



Courage & Conviction

newsfront

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Countdown

Countdown begins for GP Koirala's days as PM

■ nf correspondent

The countdown for election to the Constituent Assembly elections has stopped mid-way with much more complicated political developments overshadowing it. That election may not be held in November is not a mere speculation now, but something waiting to be formalised by the election commission anytime. It may however have much serious political fallout including the exit of GP Koirala as the prime minister.

Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) has already begun collecting signatures to have the house session summoned to move a no-trust motion against Koirala. Maoist sources say although they do not have the requisite two third majority to remove the prime minister, they believe that Koirala will have lost all moral ground to stick to the chair once Maoists formally declare that they would not participate in the November election.

India, the architect and facilitator of the 12-point agreement, has already warned Koirala that he would lose his legitimacy as prime minister if November polls are not held. To add to that worry, Baburam Bhattarai, Maoists key ideologue, has stated that the election in November will be nothing more than a farce and that Maoists would not be a part of it.

The election commission has taken the emerging situation into account. Commissioner Gorakh Bahadur Gurung said that elections may not be possible under the existing law and order situation. The commission, in the wake communal flare up in Kapilvastu and other parts of the country, as well as continued assaults by the Maoists on commission staff and rival political party activists, has asked the government, to improve the situation on a priority basis.

There are speculations that the Maoists will formally declare their boycott of the November polls once the Nepali Congress endorses a

republican manifesto and goes for a parliamentary resolution in favour of republicanism. "Such a resolution will have no legal validity," said Dinanath Sharma, a senior Maoist leader, indicating that the Maoist stance towards Koirala government in the days to come would be more of an opposition and non-cooperation. "We are not obliged to save GP Koirala any more. We are only committed to the peace process," a Maoist leader told newsfront.

The fear in the Congress is palpable. Koirala shared his fear that he might be on his way out last week with some of the senior leaders of the Congress party. But party leaders believe that Koirala's shaky position is the outcome of his politics of too much of compromise and surrender to the Maoists. Khum Bahadur Khadka, a central committee member, warned Koirala that, "once the Congress party goes republic, we will be burying ourselves in the grave dug by the Maoists and Koirala will be their first target." ■



KP Bhattarai's letter missile: Two Congress must unite to save country and democracy and together discard republicanism.

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Congress goes republic

GP Koirala sacrifices inner party democracy for republic

■ nf correspondent

GP Koirala seemed all set to go republic as he bulldozed objections, dissents and advice against blindly following the Maoist agenda on their terms. On Sunday, Koirala appealed to more than 600 Congress delegates to discard its history and go for republic for the sake of eight party unity, although many including former Prime Minister K P Bhattarai asked him not to tread the republic path.

Koirala presented his agenda as the last wish of his political life saying he is not going to contest election to the constituent assembly; and that there was no other way than going republic if elections are to be held in November.

Koirala refused to receive the call from KP Bhattarai who later shot him a letter on Saturday against going republic. "The republican slogan and its endorsement would be totally against the policy and tradition of the Congress," Bhattarai said. But Koirala made no reference to the letter that he had received. Instead, he pleaded before central committee members of the Congress, led by party General Secretary KB Gurung, not to record dissent and press for voting when the resolution for a republic Congress is moved.



At least 13 central committee members told Koirala that not only was he dumping a history of wisdom and glory that Nepali Congress represented, but he also was being dictated by Maoists as well as external forces. "It will ultimately lead to Nepal's disintegration," dissenting central committee members warned.

Koirala deleted references of BP's reconciliation policy, and Bhattarai's recent reiteration in General secretary k b Gurung's resolution.

Bhattarai endorsed those views separately through the letter: "I am

deeply worried over news reports which quoted you as saying that country's sovereignty is under threat. This coming from a prime minister sends a dangerous message that the country's sovereignty and independence cannot be protected only by a democratic system."

"As a prime minister, I think it is your responsibility to apprise the nation about such a threat. It will be a gross lapse on our part not to formulate ways to face this challenge together. National reconciliation

envisages bringing democratic and nationalist forces together and unification of the two Nepali Congress will be the first right step in that direction."

"The threat you see to the sovereignty of the nation cannot be mitigated without democratic forces coming together. Po-republic slogan and its endorsement are against the Congress policy and tradition. I firmly believe that Congress should avoid going that way," said the 84 year old Bhattarai, the only surviving founder member of the Congress. ■

Risk earning wrath

Maoists who quit the government recently in a move that appears directed at stalling the November 22 polls have come under focused attack of the international community, with clear warning that they may only stand to lose out from the move.



Sahid Mallik

The US which has still got the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) on its terrorist list came down with a harsh criticism calling it a move to 'trash' the election, and revive the decade-long civil war.

"Trying to trash this election is trying to trash the whole process. Declaring yourselves an opponent to the democratic voting process, we can't abide by that. So I hope they won't go that far," Richard Boucher, top US State Department said in Washington on Thursday.

Boucher said the US government would continue to treat the Maoists as extremist outcasts until the movement becomes a normal political party. So far the Maoists have not threatened to renounce the ceasefire that ended their decade-long insurgency, and their soldiers remain confined to UN-monitored camps.

Boucher added, "They need to

give up the gun. They need to give up extortion. They need to give up the militant youth groups that have sort of extended their power and tried to intimidate people in the countryside."

CP Gajurel, head of the Maoist party's international affairs dismissed Boucher as a mere 'echo' of what the imperialistic powers have been doing all along ever since the 12-point agreement was signed.

But it was not the US alone which is critical and apprehensive of the Maoist move.

Maoists' insistence that monarchy be abolished right now if elections are to be held in November, have not found favour from any country so far.

European Union ambassadors issued a statement, endorsing sentiments expressed by the visiting UK Minister Sahid Mallik, which said not having elections on time with full support of all parties will be a 'betrayal' of the people's aspirations and damage the credibility of the peace process in their eyes and in the eyes of the international community. Indian official viewpoint appears no different from what the US and EU have stood by. ■

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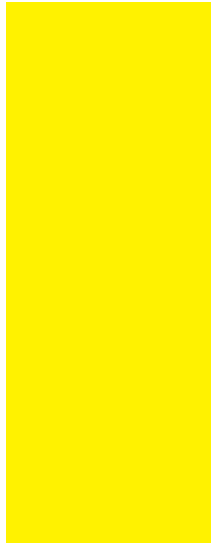
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Newsbrief

India's stick and carrot

India seems to be dangling carrots as well as sticks in front of the Maoists. Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon is believed to have invited Maoist leaders to visit India at their convenience and this was a tempting carrot for the Maoists. The casual offer was made when he had a meeting with Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai during his recent visit to the capital.

But Menon did not hesitate to display the stick as well. He made it clear that India would have to go with the rest of the world if the Maoists pulled out of the peace process, obstructed or boycotted polls and abandoned the 8-party unity - an umbrella concept that India mooted to bring Nepal's seven pro-democracy parties and the Maoists together.

India is said to be cautiously observing the Maoists' moves in the wake of their withdrawal from the government.

Election court

Although election in November looks still very uncertain, the government has set up an election court consisting of three judges of the Supreme Court to summarily address the election related disputes.

The court is headed by Justice Anup Sharma with Balram K C and Tap Bahadur Magar. All election related disputes will be dealt by the bench. One of the last businesses transacted in the House related to the adoption of the bill enabling government to form the election court.

PM and courtesy

G P Koirala is criticised by many for different reasons. But lack of courtesy is not one of them. But the experience of his childhood friend and the only surviving member of the Nepali Congress, KP Bhattarai was different this time.

Koirala refused to come on the line when Bhattarai made a call to Baluwatar to inform him that he is going to send him a letter on country's crucial political situation. The answer from the switch-board was, "I tried, and nobody picks up the phone." Koirala also did not bother to call back the octogenarian Gandhian leader who is known as Kishunji. Bhattarai shared this with some of those from Congress party who had called on him.

Fuel for election

As a follow-up to the recent visit by India's Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon, Nepal's petrol pumps which had dried up over a period of time will have a normal supply at least for some weeks to come.

To keep his promise, Indian Oil Corporation resumed supply, at a slightly enhanced level, to meet the fuel starvation that has adversely affected the normal life, movement and activities in Nepal. On Friday, IOV dispatched 2,800 KL petrol which was 500 KL more than normal supply even though the Nepal Oil Corporation has not cleared the dues running over 6 billion rupees.

An Indian embassy source said that as a good-will gesture, and to facilitate normal activities, fuel supply will continue at least till the November elections are over.

World free from hunger

It was a lobbying for a cause. Malvika Subba, youth spokesperson for hunger free campaign, impressed upon Nepal's permanent representative to the United Nations, Madhu Raman Acharya, to voice Nepal's support for the hunger free world campaign. Subba, a former Miss Nepal is the Action Aid (Nepal) ambassador in the campaign. She demanded that Nepal endorse the resolution on the right to food at the meeting of the UN member states slated to begin on 25th September at New York.

Social activists, youth spokespersons and civil society leaders from different countries are participating in various campaign actions in and around UN General Assembly to put pressure on the member state participants in order to influence a resolution for poor and excluded people who are suffering from hunger and malnutrition. 840 million people (17% of the global population) are hungry in this world of plenty, and this number is increasing.

Blood donation in Bluebird

Besides striving towards providing best services in their regular course of business, Bluebird has now undertaken activities for humanitarian services. To celebrate the 1st anniversary of Bluebird mall and 45th anniversary of Red Cross, Bluebird organised a blood donation program on 17th September 2007. In total 112 participants donated blood out of which approximately 71 were males & 41 females.

This event was followed by distribution of certificates by the chief guest Dr. Manita Rajkarnikar, Director of Central Blood Bank. Bluebird Mall is Nepal's first only genuine brand concept shopping mall with over 50 brands and outlets all under one roof.

More than 60 feared dead

■ Deepak Gyawali in Kapilvastu

As mayhem ruled and a demoralised local administration that lacked Kathmandu's firm directive failed to act promptly, Kapilvastu's communal frenzy seems to have taken a toll of at least 60 human lives, besides devastation of property in billions.

The chain of events triggered by the assassination of Mohit Khan, a prominent political and social figure in the area on September 16 outside his residence in Chandrauta village, have left many still missing. "We do not yet know how many people are missing, but any conservative estimate shows more than 50 people have lost their lives," a senior official in the home ministry in Kathmandu told newsfront. Mutilated parts of human bodies have been recovered in addition to 32 bodies accounted for.

The area continued to be under tension which was evident from the fact that criminals took away sacks of rice from a rice mill at Chandrauta, close to the armed police force camp, where Home Minister K P Sitaula was on Saturday. Sitaula faced the angry



crowd and got away only after promising that he will take action against the district chief of the police as well as the civil administration, but the anger against the 8-party government in Kathmandu among the local people is palpable.

The government is silent on the identities of those who killed Mohit Khan. Although he had been target twice by the Maoists for having headed the anti-Maoist vigilante group during the royal regime, Maoists this time have disowned their hand in the murder. "Soon after he

was killed, about 300 people from Indian side came to Nepal and attacked the residents of Krishna Nagar area," said the official.

With no administrative resistance, the crowds went on rampage, killing and uprooting the people in and around Chandrauta. Police sources confirmed that so far only 29 deaths have been confirmed, but the number of missing is far more. "As we will venture into some villages now, we will be able to give the exact number in about a week's time," Shashi Hajur Silwal, Police Superintendent said. ■

Mass Yoga class

Govt failed to cancel the event as Swami Ramdev refused to budge



The six-day Yoga (Yog) class conducted by Swami Ramdev began on Sunday, one day behind schedule, in Tundikhel after the internationally acclaimed Yoga master refused to budge an inch in the face of government warning that he faced a security risk.

"I cannot let down thousands of people who have already arrived here for Yoga class," he told Koirala, adding, "I fear nobody." The government, especially the home ministry, ultimately relented and refrained from canceling the Yoga training camp for which more than 30,000 people had queued up in the capital. As a result, classes began only on Sunday. On Saturday morning, many people got to know

about the cancellation only after they reached the venue.

The government decision to cancel the camp altogether followed suggestions from the home minister that his presence in Nepal would help the fanatic Hindus and the king. The prime minister seems to have promptly endorsed the suggestion, only to take it back in the face of stiff protests from thousands who had assembled in the capital and the defiance by the Swami. "I cannot let my disciples down," he told Koirala on Saturday morning.

The Swami who is in Nepal for the first time also got into a series of negotiations on Saturday afternoon and finally succeeded in securing support of all major political parties including the Maoists in successful

conduct of the classes, possibly making him feel Nepal's ultra-left were much more positively inclined towards ancient Yoga and Ayurveda science compared to Indian Marxists. Brinda Karat, a CPI-M politburo member had falsely accused the Swami of using human and animal ingredients in his medicines bringing the swami into a controversy.

Maoist leaders KB Mahara and Prabhakar Sharma were among those who attended the inaugural session in Tundikhel in the morning. The Swami in company of his colleague, Acharya Balkrishna, has also brought a strong contingent of Ayurveda doctors (Baidya) from the Patanjali Yogpeeth based in Haridwar. ■



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Point to Ponder

Happiness is when, what you think, what you say and what you do, are in harmony.

- Mahatma Gandhi

Maoists' exit

Maoists quitting the GP Koirala led government did not happen all of a sudden. There is a method to everything that Maoists have been doing. They have always been seeking an easy way to win. Like everyone's politics here, honesty, fairness and scruples do not seem to matter much for them as well. As a result, people no longer see them different from the existing political parties. And Maoists knew it well.

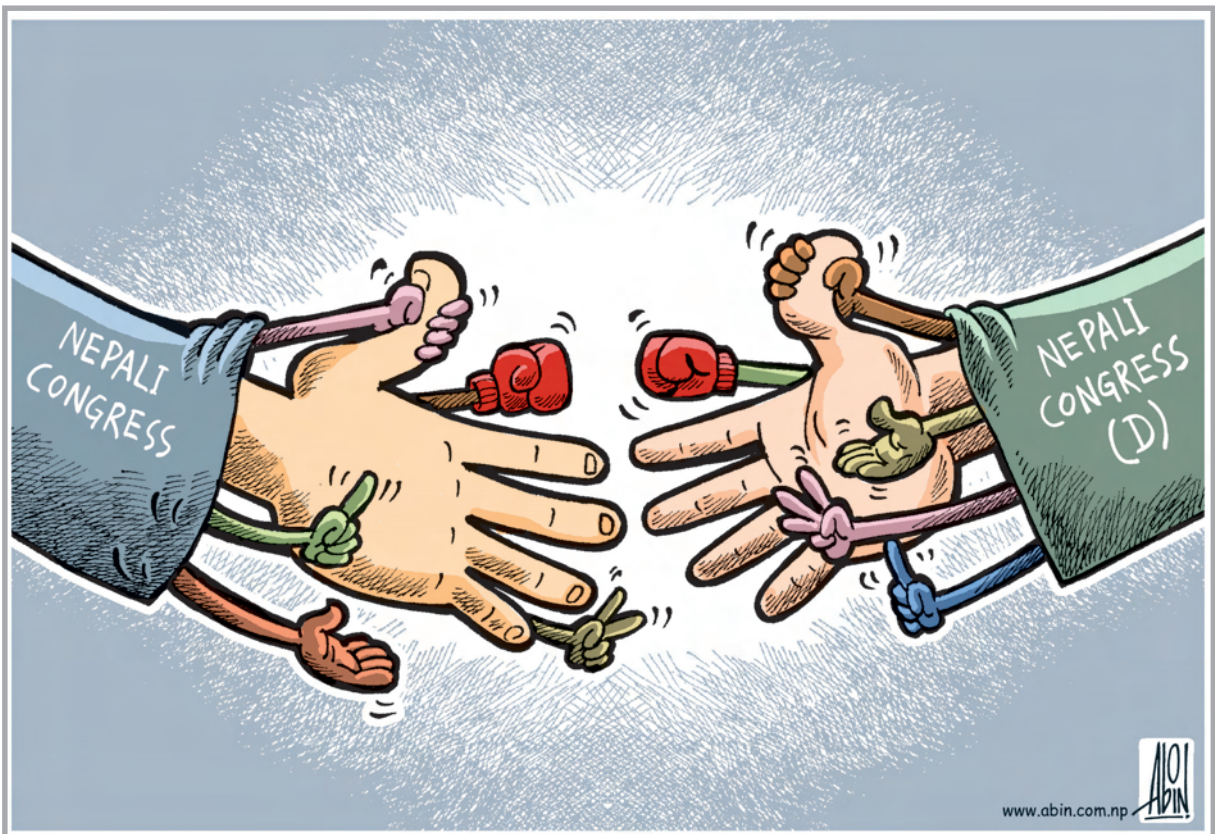
Therefore, it appears safe to assume that Maoists' withdrawal from the government is their first move towards running away from the election, which will take away the legitimacy of the present government as well as of the entire political process. In their calculation, Koirala and the rest in the coalition government have to accept their dictates if they want to be seen and recognised as legitimately ruling this country by the world outside.

The threat seems to be working out. Koirala and other coalition partners have moved a step closer towards pledging that constituent assembly will declare Nepal a republic. Koirala, as his past and present have shown, will go to any length to save his chair. And Maoists are exploiting that weakness to the hilt to extract what suits them. That is why, he chose not to sincerely implement the provisions of the comprehensive peace accord like: forming a commission for the disappeared, rehabilitating those displaced by the conflict, forming Truth and Reconciliation Commission and making sincere efforts to hold election in November.

Now there are clear indications that election in November is not at all possible, and Koirala might try to buy Maoists' return to the government to legitimise further postponement of the election. Maoists' withdrawal from the government is also an outcome of the intense differences among its top leaders with an emerging axis looking for replacement of Prachanda as the leader. At the same time, they have also initiated to oust Koirala as the prime minister.

These developments might lead to a situation where the future of the ongoing peace process looks bleak. Visible lack of will on the part of the government to implement the provisions of the CPA only reflects lack of seriousness. Koirala's leadership has not only failed, he has also proved to be utterly insensitive to the loss of lives and to the flare-up of communal situation in parts of the country.

While Koirala's leadership should not be seen as something without an alternative, Maoists need to review their withdrawal from the government. Quitting government, disrupting election will lead to disruption of the peace process. That will be the end of their journey towards a credible nationalist democratic party. A republic Nepal as a gift from Koirala will have no lasting political meaning in their favour. It can only invite people's wrath and dislike for them.



Letters

Ethnicity, no weapon

R D Limbu's 'Grave ethnic issues' makes an interesting reading. It not only goes into the genesis of the problem in a wider context, it also puts forward effective and constructive ways to approach them.

Ethnicity should not be used by politicians and those demanding their share in power structure as a weapon to destruct and disintegrate the society. It should be used for building an egalitarian society where everyone, irrespective of caste, creed, ethnicity, region, faith and religion, should feel equally that they belong to this country.

Limbu has also rightly warned the rulers of the day that denial of such an opportunity would push the country into a dangerous situation.

Nakul Bista
Sanepa, Lalitpur

Nepal for Nepalis

I read with interest the piece, 'Captured state.' The interesting fact about Maoists is that they have not yet learned the democratic system of governing.

United Nations is just a guardian of the system that is in place and it is unlikely to place the system in order that is in mess. After all, Nepal is for Nepalis to rule and manage. The gang of eight must learn to make it an inclusive society especially so at the beginning of the new millennium.

Chandra Sing Gurung,
RSIS, Nanyang University, Singapore

Endangered Nepal

KP Bhattarai's appeal for reconciliation has no doubt been dumped by many in the country as a regressive view-point not acceptable by 21st century Nepal. But many countries have invited peril by ignoring cultural, historical and assimilatory aspects of their politics.

Return of BP Koirala and Ganeshman Singh from India in December 1976 with the call for national reconciliation which meant coming together of pro-democracy forces and the king, purely within the constitution framework, is no less relevant today.

Their return came in the background of Sikkim's merger in India. The two pro-democracy leaders were quick to realise that Sikkim's transition to democracy had come at the cost of their

nation, nationhood, nationalism and independence. It was a conclusion they drew from this that a constitutional monarchy and pro-democracy forces together alone would be able to save the country.

Obviously, King Gyanendra did not act in the manner that represented the spirit of the two leaders. But G P Koirala today is moving towards a dangerous direction. He is keen to retain absolute power which he has acquired. He is worse than an absolute king at this stage.

It is time Koirala, all political party leaders including Maoists realise that any attempt to capture power by any section at the cost of national reconciliation will be disastrous for the country's future, independence, nationalism, democracy and its very existence.

Suman Basnet
Pulchowk, Lalitpur



Spiritual Corner

Cosmic unity

Lao Tzu is known for his writing of the Tao-Te Ching (Tao-meaning the way of all life, Te-meaning the right use of life by men, and Ching-meaning text or classic). Lao Tzu was not his real name, it meant old master.

He attracted many followers, but refused to set his ideas down in writing. He believed that written words might solidify into formal dogma. He wanted his philosophy to remain a natural way to live life with goodness, serenity and respect. He believed a person's conduct should be governed by instinct and conscience.

He believed that human life is constantly influenced by outside forces. He believed

simplicity to be the key to truth and freedom. He encouraged his followers to observe, seek to understand the laws of nature; to develop intuition and build up personal power; to use that power to lead life with love and without force.

People say that he was a contemporary of Confucius and served as curator of the dynastic archives until retiring to the mythical K'un-lun Mountains. He transmitted his teachings to a border guard who compiled the Lao-Tzu, also titled Tao-te Ching.



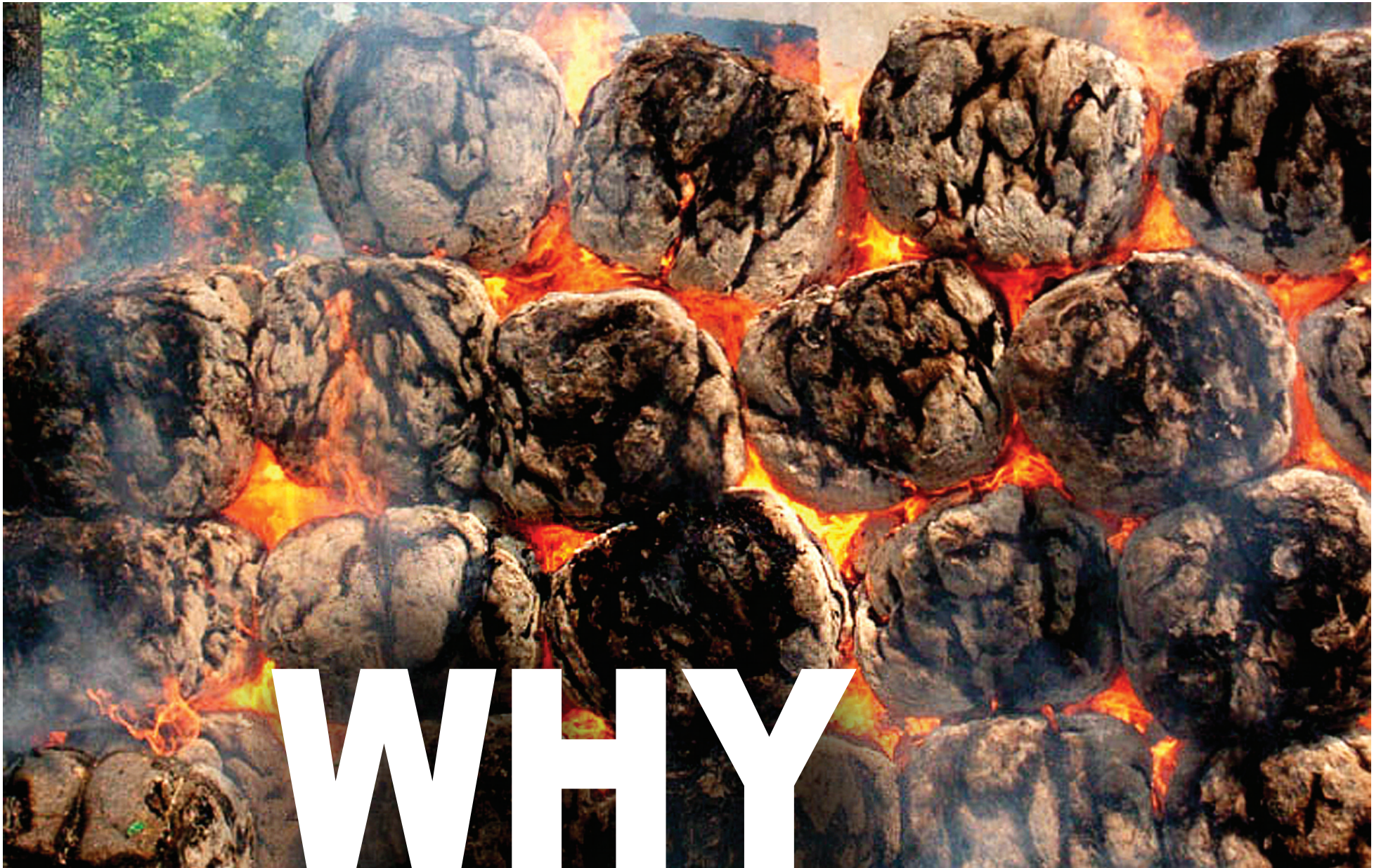
His work was dated back to 4th to 2nd century B.C. Its parables and verse advocate passive and intuitive behavior in natural harmony with the Tao. This is a cosmic unity underlying all phenomena. This is a stage of creative possibility symbolised by the child or an uncarved block.

Tao Te Ching Verse 2

When people see some things as beautiful, other things become ugly. When people see some things as good, other things become bad.

Being and non-being create each other. Difficult and easy support each other. Long and short define each other. High and low depend on each other. Before and after follow each other. Therefore the master acts without doing anything and teaches without saying anything. Things arise and she lets them come; things disappear and she lets them go. She has but doesn't possess, acts but doesn't expect. When her work is done, she forgets it. That is why it lasts forever.

Translated by Stephen Mitchell (1988)



WHY is Nepal burning?

From the failure on the part of the intelligence department to police and armed police force, it is a total failure of the home ministry.



■ Yubaraj Ghimire

Having an irresponsible government at times is better than not having any government at all. That is what one can gather from the tragic saga of riots and mayhem at Butwal, Kapilvastu and the vast stretch of land in the west. Mohit Khan, a prominent citizen known for his good as well as bad qualities was felled with bullets outside his residence a week ago. For many, he had been a fighter and savior. Those who felt the loss of a patron were naturally aggrieved.

communal tremor.

Khan had been targeted twice in the past by the Maoists, but he was not lucky the third time. But there was no word from the government as to who was his assailant. Instead, Home Minister KP Sitaula whose inefficiency and incompetence is well known was quick to share his 'conspiracy theory' with Prime Minister G P Koirala and other cabinet colleagues saying it was the outcome of a conspiracy hatched by the palace.

From the failure on the part of the intelligence department to police and armed police force, it is a total failure of the home ministry. It failed to sense that such a tension was in the offing. It failed to respond quickly when tensions erupted in the form of a communal and ethnic divide. Thoroughly demoralised and politicised police certainly cannot act, and all thanks to Sitaula.

More than 32 bodies have already been recovered, and hundreds are still missing. Vulnerable populace has started demanding that Nepal army be deployed to protect them since the police and the APF have failed to do it. Sitaula's criminal insensitivity makes him nothing more or less than a traitor. He has all along refused to own responsibility for any drift in the law and order situation as the home minister of the country.

G P Koirala's apathy towards the

overall law and order situation, his routine rhetoric that election will be held at any cost in November, and Sitaula's palace conspiracy theory without a credible probe all look like parts of a grand design in which key political actors are moving towards institutionalising governance sans accountability.

But the cost of Butwal flare up is yet to be assessed. It has come months after Nepal has been declared a 'secular state' where each and every ethnic, religious as well as minority groups should have felt much more secured, and much closer to the state protection than during the time when it was a Hindu state.

Identifying Khan's killer and an assurance of prompt action could have saved the situation from taking the turn it took. But the aftermath of the murder and government's all round failure have triggered a communal and ethnic divide, leaving deep scars.

It is also a lesson for this government and key political actors, mainly the eight parties to realise that mere insertion of 'secularism' in the constitution does not make the country and the society less vulnerable to criminals and religious fundamentalists. If people had been given a chance to own the process of Nepal's transition from a Hindu to a secular state, they would have realised how crucial a role they would need to play to protect the

people of other faiths as well, in times of communal flare up.

That happens when people own secularism entwined with humanitarian values. We can still draw the lesson now at a time when there is so much hurry to declare Nepal a republic state. Any attempt by the political parties to leave the people and the future constituent assembly with a fait accompli on the issue of republic versus ceremonial monarchy will make 'republicanism' as vulnerable as 'secularism' that the recent carnage demonstrated.

Moreover, declaring Nepal a republic now will leave enough scope to doubt that it was basically the home minister trying to create circumstances and use those excuses to impose his and Maoists' agenda of republicanism. He should not be allowed to take the political mileage from what looks like his deliberate failure in Butwal.

If there is one person who should take all the moral and administrative responsibility for the loss of lives and property in the country now, it is only Sitaula. GP Koirala will only be endorsing Sitaula's incompetence, lapses, crime and conspiracy by not making him accountable, and letting the country burn. Nepalis will not be able to accept this as a model of governance in 'new' Nepal. If Koirala does not realise this, that will be the beginning of the fall of Koirala. ■

It is also a lesson for this government and key political actors, mainly the eight parties to realise that mere insertion of 'secularism' in the constitution does not make the country and the society less vulnerable to criminals and religious fundamentalists.

But the events and protests that followed Mohit Khan's murder have raised serious questions as it had all the signs of a crime with a larger design. There are many questions that need to be answered. Mohit Khan was a Muslim by faith. Why were the mosques made the first target by those who came out on streets to protest against his murder? The events took a communal and ethnic turn with fire of revenge and animosity raging far and wide. Butwal, Kapilvastu, Nepalgunj, Dang and Pyuthan all felt the shocks of the



■ Patrick Leahy

NEPAL'S FUTURE

The leaders of Nepal's political parties know that the power of holding office comes with responsibilities, and the spotlight is on them.

There are times in virtually every country's history when years of under development and conflict give rise to opportunities to change course. Such times are rare, and such opportunities are too often missed.

I think of our Civil War, which caused so much loss of life and devastation. It preserved the Union and it led to the emancipation of some three million African slaves. Nothing can diminish those achievements or the sacrifice of those who gave their lives. But instead of providing the former slaves with the equal rights to which they were entitled, until passage of the Civil Rights Act a century later African Americans suffered from racially discriminatory laws that kept them in an inferior status. The country remained bitterly divided because of it.

Nepal today faces its own historic choice.

For more than a decade, Nepal has been plagued by an internal armed conflict in which savage brutality was inflicted on impoverished civilians by Maoist insurgents and the Royal Nepal Army. Over 13,000 people died, mostly noncombatants, and virtually no one has been held accountable for those crimes.

For more than two centuries, Nepal has been a monarchy whose kings, with rare exception, denied the rights and ignored the needs of their people who remain among the world's poorest. In February 2005, King Gyanendra, a narcissistic, arrogant autocrat, seized absolute power, jailed his opponents and muzzled the press, only to relent in April 2006 in the face of mounting international pressure and the protests of thousands of courageous Nepali citizens.

Nepal's previous experiment with multi-party democracy during the 1990s had been disappointing. The leaders of the country's political parties distinguished themselves by amassing personal fortunes and doing little for the people.

But since the restoration of civilian government in April last year there has been impressive progress. A Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed, Maoist combatants have gone into cantonments, the army has been confined to barracks, and the Maoists, until today, were part of the interim government. The King has been stripped of all political power, although the ultimate fate of the monarchy has yet to be decided.

The word "Royal" has been eliminated from government

institutions, including the army. Elections for a Constituent Assembly to be held in June were postponed, but they have been rescheduled for November 22. The Assembly is to draft a new constitution.

Also during this period, Nepal's ethnic minorities, women and other groups who have long been persecuted and denied a voice have demanded equal rights and representation. This poses both challenges and opportunities for the government.

The international community, including the United States, has supported the peace process directly and through our financial contributions to the United Nations which has performed key monitoring functions. Recently, the U.S. provided \$3 million to purchase the ballots for the elections.

Much has transpired since April 2006, when I last spoke in this chamber about political developments in Nepal. Today, just 65 days before Nepal's elections, I would like to address my brief remarks to the people of Nepal and to Nepal's political parties, including the Maoists.

On November 22, the people of Nepal will be presented with one of two options. They will either have an historic opportunity to create a legitimate, representative government which can only be achieved through a popular vote, or they will be denied that opportunity.

If the elections are held, Nepal will continue on a path that can bring its governmental institutions and its society into the modern age, and begin to finally address the poverty and injustices that gave rise to the conflict. If they are denied, the Nepali people will likely see their country become more fragmented and ungovernable, and more vulnerable to external influences over which they have little control.

Recent developments have been both encouraging and troubling. Perhaps that is to be expected in a country of multiple ethnic groups speaking some 93 languages that is struggling to transform itself.

The bombings in Kathmandu three weeks ago, other violent acts perpetrated by newly formed armed groups in the Terai and members of the Maoist young wing, the Young Communist League, and the Maoists decision to withdraw from the government, illustrate the fragility of the process.

Moreover, the leaders of the Congress parties and the Maoists

have done little to prepare for the elections. At times, party members have seemed more interested in furthering their own personal ambitions and in derailing the electoral process altogether. The leading party of the left, the UML, has done more to prepare. But all parties will need to promptly step up their election activities if voters are to have the informed choice they deserve.

On the positive side, the Election Commission deserves credit for a voter registration process that has reached Nepal's remotest villages. There is no doubt that the people are eager to go to the polls, just as they were determined to put an end to the King's abuse of power.

Over the past three years, I have observed the fortitude of the Nepali people's desire for peace, for justice, and for a meaningful voice in government. Their desire is shared and admired by the American people.

To the Maoists I would say that it was you who called for a Constituent Assembly. Saying you are committed to the democratic process at the same time that you withdraw from the government, make new demands that contradict previous commitments, support disruptive economic strikes, and threaten to return to confrontation, is not the way to earn the people's trust and support that are necessary to become an effective force for change. Nor is it the way to earn the trust of the United States.

I have campaigned for elective office five times over more than 30 years, and I know something about earning the people's trust and support. It does not come from dogmatic speeches or lofty party platforms or manifestos. It does not come from saying one thing and then doing the opposite. It certainly does not come through the use of violence, threats and extortion. It comes by showing that you deserve the people's trust and support. There is no better way to begin that process than to seize this opportunity and show the people that you can make the government work for them.

History is replete with examples of armed groups that achieved popular legitimacy through the democratic process. If the Maoists win seats through free and fair elections, uphold the commitments they have made in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and other agreements, and devote themselves to working for change peacefully, I am confident the United States will treat them as rightful members of the elected Constituent Assembly or of the government. We may disagree with

their positions on some issues, but not about their right to serve in government and to advocate for those positions.

I know the Maoists are looking to the United States to lift our restrictions on their party and its leaders, and to remove them from our list of terrorist organizations. In order for that to happen, the Maoists need to take unequivocal, positive steps. The cases of the murdered Nepali security guards need to be satisfactorily resolved. The party's resumption of land seizures and the reopening of so-called "people's courts," are steps in the wrong direction.

To the other political parties in government I would say that it is time to make good on your commitments. Not only the Maoists, but traditionally marginalized groups as well, are increasingly skeptical that the government is serious about delivering on its key commitments to the peace process, whether downsizing and reforming the army, supporting land reform, or creating jobs and opportunities for minority groups that have long been disadvantaged and ignored. Those groups should pursue their grievances through a vigorous election campaign, not through obstruction of the democratic process, the failure of the parties to govern and match rhetoric with action threatens the elections, as does the Maoists' saber rattling.

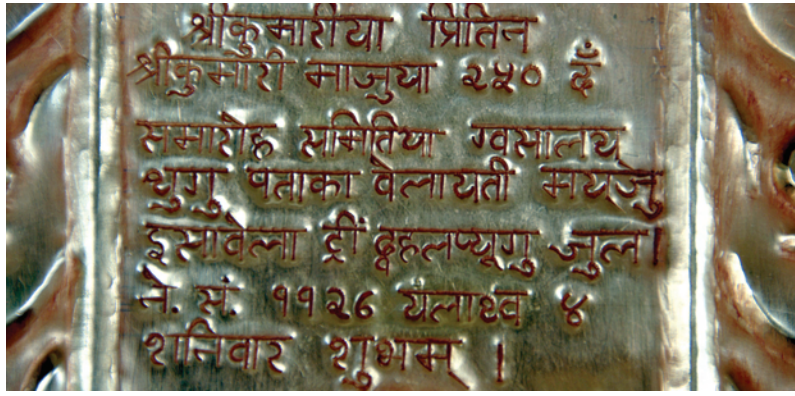
The leaders of Nepal's political parties know that the power of holding office comes with responsibilities, and the spotlight is on them. Lasting legitimacy comes not only through the ballot box but in the day-to-day ability to honor commitments and improve the lives of all citizens. This is their chance to put the Nepali people and their country first, by showing that they believe in effective, accountable government. If they do not, the United States, and I suspect many other countries, will no longer afford them the legitimacy they will need for our continued support.

Nepal's path to the future may be decided in the waning months of this year. Although a small country wedged between two emerging giants, Nepal is unique in more ways, more beautiful ways, than most other countries its size. Today, the United States – Congress and the Executive – are united in our desire to help Nepal become a democracy whose government is representative of Nepal's remarkably diverse population, and where the fundamental rights of all people are respected.

(Sen Leahy's speech in the senate on September 18, 2007.)

Nepal's previous experiment with multi-party democracy during the 1990s had been disappointing. The leaders of the country's political parties distinguished themselves by amassing personal fortunes and doing little for the people.

Isabella Tree ja;slfjas;dfj
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Celebrating KUMARI

Kumari is a reminder of divinity in all of us.

Kathmandu Kumari became the state Kumari and became important on a national level. That is why she is celebrated more. And the purity, the condition in which she is kept is still strictly maintained.

Isabella Tree



Isabella Tree, 43, an author and freelance travel journalist is writing a book on Kumari, the living child goddess in Kathmandu. After a sudden realisation that this year was the 250th year of the foundation of the famous Kumari Chen (house), she decided it would be a good occasion for her to give back something to the Kumari. Amidst a day long celebration recently, the glittering bronze Patah that she offered was hung down from the Kumari Chen. She shared this experience with Sushma Amatya.

How did this exciting event come about?

I wish to say destiny had it that my offering was to be accepted. If the Kumari did not want it, it would not have happened. I have been researching Kumari tradition for the last five years and I have been thinking for a long time that writers and journalists come to a place, do a lot of research and they take their material and go away without really giving anything back. For a long time I had been wondering as to how to give back that would mean something and be lasting.

A wonderful man, Kashi Nath Tamot who teaches Newar studies has been helping me with research for a few years; and he established that the building had been founded in 1757. Suddenly I realised that now in 2007, it would be the 250th year and might be the right occasion to contribute something to the Kumari house.

I thought if the authorities connected to the Kumari house were interested in marking this event, I could dedicate a bronze Patah that I had noticed on Akash Bhairav temple. It was fantastic when they said yes. I cannot take any credit for everything that they have been doing. There has been tremendous collaborative work and I just had the idea to cast the seed onto the water and wonderful things started happening.

A committee was formed with about 40 members – local community workers, social workers, businessmen who all contributed acknowledging the tradition of Kumari tradition. A working committee with eight people did all the planning of the celebration.

The unveiling of the Patah was done on 15 Sep with a big Pooja, officiated by Manjushree Bajracharya, the Bajracharya priest and the Pancha Buddha. There was a separate ceremony with over 300 little Kumaris carrying Poojas. The Patah was then put on the roof and let down and Yomaris were thrown on the roof.

Hundreds of people were fed with the Prasad. It was a great event.

How did you get interested in Kumari?

I came here when I was 18 with friends; and we ended up staying at Freak Street and one of the things we did see was an extraordinary child just across the square. Nobody really seemed to know much about her, the guide books did not say much but she was definitely intriguing. About 14 years later, a friend of mine came here to live and invited me and my husband for a trek. I asked her if the living goddess still existed. We then went to see her, from the courtyard. My friend's Nepali teacher said I could interview an ex Kumari and I interviewed Rasmila who was then only about 15. I wrote an article about it but I knew that I did not really know anything about the tradition. Slowly the idea began to interest me. There is not much that is written about Kumari and there are a lot of myths that still persist even after the publication of Rasmila Shakya's autobiography.

What are the myths?

The myths say ex Kumaris cannot marry because their husbands die a horrible death or they end up becoming prostitutes. It is all rubbish but it is very difficult to dispel the popular myths that are perpetuated so often by papers in Nepal as well as by foreign women's magazines.

I interviewed four or five Kumaris, most of them are married. Some, who are not, are seen as failures but why should they be seen as such? What matters is how happy they are. I think it is a traumatic period when they leave the house after attaining puberty and there may not be much preparation for that. I think now the people concerned are beginning to appreciate that there should be a careful transition from being a god to an ordinary human.

It is not an easy transition and takes a year or two for the ex-Kumaris to adjust but the strong point is that they have a close knit family who treat them with love and respect. Almost every Kumari I spoke to said it was an extraordinary experience and a great honour to be of service. Kumaris these days receive education inside the Kumari house so that they can keep up with their peers later.

What is the most fascinating thing about this tradition?

I find the whole notion of Shakti



and female energy of goddess being worshipped very interesting. As westerners we are very much dominated by patriarchal religion and it has completely subdued the ancient mother goddess cult. It is wonderful to find some place where women and female children are worshipped; and omnipotent energy is considered female. As a foreigner I cannot meet her. I can only have her Darshan from the courtyard. Yes, it is challenging to write when you cannot meet her or visit her palace.

To kneel to a young girl's feet is so fascinating; it is a reminder of divinity in all of us. Kumari is worshipped on so many different levels. She is different goddess to different people. It is understood at very simple or highly esoteric levels. It depends on who you are as to what you see in her.

What is special about Kathmandu Kumari?

Kathmandu Kumari became the state Kumari and became important on a national level. That is why she is celebrated more. And the purity, the condition in which she is kept is still strictly maintained. Tradition usually gets weaker but here it is maintained. I think the Kumari is an extraordinary experience. When I see tourists just walk past the building, I want to tell them: look, open your eyes and see!

I come back once or twice a year for about two or three weeks at a time to follow up on my research. My two children who are coming here for the first time will be experiencing the Indra Jatra this year! I am absolutely thrilled. The most exciting thing about the celebration coming up is the passion being generated by the local community. The whole building will be decorated by puffed rice – Lawa, and there will be feasts and other events following it.

Was it difficult for your offering to be accepted?

I am very well aware that there are controversies about a foreigner being involved. If you do something for the right reason, hopefully it will be accepted. There was a debate whether I should be allowed to offer the Patah or not. One of the committee members, Badri Lal Shrestha, surveyed 240 experts on Kumari tradition and religion and the consensus was that it would be fine for my offering to be accepted. The Patah looks full of life, and shows that something is happening there.

Do you consider yourself an expert on Kumari now?

Not at all. I know that I have touched only the tip of the iceberg. I will never fully understand it. I understand it enough to say it is an extraordinary thing and if I can get just a little bit of that magic across, it will be great. It is a huge sophisticated subject and I am completely awed; and I do not want to know any secrets that I am not supposed to know. It is enough that they are there.

Do you see the tradition disappearing?

No. The strength and knowledge of the tradition is very much there. Recently, there was a court case brought against Kumari and the government very wisely consulted many scholars and Newar specialists about what Kumari means and sought their recommendations. And the suggestions were to protect the tradition by way of education and preparation when she comes out. Finally, I wish to add that all the enthusiasm and energy for the 250th year commemoration and the forthcoming festival has really come from caretaker family and the committee. All the credit goes to them. ■

Social dialogue needed

Politicians want to cash in by playing the communal card.

Everything that happens in Terai today is seen through the communal lens. The serial bomb blast in Kathmandu, which took innocent lives, was seen as the handiwork of Madhesi people just because some little known Terai groups claimed responsibility. None really applied their minds to figure out whether these outfits are actually capable of carrying out such well planned destructive acts.

In Kapilavastu, when the chairman of Madhesi Loktantrik Morcha, Mohit Khan was killed by unknown assailants, the crime was seen as committed by Pahadis for the simple reason that those attackers reportedly looked like Pahadi boys in appearance. Although criminals have no nationality, caste, religion or language, criminal activities are also beginning to be seen from a communal angle.

This is a new mindset which developed after the Madhesi movement of 2007. Both Pahadis and Madhesi living in Terai suffer from wrongly conceived notions. The Madhesi feel that although they have all along contributed towards the collective success of the April movement, they are drawn into a situation where they cannot ask for their democratic rights without facing the danger of receiving bullets from government forces.

On the other hand, both old as well as young generations of Pahadis

have suddenly lost the sense of belonging in Terai. They feel that they are indeed treated like outsiders. This thinking is based on the utterances of some vested interests armed insurgents, as well as some politicians who want to cash in by playing the communal card.

There are three main reasons for this situation. First of all, the inner current of the Jana Andalan II was not properly understood by the government. The people's movement of April 2006 underscored the need for recognising the importance of ending Kathmandu based ruling concept.

When the interim constitution was drafted, the issue of federalism was not adequately addressed. This resulted in the Madhesi movement. Secondly, the assurances given by the Prime Minister in his address to the nation in response to Madhesi demands was not implemented. When the interim government was formed, proportional representation was conveniently ignored. Hence instead of solving the problem, the move further isolated the Madhesi people.

Thirdly, the presence and the ability to assert by the state machinery was found wanting and continue to be so in Terai districts. The activities of some vested interest elements were not properly controlled. Such lethargy or apathy on the part of the state machinery indirectly legitimised violence, and some criminals



■ Chandrakishore Jha

First of all, the inner current of the Jana Andalan II was not properly understood by the government. The people's movement of April 2006 underscored the need for recognising the importance of ending Kathmandu based ruling concept.

exploited the situation to their advantage.

Regrettably, the administration, instead of admitting its failure to reach out to the people tried to cover up its shortcomings by wrongly projecting that the Madhesi as a community is not prepared to be administered by Pahadi officers. When the actual reasons of people's resentments were corruption and insensitivity, the state machinery gave it a communal connotation.

The armed insurgents, who multiplied themselves into 22 groups with an attitude of revenge, are one of the elements that took advantage of this sorry state of affairs. For them, the state of lawlessness in Terai became a fertile ground, while the state machinery continues to watch from a distance.

In serious incidents like the one which took place in Janakpur where 22 people died due to consumption of locally brewed Rakshi and also communal flare up following the killing of Mohit Khan in Kapilavastu, the absence of the state machinery was glaringly visible as evident from the number of people killed.

Adding to this are the lethargic political leaders, including those who claim to champion the cause of Madhesi, namely: Mahant Thakur, Matrika Yadav, Upendra Yadav, Raghubir Mahaseth, Rajendro Mahato and Hridesh Tripathi who also failed to reach out to the people. All of them prefer to politik in

Kathmandu even when the likes of Kapilavastu riot take place.

In a situation as hopeless as this, where nothing much could be expected from the state and politicians, the only remedy would be: to bridge this gap is through a civil society social dialogue which should deliberate and find an honorable mechanism to merge Madhesi into mainstream Nepal; prevent further polarisation on communal lines; decide whether or not international bodies like UN should be seeking solutions to Madhesi problem; and the kind of cooperation to be sought from neighboring Indian states for betterment of Terai people.

The social dialogue should be carried out between Madhesi and Pahadi living in Terai, as well as between various sub-communities of Madhesi at micro levels. This should be followed by dialogue between the state and Madhesi people, and between Terai people and people of neighboring Indian state.

In the absence of committed state machinery to correctly inform and enlighten people, rumours abound and it is dividing people on communal lines. Unless such social dialogues are kept in motion urgently, the very achievement of the Jana Andalan II may go a waste. Instead, we may continue to see more of those incidents which took place in Nepalgunj, Lahan, Gaur and Kapilavastu.

(Chandrakishore Jha is Terai based journalist & an analyst)

The Indian Foreign Secretary's visit to Kathmandu was significant; however, it is too premature to conclude whether it has yielded the desired outcome. India being Nepal's largest stakeholder in Nepal's democratic transition and peace process must naturally be worried about the prevailing uncertainty. But despite India's worries and her suggestions to the concerned actors on the Nepali side, India's suggestions remain largely ignored.

India may pressurise the Nepali side, but it is the Nepali leadership who has to ultimately do the work of building a democratic polity on the ground. Just as Menon left Nepal, the Maoists withdrew from the government and that has cast serious questions regarding the viability of the peace process.

This time India was categorical in stating the need for free and fair elections as a prerequisite for legitimate polls. The international community largely follows the Indian lead, therefore; the lack or the failure to conduct credible elections from the Nepali side will invariably pose fundamental questions to the external players – should they accept the verdict of hollow elections? Consenting on fraudulent and hollow elections will inevitably raise questions regarding India's and the international community's belief towards democratic principles.

The tremor caused by the revelation that India would support the democratic process against the Maoists is an important development. The rigidity of the Maoists and their

Continuous seg of election

The results of the forthcoming CA elections will challenge Maoists' very survival as a political party.



■ Siddhartha Thapa

empty commitments towards the peace process has certainly irked everyone. However, it is pertinent now to evaluate what the Maoists actually aim to achieve and how?

The Maoist plenum had tactically aimed to send a message to the international community that Maoists are in favor of CA elections and that the regressive forces, Congress and Terai agitation were to blame should the elections be postponed. Then the Maoists came to a conclusion that the major political parties had lost their popularity in the Terai, and Prachanda thought it was appropriate to raise the demand for proportional representation in the CA elections as the main issue in order to appease

India and the Terai population and minimise the role of other parties.

Maoists have realised within the party rank and file that; in Terai, the party cannot even defend itself, while, in the hilly regions, it is not in a position of strength. And in actuality, the results of the forthcoming CA elections will challenge their very survival as a political party.

On the issue of the proclamation of republic, the chairman is said to have explained that this was not possible due to domestic circumstances and the international environment. And the party stressed on creating a favorable environment to get this proposal adopted. The party came to the conclusion that it must come up with new ideas aimed at ending monarchy.

In order to achieve their desired objective, the Maoists have planned to use disturbances as an excuse to foment agitation. They have decided to galvanise and activate human right activists, media, NGO/INGOs, physically challenged

people, the oppressed and exploited classes, martyr's families and sister organisations to create disturbances so that security forces will have no option but to seek Maoist assistance.

Another component of their strategy is to form a broad left alliance. According to the Maoists, although UML is the main obstacle to the formation of a left alliance, efforts will continue at forging a left unity will continue even if it entails splitting the UML. The Maoists have also decided to politically damage the possible unification of the two NC's and to eliminate parties especially the Congress from the Terai region.

But the greater design of the Maoist plenum is their intent to exert influence over the security forces, civil service and foreign affairs to ensure facilitation of their attempted takeover in near future. For this to materialise, the Maoists have agreed that the security, administrative and judicial system must be further weakened.

Indian warning and Girija's tough stand against the Maoists has come at the last hour. Perhaps, if the government and international community were not so busy appeasing the Maoists and had taken a strong stand on fundamental issues, this situation would never have arisen. But now the peace process is at stake. The Maoists have reached a point of no-return and the government and the international community are responsible for paving way for their further radicalisation. And even if the Maoists agree to join the government, it will not be in the same spirit. ■

Suu Kyi meets protesting monks

About 10,000 people, led by thousands of Buddhist monks, marched Sunday in Myanmar's main city of Yangon in an escalating show of dissent against the military government, witnesses said.

Nearly 5,000 monks joined by 150 nuns were followed by about 5,000 supporters as they marched from the golden Shwedagon Pagoda, Myanmar's most important landmark, the witnesses said. "We are marching for the people," chanted the monks. "We want the people to join us." The protest began with about 5,000 people, but quickly doubled in size as they marched into downtown Yangon, in the sixth consecutive day of protest in nation's commercial hub.

The march was by far the biggest protest in Yangon since anti-government demonstrations broke out five weeks ago following a massive hike in fuel prices that left many unable to afford even a bus ride to work.

The demonstrations have snowballed into the most serious challenge to the ruling junta in nearly two decades.

Tearful encounter

On Saturday, the army allowed about 2,000 monks and civilians to pass a roadblock and gather by Aung San Suu Kyi's lakeside home on University Avenue. She greeted them from the house where she has been detained for 12 of the past 18 years. Witnesses said Aung San Suu Kyi was in tears as she greeted the cinnamon-robed monks.

The 62-year-old Nobel Peace prize winner has become an internationally recognised figurehead of Myanmar's pro-democracy movement. They were chanting for around five minutes before she and two other women



Aung San Suu Kyi was in tears as she greeted the cinnamon-robed monks.

stepped out of a side door of her home, one witness said.

Unable to hold back her tears, Aung San Suu Kyi waved to the monks and their supporters as they paused outside the gates to chant prayers for peace. The monks spent about 15 minutes chanting the same Buddhist prayer they had recited through much of their earlier march in Yangon, the witnesses said.

"May we be completely free from all danger, may we be completely free from all grief, may we be completely free from poverty, may we have peace in heart and mind," they intoned.

Chanting supporters

Some of their supporters broke into tears as they joined in with their own refrain, chanting in

turn: "Long life and health for Aung San Suu Kyi, may she have freedom soon."

The military often posts armed guards to block traffic from passing by, but witnesses said the monks had persuaded the 20 armed guards to raise the blockade. "They told the guards that they just wanted to go to pray for Aung San Suu Kyi, because we are Buddhists," one witness said. The guards did not interrupt the monks during their prayers, but closed the roadblock after they left.

The gates to her compound stayed shut throughout, but one witness said that at one point, Aung San Suu Kyi was only five feet away from the monks. Monks are rumoured to be planning another march at midday, while one underground group has called for nationwide prayer vigils to begin.

Media blackout

For their part, Myanmar's military rulers have refused to tell citizens about the protests, choosing instead to fill its state-run newspaper with reports of floods and traffic. There were no reports on Sunday of the monks' protests. The state-run New Light of Myanmar prominently featured a story about General Than Shwe, the government head, sending greetings to Saudi Arabia on its national day.

Inside, there were stories on floods, paddy plantings and efforts to prevent river erosion. The newspaper derided the National League for Democracy led by Aung San Suu Kyi as "incompetent and seeking political gain". The NLD won elections in 1990 by a landslide, but the Myanmar military never recognised the result.

(Inquirer.net)

Laden wants Pakistan To revolt against President



The leader of al Qaeda Osama bin Laden has put out a call to the people of Pakistan to revolt against President Pervez Musharraf.

Osama bin Laden released a brand new recording on Thursday stating that the siege of a militant mosque stronghold earlier in the year makes him an infidel.

Bin Laden stated that the storming of the Red Mosque showed "Musharraf's insistence on continuing his loyalty, submissiveness and aid to America against the Muslims ... and makes armed rebellion against him and removing him obligatory."

He concluded stating "So when the capability is there, it is obligatory to rebel against the apostate ruler as is the case now." The title of the message was "Come to Jihad." This call comes after al Qaeda put out an 80-minute documentary stating how they defeated the United States in Afghanistan and are doing the same in Iraq. The video promised more bloodshed in those countries, Darfur, and elsewhere.

(Daily Times)

Fukuda Wins Poll, Likely Next PM

The moderate veteran politician Yasuo Fukuda easily won election as president of Japan's struggling ruling party on Sunday, assuring his selection as the new prime minister in a parliamentary vote later this week. Fukuda won 330 votes to former Foreign Minister Taro Aso's 197 votes, the party announced.

Fukuda, 71, the son of a prime minister from the 1970s, has vowed to keep his country in the fight against terrorism, improve relations with Asia and address inequalities in the world's second-largest economy. Fukuda vowed on Sunday to rebuild the popularity of the Liberal Democratic Party, which has suffered a year of scandals and policy missteps by outgoing Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who has been hospitalized since announcing on Sept. 12 that he would resign.

"It is natural that we are facing public criticism," Fukuda said in a joint appearance with his rival, Aso, on national broadcaster NHK. "We must make efforts patiently to regain public trust." Fukuda also pushed his key policies: To further engage North Korea diplomatically, push for extension of Japan's naval mission in support of U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan, and give aid to rural regions left behind by the economic recovery.

"We need to show our intention to continue the mission as a message to the international society," Fukuda said of the Afghan mission, which the opposition has vowed to defeat in parliament. "If this drags on too long we might send a wrong message to the world as if we were not committed to making that contribution."

Fukuda, who served as chief Cabinet

secretary from 2000 to 2004, has the support of the major factions of the LDP. His dominance over Aso, a hawk who served as Abe's foreign minister until August, was so clear by Sunday that morning papers had already given him the title of LDP president, and he was asked on NHK if he would choose Aso as his foreign minister. Fukuda would inherit a political



environment and LDP left in serious disarray.

Abe, 53, came into office a year ago with high support ratings and an unquestioned ruling coalition dominance in parliament.

But he quickly frittered away those advantages as his Cabinet overflowed with money scandals and he pressed ahead with a nationalist agenda while people demanded more attention to bread-and-butter issues such as pensions.

The LDP suffered a serious blow in elections in July for the upper house of parliament in which the resurgent opposition seized control of the chamber, heightening calls for snap elections for the lower house as well.

Abe apologized to the party in a message read after Fukuda's selection.

"I apologize to Aso and all LDP lawmakers, party members and the Japanese public for causing a political vacuum," said the note. Fukuda has arrived as an antidote to Abe. A sober, brainy party elder, Fukuda — son of a prime minister from the 1970s —

has vowed to concentrate on down-to-earth issues such as economic equality and growth, while seeking warmer ties with the rest of Asia.

It was unclear, however, how long Fukuda would be able to stave off calls for lower house elections. He has termed such calls "understandable." Media reports said the LDP wanted to pass the Afghan measure and the national budget early next year before dissolving the lower house. "When the public and lawmakers strongly voice a need to dissolve the parliament, I think it wouldn't be good to resist that call," Fukuda said on NHK. ■

250th year Kumari festival

In Nepal we have a tradition of worshipping female power, and Kumari is one such power.

The tradition of Kumari worshipping is very ancient and its' history can be traced back to the Vedic period. In Nepal most probably it came with the Lichchavis in the beginning of the Christian era. Worshipping of young maidens is a deep-rooted tradition among the valley people since ages. Kumari is one among the eight mother goddesses worshipped and revered in the valley since the beginning of the history.

The practice of worshipping Goddess Kumari has been continuing since then. The last Malla King Jaya Prakash Malla in NS 877(AD1757) started the tradition of chariot festival and this year NS1127 (AD 2007), the 250th anniversary of the chariot festival is going to be held. There certainly is no harm in observing some new trends in rituals or festivals since it gives a new lease to life, makes it more vibrant and can be enjoyed by everybody.

In Nepal we have a tradition of worshipping female power, and Kumari is one such power. Most probably Nepal is the only country in the world where a virgin girl is worshipped as a goddess. She is the chief deity and protector of the valley people. It is believed that the head of the state rules the country only as her trustee and in accordance with the mandate given to him only for one year and every year he has to renew it with her blessing. She symbolises our religious synchronism. Both the Hindus and the Buddhists worship her with equal veneration. To the Hindus she is the incarnation of goddess Tulaja or Durga. To the Buddhists she is Vajra Devi or the consort of Heruka.

Recently this historical, cultural and religious institution of Kumari was dragged into a controversy. Some women rights activists filed a case in the Supreme Court against the continuation of Kumari tradition. The petitioners argued that when a child is selected as a Kumari she loses her human rights or fundamental rights like



Dr. Shaphalya Amatya

freedom of movement and freedom of speech; and that even after the child is removed from Kumari-hood she is deprived of leading a normal and honorable life.

The Supreme Court ordered the Ministry of Culture to provide its' opinion on this issue and to study and submit a report for timely improvement of this tradition within three months. The Ministry of Culture formed a committee to give necessary recommendations in this issue. Recently they received the report from the said committee and the report has been sent to the court for consideration.

The report has clearly stated that the Kumari tradition has not violated the human rights of the child. Although she has some restrictions in her rights, which can be considered as a very minor loss compared to the respect she gets and her position in the society. The report has recommended some economic benefits and facilities for her benefit. It has laid more emphasis on the continuation of this tradition which has very close links and relationships with Kathmandu valley culture and religion. It also gave more impetus for its' promotion, preservation and publicity because it is a unique Nepali tradition found nowhere else.

Kumari today has an official tutor at her temple residence and she is given remuneration for her service to the country after her retirement when she reaches the age of puberty or twelve years. I am in touch with a few ex-Kumaris and I have found that they had absolutely no regrets about their childhood spent as Goddess Kumari. Regarding their maintenance and allowances if the government increases it, that

is always appreciable. Here I would like to mention the reaction of ex-Kumari Rasmila Sakya to a question by a journalist, "To become god is easier than to become a human."

The controversy raised by the visit of Bal Kumari of Bhaktapur to the United States of America is also interesting. The main Kathmandu Kumari cannot even leave the city. She can go out of her temple house only about a dozen times to attend various festivals and rituals in a year. The foreign visit of Bal Kumari of Bhaktapur cannot be appreciated because it has diminished the curiosity, faith, value and sensitivity of Kumari as a whole of this very institution of Kumari. The author or a film producer could invite one of the ex-Kumaris for launching his book or a film but not a Kumari in office.

The program committee of the impending festival announced that they will be decorating the chariots of Kumari and the house artistically; Nepali traditional and folk musical instruments will be played throughout the festival; and the ex-Kumaris will be honored. The whole week of the festival will be observed by chanting religious songs and burning lamps around Kumari house. Commemorative coins and postage stamps will be released on the occasion, and a cultural program and traditional feast will be organised.

The Kumari tradition is one of the mysteries of our country. There is no harm in having some such mysteries. Our life, culture and religion will become dry and uninteresting if we do not have or keep some such mysteries. We see goddess Kumari in our girl children and treat them with respect and love; and this value is well worth emulating by those who look down on their girl children or treat the birth of a girl child with despair. If all of us learned to treat each and every girl child like the Goddess Kumari, an equal, happy, balanced society would emerge naturally. ■

Marshland Flowers

Science itself never claims what it cannot measure at the moment as superstitious.

■ Acharya Mahayogi Sridhar Rana Rinpoche



It is through various types of Samatha practice that various Pratiharyas (miraculous powers) also called Siddhi – Riddhis develop as a matter of course; or if they do not easily develop, they can be developed by various specialised mental exercises geared to awaken these potentials in the human mind.

In this era of modernism when the physical science was considered the evaluating measuring rod for the validity of anything, Pratiharyas were suspect. And many Buddhists with modernistic leanings even thought that these were interpolated into the Buddhist scripture by overly naïve simple village folks. Needless to say this was a result of the so called scientific education spawned out by modernism. But the beauty of science is that it moves on and does not remain static.

From the 18th century to the mid 20th century, science progressed in leaps and bounds to such an unimaginable extent that man thought science alone was the answer to all its questions. So the milieu developed in which whatever was scientific was true/ real/valid/non-superstitious and whatever was not scientific was untrue/invalid/superstitious. The progress of physics and other physical sciences was so mind boggling, that its dazzle blinded all those who were part of the era of modernism. But there was a flaw in this thinking and not only Buddhist but also many Hindu Swamis and Yogis also failed to see it.

First of all only what can be measured can be studied by physics and such other physical sciences. Now there are many things which cannot and will never be measured like love/ compassion/beauty, the splendour of the Himalayas and so on. We cannot possibly say that such things are unreal/untrue/superstitious. Secondly the physical sciences are limited by the type of instrument available.

That means even those things which could be measurable like the chemical correlates in the brain to love and feel compassion were out of reach of the sciences in the 18th and 19th century. Now are we to say that

these brain chemicals like dopamine, serotonin etc were all untrue/unreal/ superstitious till the mid 20th century, and then they suddenly became real/ true/scientific? Such type of thinking is absurd to say the least.

Furthermore, science itself never claims what it cannot measure at the moment as superstitious. It is the half baked ultra-modernist types whose knowledge of science is limited to vague ideas and the enjoyment of consumerist goods produced by science that have these kinds of quaint notions. As early as 1950 Einstein declared that science cannot and will not answer all the questions and problems of mankind. This is true because rational linear thinking, on which science is based, is only one mode of thinking and knowing available to man. The world view made available through science is only one possible view amongst many other views. And this materialistic reductionist view of science is not only an artificial view extracted out of reality but also it is not more real than any other view.

Using the empirical reductionist positivism (reducing all things to empirically measurable things etc) modus operandi itself, we can question this style of absurd thinking that only what is empirically measurable is true/ real/valid/non-superstitious. The million dollar question is, "Is this hypothesis empirically measurable?" Since it is not, by its own logic falls apart.

The central point of Werner Heisenberg in his various books like Physics and Beyond, Across the Frontiers etc is that physics can make only statements about strictly limited relations that are only valid within the framework of those limitations. He also says, "Science tries to give its concepts an objective meaning. But religious language must avoid this very cleavage of the world into its objective and its subjective sides: for who would dare claim the objective side to be more real than the subjective? (To be continued.)

(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)

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Shiva's dwelling



■ Pramesh Pradhan

Pashupatinath, Nepal's Hindu shrine abounds with different temples, images and inscriptions. Pashupati is a cauldron of pilgrims, hymns, bodies being cremated, yogis and devotees. Shiva, one of the three supreme Gods in Hinduism stands on the banks of Bagmati River in eastern Kathmandu. The revered two roofed pagoda temple is replete with sparkling roofs, silver doors, and captivating wood carvings. Shiva's transport, a bull (Nandi) sits right in front of the main temple.



A world heritage site, Pashupati is believed to have been built at the beginning of Licchavi period in the 4th century. The temple was totally destroyed during Moghul invasion in the valley in 1349 AD. The temple standing today was constructed in late 17th century. Only Hindus and Buddhist are allowed inside the temple, a regulation made after the Muslim invasion, and is still practiced.

The tradition of offering wealth and land to the temple by kings of different dynasties made it the richest temple in Nepal. Pashupati was revered as the patron of Nepal when Nepal was a Hindu Kingdom, with a long history of religious harmony and tolerance. In the main sanctuary, replaced in 14th century is a Chaturmukhlinga (four faced phallus) carved on a blackish stone. Early Aryans worshipped Shiva in the form of Rudra and later as Lingam.

Legend says Lord Shiva grew bored in Mt. Kailash with his worldly assignments, armies of ghosts and spirits and his charming wife Parvati. He planned to tour alone and the place he chose was Pashupati. He enjoyed life incognito as a deer in Slesmantak forest. Because of the universal imbalance in Shiva's absence, he was located in this area and thereby named Pashupati, meaning the lord of animals. Shiva is believed to be able to destroy anything or every evil force either with his trident or his third eye. In his devotees, he destroys their ignorance. Worshipping Pashupati is believed to release a devotee from cycles of rebirths.

With around 50 temples

A lot more needs to be done to preserve this magical religious site.

around the main Pashupati temple, the whole complex looks like an open religious museum. Ritual bathing in Bagmati, is considered equivalent to having a bath in the Ganges in India; although today, the quality of water is extremely poor to say the least. A senior citizens' home stands a stone's throw away from the temple.

The temple of Guheshwori nearby is dedicated to Shiva's first wife Satidevi. Other temples such as Gorakhanath, Viswaroop, Bacchaeswori, Ram temple,

Vishnu's terracotta image, Brahma image and a 6th century image of Buddha are within walking distance.

Shivaratri, the night of Shiva, is the special day for Shiva worshippers when thousands of devotees queue up to worship the deity. Religious functions, hymns and cultural programmes are held in the complex round the clock. Teej is another special day when women visit the temple; wearing only red and they fast, pray, sing and dance for good life and longevity of their husbands. Ekadashis, Maghe sakranti, Chaturdashi, Kushe aunshi are special days when devotees throng to the temple.

Half naked Sadhus or renunciates try and imitate the legendary Shiva. They cover their bodies in ashes with minimal clothing and are sometimes seen smoking marijuana and pose unbelievable postures and try to impress their audience. On the banks of Bagmati are raised platforms or Ghats for cremation. Cremation pyres are erected at five levels symbolising the return of the five cosmic elements so as to liberate the dead of all what he/she had received from the world.

Although a world heritage site, Pashupatinath lacks facilities for devotees such as a clean river, safe drinking water and clean toilets. A lot still needs to be done to preserve this magical religious site; especially in terms of cleanliness and raising awareness among the visitors so that they treat the site with respect and reverence. Only then can the magical place be preserved for future generations.

(The writer can be contacted at: nte@mail.com.np)

Nepali gloom

Nepali fiction has come under the frivolous influence of university teachers trying to shape their narratives

First, they burned jungles, cornfields and hungry huts.

Burnt cots, almirahs and clothes, and stumps of the remaining trees--the same ash seekers

Then they made our children carry the ashes on their mule backs.

Again they burnt the whole landscape--wheat fields, barns, and my beautiful wooden house.

Slowly as we watched they burnt the whole village.

Powerless, this moment we stand shivering in the cold alone bare and barren in this deserted village.

-Padam Gautam, Joint Pain

The political fires flare up. Dreams of dead ones and future of anarchy remains subject of the nation reeling under the shadow of its own misfortune. Would peace ever return to this Shangri-la?

Disgruntled citizens, corruption in rife in political circles and the nation burns. The lines of young poet Padam Gautam that I translated from the Nepali above mirror the sad state of the polity now.

I remember what American poet



■ Yuyutsu RD Sharma

Wesley McNair said to me once: Do not say much. Do not write too much. We poets do not have much to say about our woes, even about the woes of our world. So save it and write a poem.

True to my friend's conviction in Nepal, it is the young Nepali poets who seem to have saved their breaths to articulate the agony of this nation in most concentrated forms. It is poetry here that seems to speak of the contemporary chaos more succinctly. Not the fiction that speaks of the song of the sadness of the people suffering in this endless inferno with alarming depth.

The best that there is available today in Nepali literature is in poetry. In spite of the big news that the world publishing scenarios seem to be giving, the best about the soul of Nepal can be found in poetry.

Even though most of our poets publish their own works, they are

compelled to distribute it free of cost as only a few buy the poetry collections. Even though there is no proper poetry publisher to promote it, poetry in this tumultuous Himalayan nation thrives. For poetry is the only way one has to overcome the sadness that the contemporary political chaos imposes on the average Nepalis.

The fiction writers, especially story writing, remains under the influence of obscurantist theorists senselessly parroting post modern, deconstructionist aesthetics even without properly understanding it. The Nepali fiction has come under the frivolous influence of university teachers trying to shape their narratives in light of what was popular in American universities in eighties.

The actual fact of this nation waking from the stupor of middle ages into the chaos of modern century hardly bothers them. As they intend to startle their students with their academic ingenuity, the real life drama of Nepali mountains appears remote to them.

(The writer can be reached at writer@yuyutsu.de)



Listen to him, give time

Counseling by drug therapist, Ragina Shah

When you suspect your student is addicted, what do you do?

■ Renuka Rai, Bansbari

If you doubt that your student is into drugs and if the student has not acknowledged the fact, you will have to observe him/her for a while. You will have to observe closely his circle of friends, behaviour, appearance and relationship with peers; and look out for any abnormal signs.

If you see any, you need to build a good rapport with the

student so that he can trust and can confide in you. A person can be into drugs for various reasons - problems in the family, problems with peers, boredom, physical pain, etc. Drug abuse is the negative handling of his problems.

You need to talk with him, help him be aware of his problems, listen to him and give him time to open up. You need to tell him basically he is a good person and just the fact that he came to you is a positive factor, and shows he wants to change for the better. This will help him boost his self esteem.

At the same time getting professional help for his addiction is very essential. Drug users often think that they are managing their drug habit well and it is not an addiction. Such people may not be aware of the fact, taking drugs frequently as a means to cope with their problem shows something is wrong. At the same time there needs to be support from their family for them to remain motivated and stay drug free.

(Send questions on drug/alcohol/smoking addiction to: newsfront@bhrikuti.com)

INSIGHT



Mountain view from a village in Syangja, Nepal.

- Sushma Amatya



■ Dr. Rita Thapa
(Former WHO staff)

Can yoga be a modern life choice?

The attractive arrays of fancy yoga products that we find these days in global markets indicate its worldwide popularity, across culture and age. These products are designed to cater to various human needs ranging from health, fitness and glamour to sport like golf. Yet one can wonders, how could an ancient tradition like yoga be compatible with the needs of our modern life?

We hear from our elders that yoga is a traditional science. Its regular practice can help us to harmonise body and mind, thus guaranteeing a better physical and mental well-being. Is it true?

With this in mind, let us review how scientific is this ancient wisdom of yoga. Patanjali presented integrated yoga more than 2500 years ago as a way to promote and protect human health. Although Patanjali had described eight interactive practices under integrated yoga, they can be organised into three main categories, namely, physical postures, breathing exercises and meditation.

Yogic physical postures:

The yogic postures are of several types. They are mainly designed to improve the musculoskeletal and several organs' functions like heart, lungs, liver and gastrointestinal tracts including reproductive organs. Studies on normal individuals have indicated that a regular practice of yogic postures leads to decrease in the pulse rate, blood pressure, respiration and body weight, including improvement of psychological intelligence and memory quotient.

The biochemical examination of the blood of these individuals has shown decrease in blood sugar and serum cholesterol, and a rise



Yoga Master Swami Ramdev in Kathmandu.

in serum protein level. Furthermore, hormones secreted by thyroid, adrenal glands, including sex glands were also found increased in the practitioners of yogic postures.

Breathing exercise: This is an important part of yoga, and a key to obtaining optimal wellbeing. Like postures, many types of yogic breathing exercises are described. Basically, these breathing exercises are meant to optimally aerate every cells and molecules of our body with life force-the oxygen, while taking all the toxins and tensions out from our body system. Regular practice of yogic breathing has shown a similar positive biochemical results as that of yogic postures, except that the fall in serum cholesterol was much more marked than that in

the exercise.

Meditation: Meditation is a highly developed form of mental training. This is to positively steer the various functions of body and mind. Regular meditation helps us to gradually develop control over the various involuntary functions of body and brain such as heart beating, food digestion, and oxygen absorption from lungs including the various emotions. Patanjali has described eight steps of meditation to achieve the ultimate goal of superconsciousness state.

Vipassana, a popularly practiced method in Nepal, is one of the several methods described by the Shaky Muni Buddha. Founded on experiential knowledge, Vipassana, like other

Buddhist meditation, allows us to recognise and control various positive and negative emotions and thoughts as they arise. This gradually helps us to take "action in awareness" rather than just reacting. There is no better example of applied form of, "action in awareness" than that of Tiger Woods, the invincible world champion of golf. Once in an ABC-TV interview, Tiger Woods while crediting his mother for passing on him the meditation, confided, "I use my mind as my main asset."

To this effect, a recent ground breaking collaborative scientific study between neuroscience and Buddhism has shown that deliberate mental training can bring about observable changes in the human brain (2007, Sharaon Begley, Train

Your Mind, Change Your Brain). It testifies what the Shaky Muni Buddha has been teaching us since the last 2500 years. It shows that brain changes can be generated by pure mental activity. That means mind-meditation can change brains, how people think can really change their brains.

These findings combined with the recent discovery in neuroscience that adult brain retains the ability to change its structures and functions (neuro plasticity) throws a new light in our understanding of meditation and its role in the management of associated mental health problems like, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), and brain damage from a stroke and others.

We find now that the traditional science of yoga that was founded on thousands of years of experiential knowledge is scientifically valid. There are scientific explanations as to why regular practice of yoga could prevent not only the occurrence of various physical and psychosomatic disorders, it improves ability to cope stresses more effectively, promotes musculoskeletal & neurological functions despite the aging. Thus, yoga stands as one of the safest, easiest and least expensive ways of promoting and protecting one's physical, mental and social wellbeing.

Developing an optimally functioning body and brain does not usually require some high tech fancy medical interventions and hospitals or expensive medicines. It can come from a smart life style choice we make early on. Yoga is one of such modern life choice. But it takes our personal efforts and commitment to co-opt it into our daily life activities—as a mark of a modern Nepali. ■



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