On roof top

■ Keith Douglas Leslie

A Saturday afternoon at home with Josh downstairs finishing his boarding school stuff, Anita cleaning inside somewhere, Shakun & Leah off to Fatima's for their massages, Ez at Phora to play basketball and me, the Dad, taking a few hours of relaxation upstairs after cleaning the overgrown ivy and a summer's debris along the rooftop molded gutters.

When Ez came home from Lyle's about 11 am and found me up above the living room, wrestling and tearing the slender, elastic lines of ivy that had overwhelmed the rooftop defenses, he chuckled and said, "you're still on the roof!"

Where I had been at 8 pm last night, when the electricity was out for a few hours, lying on the wooden bench in the open air loggia on the back of the living room roof watching the dark, clamoring clouds overhead.

Ez called, "Dad, where are you?" When I answered, he asked, "Do you have 20 or 50 rupees on you?" "No," I responded, "I'm up here in the loggia by myself; the money's on the desk in front of the computer."

"Ok, I'm going down to Budhanilkantha to get some momos for dinner. Then, we're going to Lyle's house." So, the next morning, Ez was amused to find his occasionally misplaced Dad still up on the roof, where he'd left him 15 hours earlier...

But, when you have such a plethora of roof vistas with verdant, rugged hillsides all around & the wide Kathmandu valley below, billowy day-time cumulus clouds on the horizon or city lights twinkling in the darkness, well, methinks, there's hardly a better place to contemplate the wonder of it all while continuing one's perpetual struggle with the fierce, semi-tropical invasion of monsoon foliage that seeks to swarm the ramparts of our precious home, drain pipes and existence.

Nature will win, of course, in the prime mover's final, ontological & metaphysical graphic chart-busting grand finale -- but that's probably a long way off yet from today's Saturday.

For now, the day-to-day struggle is full of joy enough, while Ms. Bountiful Nature temporarily bends her ineluctable florid ambition to our more limited thoughts and desires, to permit us to create a bit of sublime horticultural beauty up on the roof.

After all, without Mother Earth's eagerness to keep spreading her tendrils, leaves, seeds & roots, we'd be a lonely race of lonely people in a very barren world, indeed. Now, back to the barricades! But, first, where did I put my pruning scissors? ■



Pandit Ronu Majumdar, Indian's renowned flutist mesmerising the audience at Birendra International Convention Center on Thursday.

Fewa muse

Landscapes always mirror the emotional interiors of the people who inhabit them.

"Our lives are Swiss – so still, so cool till one afternoon the Alps neglect their curtains And we look farther on Italy – stands the other side But like a guard between The siren Alps, the solemn Alps Forever intervene"

(Emily Dickinson)

At Villa Serbellonia, American poet Wesley C McNair recited the above quoted extract from Emily Dickinson's poem to me. We met like long lost friends and discussed the poem that Dickinson wrote about this side of the Alps; even though she had never visited the region. True geography, McNair said, is interior. He opined that the project, writing Annapurnas poems is dear to his heart as well since landscapes always mirror the emotional interiors of the people who inhabit them.

Entering boot-shaped Italy was magical. I had casually looked out of the widow of the airplane and found that we were flying above the Alps. The view was breathtaking and for a moment we felt we were going to land at Tribhuvan airport, instead of Malpensa, Milano. That day moving from Milano to the edge of Lake Como, I could clearly see the shadow of the fishtail in the long endless strip of the turquoise waters of Lake Como. I knew I had discovered the naked wire that runs between Annapurnas and the Alps.

Moving by the side of the lake I had a feel of moving along the lake Fewa's shimmering waters. Only the villages, folk songs, porters carrying mountains of load on their backs and mules circling the bleeding trails of struggle were missing. The unrest, ambushes and bloodbaths were not there. The rest was similar.

I could see it had snowed just a day or two before. The dark blue waters of Lake Bellagio and Lekko seemed familiar to me. I had forgotten these waters altogether but found them here alive and charming me with their placid charm. I had expected a different landscape to write about for a few months. But the Alps carry the unmistakable charm of the Himalayan hill ranges. Asserting the fact the

The dark blue waters of Lake Bellagio and Lekko seemed familiar to me. I had forgotten these waters altogether but found them here alive and charming me with their placid charm.



■ Yuyutsu RD Sharma

nature is the same all over. Only humans have divided it for frivolous reasons.

Moving along the banks of these lakes I also trace the footsteps of senior writers. It constantly reminds me of my Guru David Ray who was here decades ago with his wife Judy Ray. I browse through the books he has left behind in the villa library. He wrote, "Judy & I loved taking the boat across the lake & walking around the little towns, having lakeside tea." There are signed books by other famous authors including Michael Ondaatje, Anita Desai and Rita Dove that I come across here.

As I took a boat to reach Serbelloni, I recollected the anecdote that another visitor Mr. Sheldon Segal, had narrated to me. While going to the area on an hour-long boat journey, Segal told how at last they could see the Villa Serbellonia. As the boat drew near the Villa, one of the boatmen said – "Do you know any famous person who lived in that famous villa?" Feigning ignorance, Segal said, "No, I have no idea." As Segal waited, expecting from him names of famous writers and artists who had visited the idyllic mount to get inspired, the Bellagio boatman said excitedly, "Yes, the US president John Kennedy came once and lived in that famous villa!"

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Insight

Re-education

The outdated system of teaching and learning needs to be completely overhauled.



■ Sushma Amatya

What does education really mean? What kind of education are students getting in Nepal? Does it contribute to their mental, intellectual, emotional, physical, psychological development and overall wellbeing? Does it help create a well rounded personality; a happy, creative and responsible person who becomes an asset to the society? These questions and more need to be addressed and evaluated urgently given the present day scenario of rising competition, unemployment and discontent among the young people besides other issues.

Take the frequent cases of discord between students and teachers. A recent case was the protest by students in Tribhuvan University, that most students secured low grades in their examinations. Their demand was that those who were placed in third class get upgraded automatically to second and those who managed second class to the first class.

In the democracy we have created today which appears to have given license to act willfully and irresponsibly, this kind of protest shows that even educational institutions are being threatened to stoop down and dole out free marks without students having to work for it. It is common knowledge that wise teachers avoid turning up at the university on the day of the result fearing that they might face the wrath of students whose attention and energies get diverted from diverse activities towards the issue of studying only after their grades shock them into worrying about it.

The question arises if students need to use brains to earn school, college or university degrees at all now, when flexing muscles en masse seems to be all pervasive. Is it time to burn books, jail teachers who do not give in to outrageous demands and let first class university degrees rain on all students alike? Is this an expression of how education is being perceived today?

The extent to which this mass hysteria of wielding force, show of force to get anything one wants whether one deserves it or not, is proven amply by a five year old kindergarten student who demanded that he was tired of his teacher wearing blue and so she should wear red, his favorite colour. When the teacher decided to amuse him by asking him what he would do, if she did not; he responded that he would take a Julius – a demonstration against her wearing blue all the time. His ally, another child did not lose the opportunity to voice his displeasure at being taught the same old alphabets and wanted to learn something else, "or else, I'll declare a strike." Just a few samples of how quickly the young minds learn to adapt.

We have to make a clear distinction between what is acceptable, within the framework created to establish a peaceful society and what is wrong, barbaric, senseless, atrocious or plain stupid. Show of force must not be allowed to prevail over what is right. There is a huge difference between knowing what you are fighting for, having the conviction and then going for it; and just blindly giving into mass hysteria. Students have a responsibility towards themselves and to their parents to begin with. The value of time, youthful energy and timely development of one's potentials must not be underestimated.

On the other hand, it is time for our educational system to be reviewed and updated. Boring rote learning need to be replaced by a student friendly way of learning where each student can develop his/her unique potential; regardless of students' economic background. A system has to be created where there exists employment opportunities for students from all walks of life. The traditional method of access to employment based merely on presentation of university degrees needs to be reviewed. The outdated system of teaching and learning needs to be completely overhauled.

An educated person, although he/she might have only passed class five or ten would be an asset to the society. Compare this to an uneducated person with a Ph.D who is starved of basic human values such as integrity, kindness, compassion and does not care about the impact of one's actions on others. Such insensitive people can serve only their narrow self interests and could end up being a burden to the society. The point here is that to create a balanced personality, it is crucial to pay attention to nurturing both sides of a human brain containing – intellect and emotions, logic and metaphors, calculative and intuitive capacity.

Such a complete, farsighted education would succeed in imparting the knowledge, instilling the wisdom and giving everybody the freedom to choose what they want to be and how they would like to live their lives. Decisions made on foundation of such an education would be holistic, and would benefit others as well as self. It would create ripples of happiness and fulfillment, not sorrow and emptiness.

Fighting for such an all-encompassing education would be worthwhile, not namesake empty degrees. ■

The CD turns 25

When the first CDs rolled off the presses at the Philips factory near Hannover, Germany on 17 August 1982, nobody realised these newfangled compact discs would revolutionise entertainment.

"In the late seventies and early eighties we never imagined that one day, the computing and entertainment industries would also opt for the digital CD to store the growing volume of data for computer programs and movies," said Piet Kramer, one of the Philips engineers who developed the CD.

By the 1990s, CDs had not only nearly pushed out vinyl records but also paved the way for other uses of the digital disc, like the CD-Rom (compact disc read-only memory) and DVDs (digital video discs).

In the last 25 years, more than 200 billion CDs have been sold worldwide, Dutch electronics giant Philips — who invented the CD and developed it together with Sony — estimates.

Humble beginnings

"It started out quite small as many revolutions do," Paul Solleveld of the Dutch organisation for the entertainment industry NVPI told AFP.

Initially Philips hit upon the idea of digital recording for video and developed a 12-inch (30-centimetre) size golden CD to play movies, but the video disc never caught on. It was only after it flopped that Philips engineers suggested making a smaller digital disc with only sound — and the CD as we know it was born.

The beginnings were indeed humble: the first CDs to be pressed were "The Visitors" by Swedish pop group ABBA, the top-selling artists of Philips record label Polygram, and a classical recording by Herbert von Karajan conducting "An Alpine Symphony" by Richard Strauss.

In the early days, Philips released a limited number of CD titles mainly of classical music. The idea was that classical fans would better appreciate the superior sound quality.

Classical music lovers were also generally

more affluent than pop and rock music fans, and Philips thought they would be more inclined to pay the price for the more expensive CDs — and the very expensive CD-players, whose first models cost some 2000 Dutch guilders (around \$2000 at today's rate, taking into account inflation).

Their hunch was right. The superior quality of the CD revealed dimensions that up to then had been hidden on standard vinyl recordings.

"When Chilean pianist Claudio Arrau recorded one of the first CDs for Polygram we discovered that he was grunting and panting while playing. Before on vinyl you didn't hear that but on CD it was crystal clear," said Frank van den Berg, a former member of the Polygram CD development task force.

For the first couple of years CDs were slow to take off but in 1985 one of the most famous groups of the era, British rock band "Dire Straits," adopted the CD and released their "Brothers in Arms" album, one of the first fully digital recordings.

It went on to become the first album to sell over a million copies on CD and firmly established the CD as the music format for years to come.

"By the late eighties CD sales took off and hit a high point in sales in 1991 but since then they have been dropping," Solleveld said.



Slowly riding off into the sunset?

Some wonder if the CD will make it to its 30th anniversary, with the surge in digital music downloads that are put directly onto MP3 music players like the popular iPod.

In the last 10 years CD sales have been dropping while digital download sales are rising rapidly. According to the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), digital sales will account for a quarter of all worldwide music sales by 2010.

Nonetheless Solleveld is optimistic that the CD will make it to 30 and beyond.

"To some extent the CD has been replaced by downloads on MP3 players but I think there will always be a place for the CD," he said.

(cooltech)

In the last 25 years, more than 200 billion CDs have been sold worldwide

The King is dead . . . it's party time

Elvis Presley fans danced in the streets of London, laid wreaths at his feet in Japan and massed for a commemorative concert at Graceland in Memphis as the world paid tribute to "The King" on the 30th anniversary of his death.

On the hottest day recorded in Japan, Kurumi Nakamura became one of the first fans to mark the commemoration by laying a wreath at the feet of a bronze statue in the Harajuku district of Tokyo. The anniversary, she declared, "is not a day of mourning, but a happy, happy day of memories".

Japan has one of the largest Elvis fan clubs in the world. Its chief adviser is the younger brother of Junichiro Koizumi, the former Japanese Prime Minister who released his own CD of Elvis tunes and once

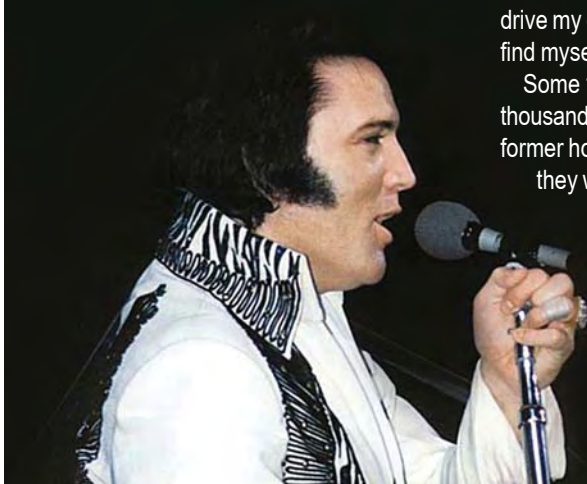
visited Graceland with President Bush.

Mrs Nakamura said that she watched one of his concerts or films every night and that her home was plastered with Elvis posters. But if her husband was jealous of her idol-worship, she said, "he keeps it locked away in his heart like a Japanese man should".

In Germany, where Elvis was based while serving in the US Army, hundreds of visitors visited the Ellington Hotel in Berlin to see the biggest collection of original Elvis memorabilia outside the United States. Franz Josef Wagner, a columnist for Bild newspaper, recalled what Elvis represented to the newly liberated West Germany after the Second World War. "On the radio it's the Armed Forces Network, the US military broadcaster — I hear My Happiness. . ." he wrote. "When I drive my car today and hear My Happiness I find myself on the verge of tears."

Some 1,200 British fans joined tens of thousands of people at Graceland, Elvis's former home in Memphis, Tennessee, where they were to watch a commemorative concert featuring video footage last night.

"I have been a mad Elvis fan all my life," said Tony Prince, the former disc jockey at Radio Luxembourg, who made the trip as president of the British fan club. ■



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