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WEEKLY

RS. 30



What Next?

After 11 Tumultuous Months In Singha Durbar
Surya Bahadur Thapa Steps Down



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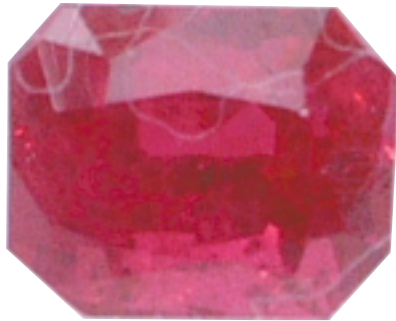


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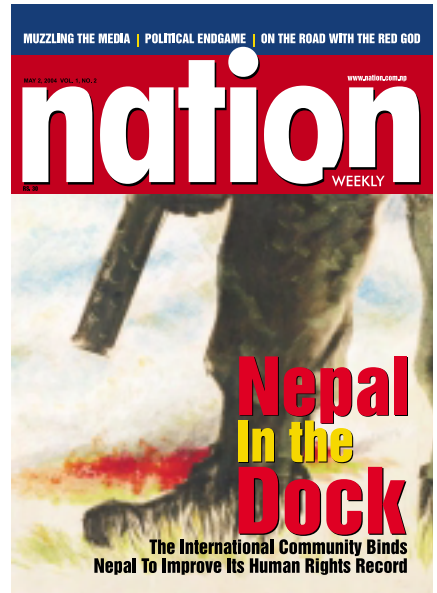
Everest as lab

I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO read the article in Nation on my research project on Everest ("A laboratory known as Everest," Everest, May 2). Without qualification, it is the best non-technical account of this project that I have ever read. Joshi succeeded in writing an engaging and accurate account that "ordinary" readers can follow. I have sent her article to my colleagues in the United States and elsewhere, as well as to the funding agency—the National Space Biomedical Research Institute, which reports to NASA Headquarters.

PHILIP LIEBERMAN
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Donors fall out

THIS IS IN RESPONSE TO Akhilesh Upadhyay's article on the donor fallout ("Nepal's Donor Fall Out," Cover Story, May 9). The donors have had their differences over the years but the issue came to a head in recent months, particularly after King Gyanendra dismissed Deuba government. In recent weeks, interestingly, some donors have abandoned their traditional façade of silence and come out strongly to state displeasure over how the country is being run; others have criticized the parties. As a Nepali, I am not quite sure whether I am happy about this activism. But then again, in an ideal world, the donors would be sitting comfortably inside their embassies instead of getting their hands dirty. And we will be running



our country. The fact is today's Nepal is not an ideal world—and can we really blame the donors for asking us to spend their money judiciously?

DHURBA SIMKHADA
DHOKA TOLE

THE DONORS' MEET, THE NEPAL Development Forum, is now over. I wonder what their funding criteria are? Foreign loans and aid in the past have especially benefited government officials and those who have ties with the establishment, rather than the common Nepali. Indeed, the poor in poor countries are betrayed twice: by the rich nations and by their own government.

YAM GURUNG
LALITPUR



Congratulations, details please
CONGRATULATIONS ON A VERY
fine magazine. It is amazing to see such
quality.

KAMAL TULADHAR
ASON

AFTER GOING THROUGH ALL
the three volumes published to date, I
can say Nation is in for a long haul. You
are, it seems, catering to diverse groups
of readers. Here I want to draw your
attention to a mistaker in the City
Page (May 9). As a movie buff, I must
appreciate your inclusion of the
schedules of films being screened in
the city. Sadly, it does not help me
get the whole information. You only
mention the titles and venues but do
not give the time and date of the
screenings.

ANUBHAV AJEET
THAPATHALI

WHERE ARE THE UPDATES? AN
online presence without regular up-
dates is not acceptable (especially for a
great startup magazine like yours). So
please do that. And can you please thank
Sam Thomas ("As Long As You Film
It," Viewpoint, May 2) for the wonder-
fully argued article on the documen-
tary Bhedako Oon Justo? That is how
articles should be presented. Wonder-
ful stuff.

AMAR
VIA EMAIL

Chinese "design"

I ENJOYED AND READ WITH
interest Swarnim Wagle's "Five Iron-
ies" (May 9). I wish to add two
points for emphasis: First, the Chi-
nese themselves do not believe that
the United States wants to use Nepal
in its "design" to encircle China.
Chinese ambassador in Nepal re-
cently brushed aside diplomatic cau-
tion to laugh the question away—lit-
erally—when I put it before him.
Second, the official Chinese refer-
ence to Nepali Maoists is "anti-gov-
ernment forces." The Nepali com-
rades are not even considered
"rebels."

RAMESH SHARMA
DHAPASI

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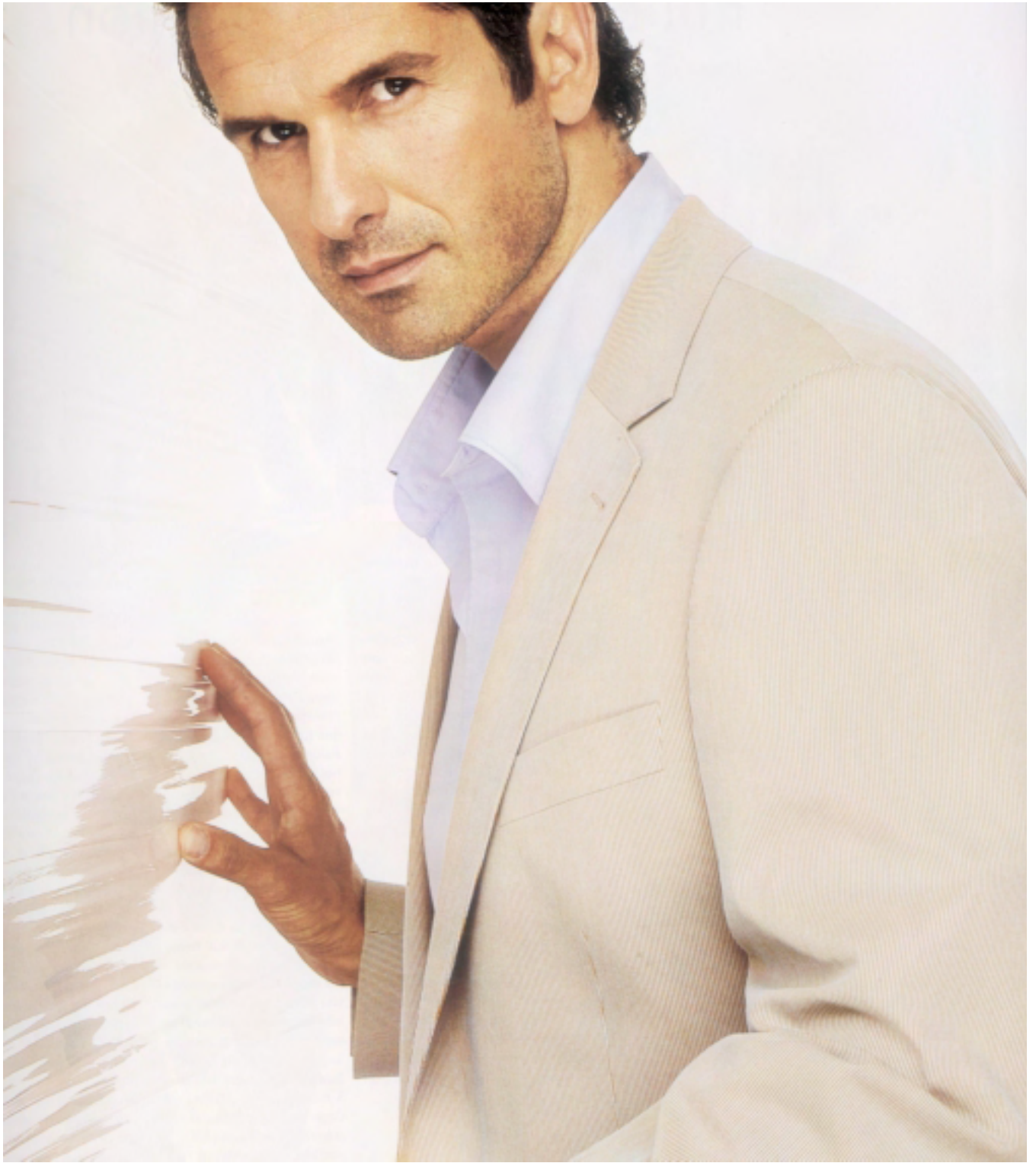
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Picture of the Week



LITTLE PRINCESS: Yuvaraj Kumari Purnika Shah performing along with her classmates on Friday, during the Parents Day celebration at Rupy's International School in Bafal, Kathmandu



Cry For Help

BY SUMAN PRADHAN

Since the collapse of the cease-fire last August, the southern border district of Bara has emerged as a hotbed of Maoist activity. Kalaiya, the district headquarters, has been bombed

several times by the rebels. They have also killed scores of local “informants” and class enemies in the surrounding countryside. The government has, in turn, launched concerted security operations, killing many rebels as well as innocents.

To a casual observer, the violence may seem strange because Bara after all is a relatively developed district. There’s a thriving agriculture-based industry. The road and communication networks are better than in many parts of Nepal. And the people, comprising mostly of Terai Rajputs, Brahmins, Telis, Tharus, Muslims and dalits with a sprinkling of hill migrants, are mostly engaged in some sort of economic activity—be it farming, industry or legal or illegal trade from across the nearby border.

Why then has Bara emerged as such a hotbed of violent extreme left-wing politics? Why have the rebels found willing recruits and support in a district that is better off than most others? Let us listen to what the locals themselves have to say.

Krishna Jaiswal is a self-employed businessman who runs a small workshop in Kalaiya, manufacturing small tools and pipes for irrigation. His customers are the rural farmers who come to the market once in a while to buy his tools and fertilizers.

I asked Mr. Jaiswal how business was. He replied: “It’s bad. The insurgency has eaten up most of my business. The number of villagers coming to Kalaiya to buy my stuff has decreased considerably. Everyone is afraid to come here now, lest they be caught in the conflict between the rebels and the security forces.”

Mr. Jaiswal then talks about another interesting reason for declining business. Most of his customers are small subsistence farmers from the villages surrounding Kalaiya. These farmers used to get good fertilizers, irrigation facilities and other inputs, thanks to agriculture subsidies provided by the government in the past. Taking out a loan from an agriculture bank to buy the needed stuff was relatively easy. But in the past few years, the subsidies have been cut, thanks to donor pressure. Farmers who relied on government aid have to find money at market rates and buy fertilizers and

equipment at market prices. Clearly, the incentives have decreased but the frustrations have correspondingly increased. Enter the Maoists.

“It is very easy to recruit people who have empty stomachs,” explains Mr. Jaiswal. “The Maoists have been doing just that in the villages. And many small farmers who see no hope in farming are supporting the rebels because the Maoists give them some hope, however impossible that hope may be.”

As Mr. Jaiswal explains his reasons, his 26-year-old son—let’s call him Udhab—sits nearby listening intently to this conversation. Udhab

is a trained electrical engineer from one of the ex-Soviet republics. He returned to Nepal two years ago, but hasn’t been able to find a job despite appearing in countless recruiting exams.

“I was selected as one of the finalists to a position in a government utility company, but was rejected because my father couldn’t pay the Rs. 300,000 bribe the selecting officer was asking,” he sighs. Udhab then says that one of his friends, who studied in the same institute in the ex-Soviet republic, got the job. “He admitted to me that he paid the bribe, and advised that I too do the same next time.”

Udhab today spends time helping his father in the workshop. He dreams of migrating abroad for better opportunities, but doesn’t have the money nor the connections to make that happen. He admits his prospects are bleak, and that makes him a prospective recruit for the Maoists. “If the Maoists were to come and recruit me, I would join them. What is the use of all this education if I can’t make a living?” he asks.

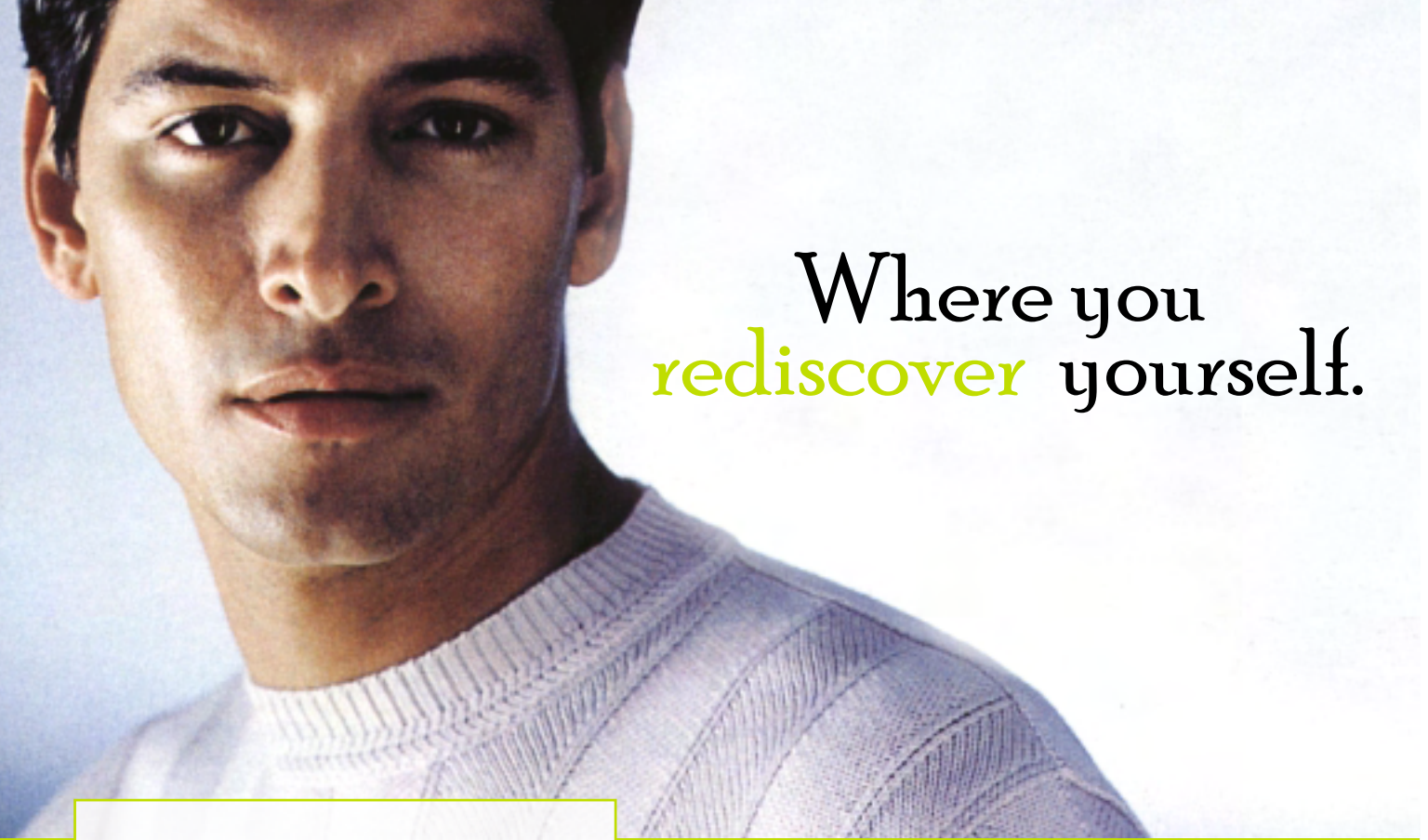
You can take this as the idle rumblings of a bored Terai family, or as the cries for help from the poor and powerless masses. But in essence, in telling their different stories, both father and son have laid bare the truth about the ground realities of the Maoist conflict. Countless such stories are found across the length and breadth of Nepal, but their message is always the same: as long as the country’s small farmers, small business owners and youth see no hope either in the present or in the future, the insurgency will only grow.

I wonder if the Nepal Development Forum meetings, which concluded last week, got to hear any of these stories. For if they had, they would see how well-intentioned efforts to restructure a poor economy along unbridled free-market lines, creates the conditions for conflict.

(The names in the article have all been changed at the persons’ request) **N**



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SOALTEE



KATHMANDU

The Maoist heartland

The Royal Nepal Army has intensified its operation against the Maoists in the Mid-western hills, including Rolpa and Rukum, the epicenter of Maoist heartland. The newly appointed Army Spokesman, Rajendra Thapa, said the objective of the operation is to give people in the region a sense of security as well as reach those Maoists who could possibly surrender. "Isn't it time we changed our psychology over how many steps were taken in resolving the crisis rather than over the number of dead bodies?" Thapa said when asked about casualties during the operation.



10+2 curriculum

Starting next session, Tribhuvan University will phase out its Proficiency Certificate Level (PCL) curriculum and replace it with the one being used by 10+2 Higher Secondary Education Board. The issue of phasing out the PCL has remained a political hot potato ever since the Board was introduced to improve the quality of education in the higher secondary level 10 years ago. Student unions, who have been demanding that private schools and colleges lower their fees, say this decision will hike up tuition fees. Some 436 government schools (among a total 856 schools) fall under

the Board. The 10+2 education system currently has 250,000 students whereas the Proficiency Certificate level has 100,000.

Journalist memorial

Rastyriya Samachar Samiti reporter Gyanendra Khadka, who was killed by Maoists in Sindhupalchowk last September, had his name featured among the 53 new journalists added in this year's Freedom Forum Journalists Memorial. The memorial now pays tribute to 1,528 reporters, editors, photographers and broadcasters who died or were killed while on assignment.

Remittances flow

Laxmi Bank has signed up with Western Union to facilitate flow of remittances from abroad. A global leader in money transfer, Western Union has 170,000 locations in over 190 countries. It is believed to handle more than 6,000 remittances into Nepal from various parts of the country. Annapurna Travels & Tours, Western Union's primary agent in Nepal, will coordinate the bank's association with Western Union. Recipients of the money in Nepal pay no charges. The service will initially be on offer in the bank's branches in Banepa, Birgunj and Pokhara (opening soon).

Maoist rampage

Maoists abducted 1,500 teachers and students and took them to an undisclosed location in Rukum. They were taken hostage from schools in the villages of Chaurjahari, Basikot, Ratimati, Jhula, Manma, Rukumkot and Phatimkandar. Dozens of schools in the Maoist hotbed have been closed for an in-

definite period due to fears of added abductions. Locals assume that the villagers were taken hostage to attend the anniversary ceremonies of the pro-Maoist student union, ANNISU and would be released once the ceremonies were over. Maoists are said to have ordered all the teachers and students in the villages to attend the anniversary functions and anyone defying the order would be given a three-month term in a labor camp, according to Nepal Samacharpatra. There are similar reports of mass abductions from Dadeldhura, Kalikot and Bajhang. There are two explanations to these abductions: either the Maoists are preparing for a massive attack somewhere in the Mid West or Far West, or the captives will be set free after a routine indoctrination through Janabadi sessions.

Letter to Bhutan

The Foreign Ministry has sent a letter to Bhutan asking it to resume the repatriation process, which stalled last year when refugees in Khudunabari camps attacked Bhutanese in the joint Nepal-Bhutan verification team. The refugees, who have been languishing in the UN camps for more than 10 years, became agitated when the JVT

members said that many of the refugees had fallen in the "non-Bhutanese" category. The repatriation was slated for early this year but Bhutanese officials have refused to visit Nepal. "We have sent the letter to resume the stalled process immediately," says Foreign Secretary Madhu Raman Acharya. "We will make sure fears of inadequate security are addressed."



Fire in the train

Nepal's only public train, Janakpur Railways, closed its service last Monday after Maoist torched the Mahinapur Railway station in the border town. The fire damaged the ticket counter and the office building in the station. The 52-km Janakpur-Jayanagar service had not resumed its service when we went to press.



Thapa resigns

Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa resigned on Friday after facing much pressure from the protesting political parties. The government had earlier in the week arrested Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala and CPN(UML) General Secretary Madhav Nepal from their residences and set them free later in the day. The next day, the government removed its tag of riot prone zone in major areas of the capital. The party protests, however, did not simmer down. After Thapa's resignation, the government released students arrested during the protests. But by the time we went to press, the parties were still sticking to their stance of continuing their protests.

Bus accident

A bus accident in Sano Daireni of Palpa killed 33 people and injured more than two dozens on the morning of May 1. The bus that was heading for Pokhara from Butwal rammed past road barriers, skidded off the Siddhartha Highway, and fell more than a hundred meters below.

Visa problems

The government on May 5 released all of the 54 Nepalis who were kept in custody after they were deported from Malaysia on charges of holding fake visas. The arrests had come under sharp criticism from companies supplying laborers to foreign countries. Police on April 27 confiscated fake visa stamping machines from the Chundevi residence of two front desk staff of the Malaysian Embassy. Malaysia's New Straits Times said no Malaysians were involved in the

scam. Another report quoted Malaysian Home Affairs Minister Datuk Azmi Khalid as saying a total of 56 Nepalis were refused entry at the Kuala Lumpur airport on April 24 and that another 610 in Nepal were also found to have fake visas. The arrested Nepalis claim they are innocent and that they didn't know the visas were fake.

Farewell maestro

Sangeet Praveen Nararaj Dhakal passed away last Wednesday at the age of 84 after battling a long time chest ailment. He was a renowned classical musician and was teaching in many campuses. A newspaper quoted his son Prabhuraj Dhakal as saying his father's last wish was to open a classical music school in all 75 districts.

Respect rules

The International Committee of the Red Cross marked this year's International Red Cross Day by asking parties to the civil conflict to respect



the basic rules of international humanitarian law and to stop targeting civilians. The international Red Cross and Red Crescent movement is the largest humanitarian aid organization in the world with more than 100 million members and volunteers and 300,000 employees. The ICRC's work in Nepal was recently highlighted through mediation in the release of security personnel abducted by the Maoists in Ilam last month and in Beni two months ago. The international Red Cross and Red Crescent day has been celebrated annually since 1948 on the birthday of Henry Durant, the founder of Red Cross.

No U.S. visa

The U.S. government has urged the Congress to make the necessary changes in the law to close the door for Diversity Visa applications from countries that are perceived as hostile to the United States. Those fleeing oppression in countries such as Cuba, Libya, Syria, and Iran will be ineligible to apply for the Diversity Visa if the Congress upholds the recommendation. Nepal is apparently not going to be affected. The Congress has also been asked to bar future entries from applicants who attempt multiple entries. The U.S. Congress established the Diversity Visa Program in 1995 to authorize up to 50,000 immigrant visas annually for countries that were under-represented among the 400,000 to 500,000 immigrants coming to the United States each year. Most immigration to the United States is based upon family relationships or employment but the Diversity Visa doesn't require either.



PETITION TIME: Members of the Women's Solidarity Group for Peace and Dialogue await a Royal audience



A HOUSE FOR MR. P

Much has been said about the remittances keeping Nepal's cash-strapped economy afloat but experts now question whether the money has helped boost the country's overall economic outlook

**BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI
AND TIKU GAUCHAN**

Surendra Pathak lives in Queens, New York City. He saves Rs. 70,000 and upwards each month from his work as a waiter in a Manhattan restaurant. "Sometimes more, if I am

lucky and the tipping is good," he says over the phone from New York. Pathak works hard and lives frugally—he seldom eats out and does not splurge on bars and the good things of a life in the west. He sends most of his savings home to Kathmandu, where his wife and

brother-in-law have been investing on real estate.

Like Pathak, thousands of Nepalis who have gone abroad to places as far as Japan, South Korea, Europe and the Gulf regularly send money home. Much has been said about the remittances keeping Nepal's cash-strapped economy afloat but experts now question whether the money has helped boost the country's overall economic outlook.

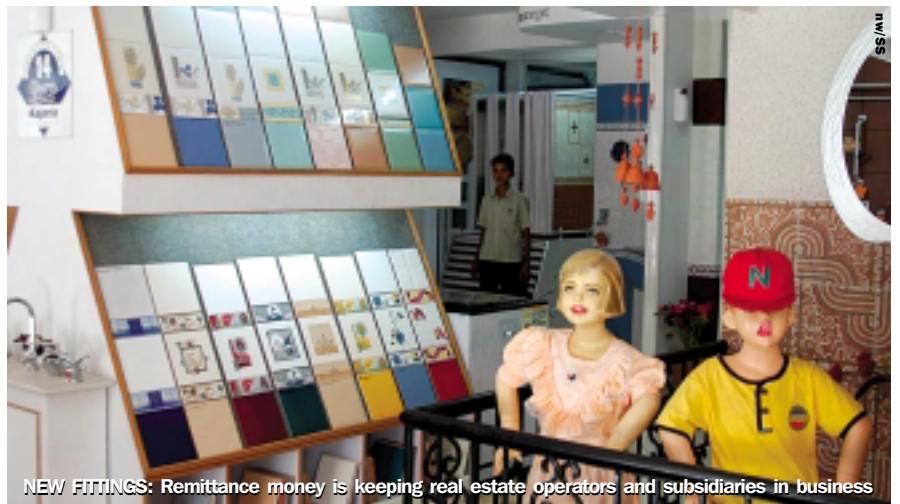
"Most of the spending is not taking place in areas such as manufacturing but in less productive sectors," says Pradip



PATHAK

Upadhyay, an economist and director of National Development Volunteers Service under the National Planning Commission. Upadhyay believes the impact of investments on economy would have been far greater if the investments were directed into ventures that would boost industrial productivity and stable businesses. Unfortunately, with the poor security situation in the country, prospective investors are shying away from businesses and manufacturing industries.

What is happening instead is that the remittance money is helping the con-



NEW FITTINGS: Remittance money is keeping real estate operators and subsidiaries in business

struction, banking and finance sectors flourish. Mansions sprouting in new residential colonies like Gongabu, Bhaisepati and Tikhe Dewal clearly show where the remittance money pouring into the country finally ends up. The logic for investing in real estate is clear: in such bearish times, investing in houses is investing in safe capital. And together with the houses being built by people fleeing the insurgency in the villages, the real estate industry is thriving.

The latest Economic Survey revealed an increase in real estate and land revenues to over Rs. 715 million, up from Rs. 570 million in 2002. By rough estimates, real estate prices have more than doubled: a ropani of land in Tikhe Dewal, more than a kilometer outside Ring Road, which was going for Rs. 500,000 three years ago, today commands a price tag of Rs. 1.6 million.

Remittance money is also the major reason for the upsurge in Nepal's banking sector. Nepal Rastra Bank's figures for the last fiscal year show an increase in convertible reserves by 22.9 percent (to Rs. 98 billion) over last year. "Remittance has been a huge help to banks," says Suman Joshi, Laxmi Bank's Chief Executive Officer.

Joshi estimates the current legal remittance market to be over a million rupees monthly in cities such as Dharan alone. The figure could be much higher in places like Pokhara where more people have gone abroad for work.

Since the government opened up its policy to allow the operation of private commercial banks, most of them are focusing on making it easier for money to be transferred from abroad. Apart from

17 banks, there are 19 independent firms operating as money agents. Just last week, Laxmi Bank signed up with Western Union, a global leader in the money transfer business, to facilitate flow of remittance.

"The global trend, including in Nepal, is that while risks in business lending have gone up, remittance money has made it easier for banks to focus on individual financing," says Joshi.

With houses and shopping complexes coming up in the Valley like never before and with people zipping around in new bikes bought on loan schemes, it may seem that despite the financial mess, the country will tide through the times. A boom in real estate is a good indicator for the health of the economy in places where business is thriving. In conflict-torn Nepal, mired in economic stasis, the boom in real estate is only an indicator of investors playing it safe.

For the country's health to improve, there can be no two ways about it: only political stability can bail out the ailing economy. And until that happens migrant workers like Surendra Pathak will have to live marginalized lives in other countries, working tough jobs, and hope that someday they will be able to invest in better businesses and come home to oversee their ventures. That will not only be better for their livelihood, it will be better for the country too.

But such times may not come around soon. "It is difficult to predict if the present economy is heading for a burst of the economic bubble," says Joshi. "As it is, long term visions are difficult to implement in the current context of war economy in Nepal." ■

AFTER THE FALL

Surya Bahadur Thapa has resigned as Prime Minister but the parties are saying their protests will continue until sovereignty returns to the people. But that's just one of many problems ahead

BY AKHILESH UPADHYAY

After 11 tumultuous months in office, Surya Bahadur Thapa left Singh Durbar Friday, a rather lonely man. Even his party RPP had pulled out its support for the beleaguered Prime Minister. While he was delivering his swan song live on Nepal Television and Radio Nepal, his colleagues were having a hearty laugh over it all at the party office in Naxal.

Thapa's legacy: a deep rift between the political parties and the Palace;

breakdown of a fragile peace process; extremely poor security situation that threatens to stall development activities; and failure to make security forces adhere to accepted human rights standards.

It is important to note here that Nepal's donors, during the Nepal Development Forum last week and weeks preceding the biennial meet, made it amply clear that adherence to internationally accepted human rights norms and return to representative governance were key conditions to providing development dollars.





While Thapa, as prime minister, will be blamed by historians for the rotten state of affairs that the country now finds itself in (after his appointment last June Thapa insisted that the King had restored executive powers to his cabinet), it will be unfair to put the blame squarely on him. Nepal's present-day politics is far too complex for one single person to unravel, even if that person is a battle-hardened political veteran like Thapa. The rift between the political parties and the Palace had started well before he came into office and the "people's war," started by the Maoists in 1996, had already fanned to dangerous levels while the parties were still in power.

Nevertheless, with Thapa now out of the way, King Gyanendra has a historic opportunity to begin mending fences with the mainstream political parties who have been in the wilderness due to his October 4, 2002 action. In that time, republican slogans have gathered currency. The King therefore has the Herculean task of righting the political process and, at the same time, turning the parties around to defend the monarchy against the Maoists.

For this, many analysts agree that since the problem lies far beyond Thapa, the solution should extend well beyond his ouster. "The issue here isn't about the removal of Lokendra Bahadur Chand or Surya Bahadur Thapa," says Lok Raj Baral, a political science professor, "but the restoration of the derailed political process."

What exactly does this mean? Since most now agree that the King's rule by hand-picked governments overstretched the letter and spirit of the Constitution—therefore the derailed political process—it can only be righted if a representative government with full executive powers is formed.

The best way to put a representative government in place is to hold elections. The King himself promised to hold one within 2061 B.S. But elections are already a major bone of contention between the parties and the Palace. The parties are not so anxious about holding elections so much as they are about resolving the Maoist issue. "We are in the line of fire," says Amrit Bohara, a CPN(UML) central committee member. "The parties realize that going to elections without

TIMELINE

2001

June 1 King Birendra and family members are assassinated by Crown Prince Dipendra, in the Royal Palace on Friday. The prince goes into a coma from apparently self-inflicted gunshot wound

June 2 Crown Prince Dipendra declared king while still in coma. Prince Gyanendra declared regent

June 4 King Dipendra dies, Prince Gyanendra declared king. Anti-Gyanendra protests are held in the capital where a curfew is imposed

July 19 Maoists step up violence, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala resigns

July 22 Sher Bahadur Deuba named new Prime Minister, announces truce with rebels

Aug 30 Government, Maoists begin peace talks in Godavari. Maoists demand new constitution

Nov 21 Maoists end four-month ceasefire

Nov 23 Maoists for the first time launch attack on the Army by mowing down a barracks in Dang. Attacks in Surkhet and Syangja, killing 24 policemen

Nov 25 Another attempted attack on the Army base in Salleri

Nov 26 King Gyanendra declares state of emergency. Royal Nepal Army deployed against the Maoists

2002

Jan 18 U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell visits Nepal

Feb 17 Maoists mow down another Army barracks in Mangelsen, Achham Authorities say hundreds of Maoist rebels killed since Army operations began

March 17 Army claims Maoist training center busted in Rolpa, 68 Maoists killed

May 7 Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba meets with U.S. President George W. Bush to seek support

for his campaign against the Maoists. Bush pledges US\$20 million. Maoists offer truce, which is rejected by the government

May 22 King Gyanendra dissolves Parliament, orders fresh elections. Deuba expelled by the Nepali Congress, but remains interim prime minister

Aug 28 Government lifts state of emergency

Oct 4 King Gyanendra fires Deuba calling him "incompetent" and "incapable" of holding parliamentary elections on schedule. Deuba had asked for the postponement of elections due to fears of Maoist violence

Oct 11 King Gyanendra names Lokendra Bahadur Chand of Rastriya Prajatantra Party the new prime minister

2003

Jan 29 Maoists declare cease-fire, begin peace talks with government

May 30 Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand resigns

June 4 King Gyanendra appoints Surya Bahadur Thapa, 75, as new Prime Minister

July 31 Maoists agree to government requests for a resumption of peace talks

Aug 17 Peace talks resume in Nepalgunj for the first time since May

Aug 27 Maoists call off seven-month cease-fire and withdraw from peace talks. Shoot dead an Army colonel, fighting resumes. Clashes between soldiers and rebels escalate through late 2003, leaving heavy casualties on both sides

2004

May 7 Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa announces his resignation (Friday) after 11 months in office and months of protests by political parties demanding a restoration of democracy and new elections

THE LINEAGE:
King Gyanendra (R) with Crown Prince Paras



BR



rw/ss

resolving the Maoist problem will be suicidal. Literally. And there we need to listen carefully to the Maoists.”

If that calls for the delaying of elections, or even going for a constituent assembly, so be it, says Prof. Baral. “The country’s problems will not be solved without resolving the Maoist problem. Any election held without the resolution of the Maoist issue is unlikely to be successful.” It was this that led to fall of the last elected government of Sher Bahadur Deuba.

But however pressing the need to resolve the Maoist problem, it can only come later. For now, the immediate problem is to get the parties and the Palace to agree on the shape of the next government. This is not an easy task, as has been borne out by recent history. The issue is not just who forms the next government and how much leverage such a government will have, but rather what should be the role of the monarch, who controls the Royal Nepal Army and where does sovereignty lie in practice? Many analysts say, it was failure to deal with these crucial issues during the democratic years that invited the King’s intervention.

The five-party alliance which spearheaded an anti-King movement (euphemistically called anti-regression) from April 1 is clear about where it stands: it wants to minimize the King’s role by reducing his executive powers, and have control over the Royal purse and Royal Nepal Army, which according to its 18-point agenda, should be put under parliamentary control. The Nepali Congress (Democratic), though not a signatory to the 18-point agenda, too is supportive of most of the points in the list.

But it will be difficult to get the Palace to agree to such wholesale change. The King’s announcement on Friday evening calling on the parties to put forth a person with a “clean image” as the new Prime Minister is signal enough that the monarch wants to retain his rights over the appointment of the executive. In essence, what this means is, even if sovereignty is vested in the people and their elected representatives, the King makes the final decision over who heads the government.



rw/ss

(CLOCKWISE, FROM LEFT)

DEVELOPMENTS BEFORE THE DOWNFALL:

Leaders sitting out their time behind the barricades

The masses congregate a day after Koirala’s and Nepal’s arrest and release

Singha Durbar awaits one with a “clean image”

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Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa (in his car) inside the Palace to tender his resignation

Not surprisingly, the parties find this unacceptable, and therefore the consternation caused by the King's Friday announcement.

Outgoing Prime Minister Thapa, sensing the parties' mood tried one last time to bridge the divide between the Palace and the parties. In his resignation speech, he took great pains to stress that the King was committed to constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy and it would be unfair to question the King's commitment to democracy.

But parties aren't quite sure about that, especially after the "clean image" announcement. The Palace, party leaders say, is positioning for another hand-picked government, instead of restoring a government with executive powers. They recall how the early rift between the King and parties started in the days after the dismissal of Sher Bahadur Deuba's government on 4 October 2002 and later after Chand's removal on May 30 last year.

"We may have given the Palace the benefit of doubt in the past," says Bharat Mohan Adhikari, a central committee member of CPN(UML). "The parties have always had their consensus prime



UML's Bharat Mohan Adhikari



NC's Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat

minister," Adhikari says, recalling how the King snubbed political parties last year when he appointed Thapa instead of UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal. This time round, the mood in the parties is different. "Unless we get a clear commitment from the Palace about the transfer of sovereign rights to the people," says the former finance minister, "our protest against regression will continue."

Says Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat, a Nepali Congress central committee member, "We are not encouraged by what we have heard from the Palace so far," in reference to the controversial statement from

the Palace Friday. The statement says that the new prime minister should have a "clean image and an ability to take along all parties" and "start elections to Pratinidhi Sabha within 2061 B.S. as per the people's desire."

By the time we went to press, there was still no clear indication of the shape of the next government, or indeed of an agreement between the Palace and the parties. But all sides know, a new government is just the beginning.

The end can only come when an enlightened representative government which has the confidence of the people negotiates a lasting peace with the Maoists. The key word here is enlightened. For it needs an enlightened government not only to forge peace with the Maoists but also to see that the root causes that have fanned the rebellion, exclusion and poverty, is dealt with effectively.



nm/ss

STRINGS ATTACHED

The donors at the NDF have come up with a consensus. Europeans emphasized that the demands of the parties needed to be addressed as soon as possible. And even the United States, seen widely as siding with the government on human rights issues, made no attempt to hide its displeasure over the security forces' poor human rights record

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

The Nepal Development Forum turned out to be the last official assignment for the Surya Bahadur Thapa government. And if claims made

by government officials are any indication, it also turned out to be perhaps the most grueling one for the government, whose human rights record has routinely come under fire from the international community.

Apart from the regular opposition from the political parties on the streets, the two-day forum required continuous face-to-face clarifications and commitments to dissatisfied donors on a number of issues, including human rights and constitutional monarchy.

"It was going to be rough and we were prepared," said a senior government official. "But we were not quite prepared for this level of resistance."

During the meeting, donors issued separate statements. Europeans emphasized that the demands of the parties needed to be addressed as soon as possible. And even the United States, seen widely as siding with the government on human rights issues, made no attempt to hide its displeasure over the

security forces' poor human rights record.

The United States said that it wanted to see Nepal make progress on human rights and good governance. "Both the Maoists and the security forces abuse human rights," said a statement presented by Donald A. Camp, U.S. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asian Affairs.

The end result: Delegates from 20 countries, six international financial institutions and UN agencies gave a nod to the government's estimated annual funding of US\$ 560 million for the Poverty Reduction Strategy. But that didn't come easy.

It required the government to listen patiently to harsh criticism from the donors, many of whom were raising issues that protestors were chanting on the streets.

The tone was set right from the word go. "Giving development another chance is not a blank check for more of the same



(FAR LEFT) World Bank Vice President Praful Patel and UN Special Representative Matthew Kahane

(LEFT TOP) Though not a donor, India attended NDF as an invitee

(LEFT MIDDLE) Civil society groups protest outside the NDF venue

(LEFT BOTTOM) Finance Minister Lohani at the NDF

(ABOVE) Delegates at the inaugural session at the BICC

chaotic governance,” said Praful Patel, World Bank’s vice-president of the South Asia Region in his inaugural address.

His concerns were shared by the Europeans: “We wish to reiterate that failure to address these issues (restoration of democracy, peace process and improving the human rights situation) will severely undermine the prospects for our development partnership to further develop and fully materialize.”

Finance Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani seemed pleased with the outcome, though. “We have to take these (concerns) seriously,” Lohani told reporters from the dais that he shared with the World Bank’s Patel, heads of other government agencies and the UN’s Matthew Kahane, who represented the donors. “It is only natural for our friends to voice their concern over the present conflict and political stalemate.”

The political parties, who had already announced their boycott of the two-day meeting, had met with donors for two and a half hours before the forum got underway on Wednesday. The parties’ had demanded that the forum be postponed but the donors turned down their request, stressing that Nepal’s development needs could not be compromised.

Although the political parties had attended pre-consultation meetings earlier that lasted for 17 days, they refused to attend the grand finale, saying they would not like to attend an event hosted by an illegitimate government. Civil society participants too joined forces with the political parties.

“This is not a meeting with the political parties,” Minister Lohani said, when he was asked if the boycott of the parties had affected the meeting. “They gave their input during the pre-consultations. The meeting is now between

His Majesty’s Government and the donors.”

Lohani didn’t have an easy ride though. A joint statement issued by the donors repeatedly highlighted the need to restore democracy, both at the national and local levels, respect human rights and urge the government to forge partnership with local stakeholders.

In March the outgoing Prime Minister Thapa had released a 25-point Commitment Paper on human rights in Kathmandu while the 56th UN Human Rights Session was going on in Geneva, where human rights abuses in Nepal was a major issue.

But a month on, the donor community still maintains that the government needs to work on many fronts. While donor support is crucial for Nepal’s long term progress, development goals will only be attained if the government first commits itself to achieving peace, good governance and human rights, says Camp, who led the U.S. team at the NDF. **N**

Donors demanded **democracy, human rights**

SOLDIERS WITH SCHOOLBAGS

Many of the widely reported “abductions” are more a coercion to attend cultural programs. But there are also unfounded claims that the Maoist are trying to raise a 50,000-strong child militia

BY SUSHMA JOSHI

On April 21, newspapers re-reported that the Maoists had abducted 162 people, including 120 students, from the villages of Subhang and Bharapa in Panchthar. The papers weren't clear when they had been abducted and the local residents were at a loss to explain why. Next day, 1,000 more were taken hostage from the villages in Panchthar and Taplejung—neither of them a Maoist stronghold.

Earlier, on February 27, 65 students from sixth to tenth grades, were abducted along with their teacher while returning from Musikot, Rukum (this one a Maoist stronghold) after taking part in the Birendra Shield Competition. The security forces who were deployed to free the students failed in their mission. When the gun battle between the Army and the rebels raged on for days, the locals fled their villages.

According to subsequent news reports, though vague, the abductees were set free after Janabadi education sessions. INSEC, a human rights group, says that many of the widely reported “abductions” are more a coercion to attend cultural programs than people being held against their will for any length of time. But there are also unfounded claims that the Maoist are trying to raise a 50,000-strong child militia.

“Children from eighth and ninth grades are taken for a few days, and are indoctrinated,” says Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN), which runs its own social service program in Rolpa, Rukum and Salyan, the districts hit hardest by

the insurgency. “They are made to do exercises; they are made to carry heavy loads and run. The Maoists give them their books to read. So they are not ‘abducted’ by force or made captive in a conventional sense. They are taken en masse to attend Maoist programs, and then they are returned.”

Incidents of Maoists taking students from schools have become increasingly common since early 2004. In mid-February, the Maoists celebrated the eighth anniversary of the “people’s war,” forcing 700 students in Accham to join their anti-establishment protest. On February 20, a teacher reported seeing 300 students taken from a school in Rolpa. Khem Bahadur Budha told AFP news agency that the students were taken from Saiwang Secondary School at Holeri village.

Unconfirmed reports say the Maoists are planning to raise a huge child militia. While the claim is as difficult to establish as many other stories about the Maoists, there are some pointers that give credence to the claim. Kamal Shahi, ANNISU-R central secretariat member and convenor of the Maoist Bheri-Karnali Regional Coordination Committee, has been quoted as saying that the decision to raise the child militia was taken on January 10-11. And that the Maoists planned to ‘induct’ 375,000 students by the end of Baisakh (May 13). One militia would be levied from each school. The students would not be coerced, Shahi said.

The security forces’ response to the recruitment of children, in both mili-

tias and active combat, has not been exactly friendly. They have been known to open fire in schoolyards, and take children being taught by teachers at gunpoint. “Four years ago, the security forces were interrogating children who had become involved in conflict,” reports CWIN. “They had surrender camps. There is no concept of verbal sexual assault in the military. They would use abusive words to the children, and even threaten to rape them in order to get information.”

Nepal is one of the 13 countries in Asia actively using children as soldiers, says the London-based Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. The Maoists, not the Army, uses them. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child says children below 15 cannot be used in warfare.

Krishna Bahadur Mahara, a Maoist leader, told CNN in November 2002 that reports of child recruitment by Maoist groups are “baseless allegations made by the Nepali government. We have no children in our fighting force. We do not admit anyone below 18 in our army... As far as our movement is concerned, we have the support of the children as well as the elderly. But they are not part of our army...”

According to Nepali laws, a person is only considered a child up to the age of 16, unlike in other countries where the responsibilities of adulthood start at



18. Maoists claim only people over 18 become combatants. Underage children are put in militias, which are not involved in active warfare.

SSP Ramesh Chand of Nepal Police says there are no laws specific to children. The law of the land treats children caught with arms and wearing guerrilla outfits just as it would the adults. "We don't automatically think a child carrying a gun is a culprit. They are given the chance to surrender. We believe we can't attack children, but if they attack first, then of course the security personnel have to respond."

Children are helpless pawns in the conflict.

Rights workers say that children are used as human shields by the Maoists, who also train them to carry light arms and ammunition. Since the "people's war" began in 1996, 214 children have been documented killed: 140 by the state, and 74 by the Maoists, according to INSEC.

Juvenile courts, which deal with children separately, don't exist in Nepal.

Nepal is one of the 13 countries in Asia actively using children as soldiers, says the London-based Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers.

There are "juvenile benches" where judges sit separately to try the cases of children in all 75 districts, but only a few cases have been tried through these benches. The individuals administering these benches don't know much about them, say rights workers. Nepal's Children's Act of 1992 has specifically mentioned the need for juvenile courts, but it hasn't been implemented.

"There are no separate prisons for children," says SSP Chand. "Juvenile custody doesn't exist in Nepal. The government doesn't have the resources." The anti-terrorism law is administered by the civil police, not the security forces or the military.

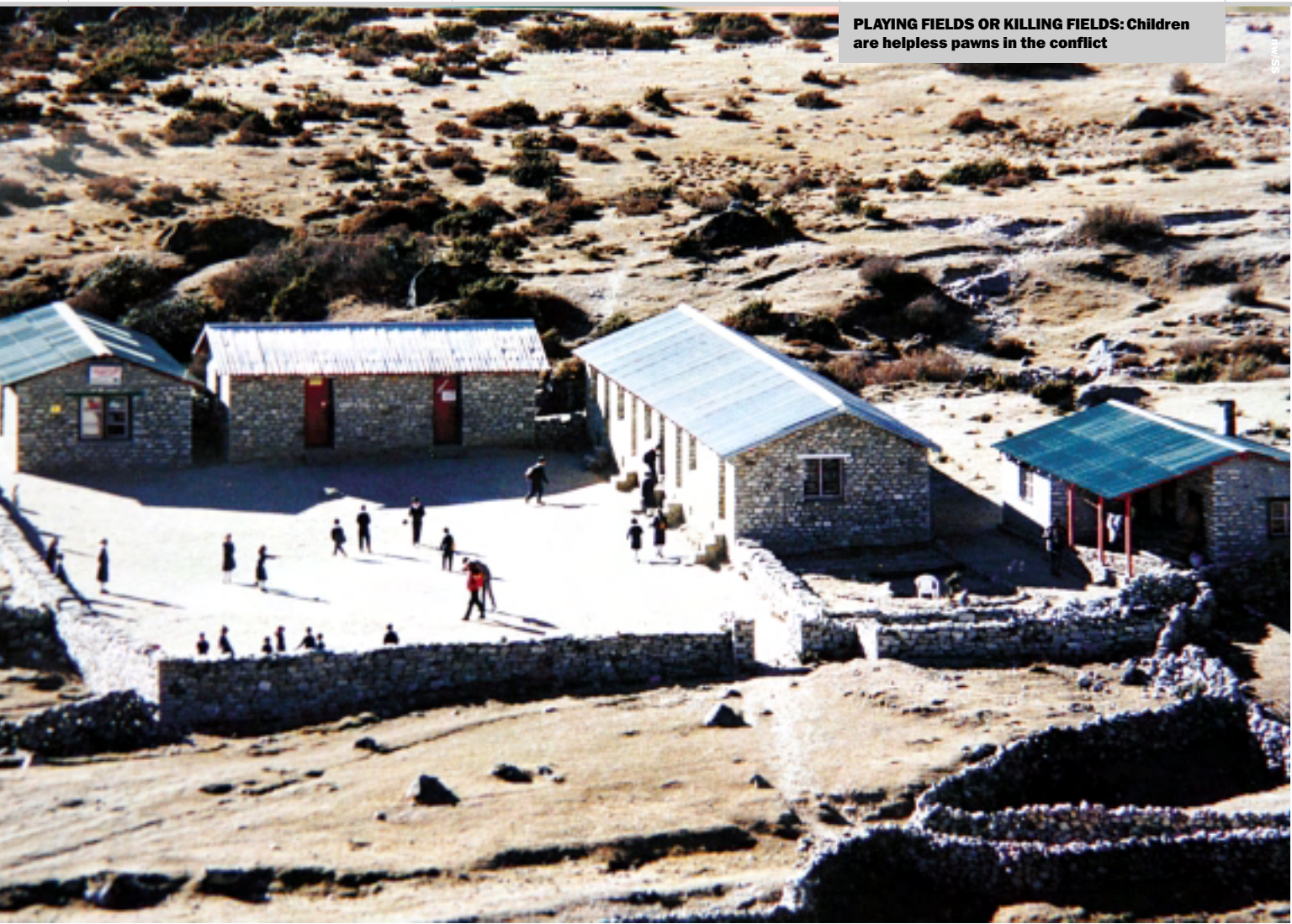
The Maoist policy to take students has severely affected the schools and hundreds have closed down in different parts of the country as parents and teach-

ers, afraid of having their children abducted, either stop sending children to school or move them to urban centers where they are comparatively safer.

Girls' education has especially suffered: news reports say that girls below puberty are being made to wear bridal wear while going to school, since the Maoists are thought to target married women less.

Children as Zone of Peace National Coalition, a forum of 30 organizations, has condemned the Maoist plans to use children in militias, and have urged both the Maoists and security forces to declare schools as battle-free zones. Until that happens, the civil conflict will continue to rob an entire generation of children of their right to education and a better future. **N**

PLAYING FIELDS OR KILLING FIELDS: Children are helpless pawns in the conflict



THREE FALL GUYS

There is still confusion in conservation circles about what should take primacy: livelihood or conservation. The balance sometimes swings too much towards the conservation end at the expense of the voiceless

BY SAMUEL THOMAS

Organised poaching and trade in wildlife are threatening conservation gains and putting several species at risk, but token convictions will not help the cause.

Last month leading conservationists and experts from South Asia and elsewhere in the world gathered in Kathmandu for two back-to-back workshops on trafficking in wild flora and fauna. The urgency was clear: in recent months there have been huge hauls of wildlife parts in Nepal, most bound for Tibet. The hauls have sent shivers down the spines of leading conservationists. If this is the scale of the killing, they fear, there won't be anything left in a few years.

There are clear and ominous signs. Experts agree that Nepal is not a consumer market, but is a source and transit for huge quantities of wildlife parts in the region. There are organized groups involved in the trade, catering to huge markets elsewhere. The amounts involved are staggering. Now, for the enforcement side: how have agencies here dealt with the threat and with people, in the rare cases where they have been caught? This, after all, was the focus of the second workshop.

On 1 September 2003, newspapers reported that three Chepang men—Ram Bahadur Praja, 27, Sukra Bahadur Praja, 19 and Prem Bahadur Praja, 19—were convicted for poaching rhinos, sentenced to 15 years in prison and asked to pay fines of Rs.100,000 each. There has been little or no reaction to the case in the media. It is business as usual for civil society in Kathmandu. Tellingly, the verdict was delivered on the same day that a

customs official posted a bail amount of Rs. 4.3 million in a corruption case and was freed on bail.

In the case of these three men, the 'justice' came quickly—the main accused was arrested in Chitwan in June 2003. The sentence was delivered in three months. Clearly the customs official and the Chepang are equal before the law of the land, but it is 'equity before the law' that is more important here. To understand this one needs to turn first

bing and punishing three fall guys so severely.

This is a story we have heard all too often. Some months ago a man was caught attempting to smuggle 109 leopard skins. He said he was doing this at the behest of a trader. Where is the trader? In this case too, the larger fish have gotten away. And so while the fall guy spends years in prison for being a courier, the trader is sourcing leopard skins elsewhere. An Army colonel was caught hunting in Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve. The issue was widely publicised in the media. But no one suggested 15 years and a Rs.100,000 fine.

This is a problem of not "putting the last first." Although conservation organisations after the Millennium

While the fall guy spends years in prison for being a courier, the trader is sourcing leopard skins elsewhere. The larger fish get away

to the socio-economic and political status of the Chepang, easily one of the most disadvantaged indigenous groups in the country.

This justice was too speedy, too severe and somehow too convenient. Clearly, the three convicted men are not in league with merchants from Yemen who trade in rhino horn. Clearly, they are not in league with Chinese triads who control the illegal trade in wildlife parts for traditional medicine. Clearly, they do not control the trade from or through Nepal and benefit a great deal from it. Clearly, they cannot pay fines of Rs.100,000 or even hire a lawyer.

The authorities were quick to act in this case, although they remain 'clueless' about the big national and international players in this racket, the ones who always get away. It was rather sad to see people applaud the authorities for nab-





SHYAM RAJIVANUJON ARCHIVE



THOMAS LARJON ARCHIVE



GANESH PHOTOSUCHI ARCHIVE

PRIZE CACHE: How many years in the pen would such a booty warrant?

Summit (“conservation must be part of the development agenda or risk ‘irrelevance’”) admit to having made the shift, there is still confusion as to which approach should take primacy. There can be no two ways about it. This is really the livelihood versus conservation issue with the balance sometimes swinging too much towards the conservation end at the expense of the voiceless.

The creation of protected areas has often meant that access to traditional common property resources is denied, sometimes to the benefit of more advantaged groups. Also, after all these years, compensation mechanisms for crop depredation and loss of life and limb due to wildlife are still not fully in place.

This case is a test for the mainstream conservation sector’s commitment to people-centred conservation. While we all recognize that poaching of an endangered animal is a crime worthy of punishment, conservation cannot succeed by locking up the pawns in the trade.

If the rhino or any other threatened animal is to survive, it is the big fish in the business that must be put away. The landless and extremely poor dalits and janjatis must have a substantial part in the conservation effort and their livelihood issues must be addressed.

Their expertise, in tracking and spotting, and the lay of the land, will help conservation units function better. Many efforts worldwide have succeeded by using ex-poachers in forest patrols.

This case is also an opportunity for human rights watchdogs to take off their conflict blinkers and see other victims who have no advocates, no livelihood security, and are being exploited by international smugglers for their traditional hunting skills.

For conservation actors and donors, it is an opportunity to push for more meaningful inclusion of the poorest in conservation efforts.

For the media, it is a great opportunity to take up this case and demand that real justice be done. This huge problem cannot be solved by locking up little men.

(Thomas works with IUCN. The views expressed are his.) **N**

PROBIR GUHA'S TAKES



Probir Guha's Alternative Living Theatre focuses on "the experience of hunger, unemployment and social inequality, and portrays the pain, humiliation, disillusionment and alienation of the downtrodden."

How long have you been in theatre?
From 1965.

What sort of plays were done then?
All traditional stuff. Now Indian theatre has become very modern.

Are you happy with the issues that Indian theatre artists are raising?
Not really. Most of the directors today are doing the kind of plays that come under the rubric of art for art's sake. This kind of play doesn't do anything to address the suffering of the multitude and the plight of people without a job and shelter, women sold for flesh, the hungry pains me deeply and I want to react to it. I strongly feel that theatre should react to the wounds.

Can you tell us a little about the form you are working on?
I keep researching ways to connect to the people. The form I am working on is one way of connecting to the people. We need to shock the people.

Your take on Nepali theatre?
When I first came here, there was no good theatre to speak of. Now Nepali theatre seems to have improved a bit. Nepali theatre is still pretty much an imitation of Anglo-American theatre, transported through India. Now it has to find its own language. **N**

BY AJIT BARAL

More Matter With Less Art

BY AJIT BARAL

Last month the Nepal chapter of the International Theatre Institute hosted a series of plays at Gurukul drama school in Baneswore. From April 23 to April 28 theatre groups from Nepal, India and Bangladesh had Gurukul's premises abuzz, staging three plays a day.

The Nepali contingent was made up of troupes from Kathmandu, Dharan and Bhojpur. While some of the Nepali plays seemed amateurish with actors displaying stage fright and some of them hamming it up, there were some notable performances: "Agniko Katha," directed by Sunil Pokharel of Aarohan, "Thamelko Yatra," directed by Puskar Gurung of the Dabali Theatre and "The Fire Raisers," directed by Sabina Lehmann. "Agniko Katha" has been staged many times both at home and abroad. Last March, the play had been selected as one of the 10 best plays staged at the Rangamahotsav, organized by the National School of Drama.

Among the visitors, the Alternative Living Theatre, Kolkota, came up with sterling performances. Probir Guha of the Alternative Living Theatre was the

man of the festival. He brought a dash of freshness to the festival with his novel style of presentation. Guha is preoccupied with breaking the spatial constraints of conventional theatre and creates a stage where there is none. During the performance of his plays, Guha would lead the audience inside the theatre hall or out at will, bringing them face to face with complexities of daily life, forcing them internalize the pathos. In one of his plays he blindfolded the audience, made them tour the Gurukul premises—climbing up and down the slopes, crossing over corpses and passing through ringing cries—only to uncover their eyes inside a toilet where people eating food greeted them—all in an effort to shock the audience.

His plays were unabashedly political. In "Tritiyayuddha" he lashed out at the third war—globalization, Coca-Colanization, McDonaldization and the G-8 countries. In "Jatrapath" he tried to demystify the myth of Shining India.

The Dabali theatre troupe from Kathmandu have decided to extend their shows beyond the festival and their play, "Thamelko Yatra," which is being staged everyday at Gurukul will run until May 12. **N**



PHOTO COURTESY/AAROCHAN

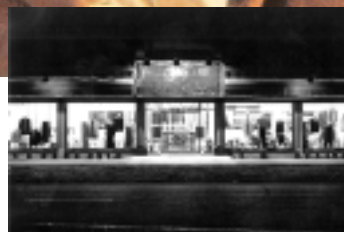
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The Buddhist Behind The Camera

Wayne's photos are moved and angered by the same existence that troubled Prince Siddhartha

BY SUSHMA JOSHI

The oft-repeated complaint about Buddhists, especially Western ones living in Nepal, is that they are so engrossed in their meditation practice that they have a difficult time naming the prime minister. The outside world is perceived through a transcendental blur. Wayne Amtzis is a welcome exception to this stereotype.

"That's an interesting shape over there," says Wayne, pointing to a crack in the concrete with a twinkle in his eye. "It looks like a Buddha. No, more like a rabbit." The first impression of irrepressible Wayne is that he does not have any holy cows tied up in his backyard.

In the garden, Wayne has sheets and sheets of his old poems which have been eaten by insects. When the poet, who keeps no backups, recently found his old poetry in such shape, he did not get into a fit of depression. He took photographs of them instead. Those pages were placed with other objects: garden cans, prayer beads and bowls, leaves, street signs, a torn vest, a rubber doll and other random street treasures found by the artist, and digitally remixed in the computer. This series, featuring the reincarnated poems, was exhibited at the Siddhartha Art Gallery this April.

Wayne looks at the darkness and light that makes up Nepal with the same clear-eyed and unflinching gaze, the same steady equilibrium. Unlike the aid workers purring by in their air-conditioned Pajeros, Wayne Amtzis moves down the crowded lanes and streets, slowly on foot, pausing to catch snatches of dialogue, facial gestures, the sound of street static. He has time to listen to a tired coolie over here, watch the spit come out of the mouth of a supposed madwoman over there.

His poems start gently enough, leading you down a modern space full of cars and corpses, technology and organic decay. The dénouement, when it comes, comes abruptly, shocking the reader out of complacency—the suicide of a sixteen year old girl, or a "Welcome to Nepal" sign sponsored by Coca-Cola. The almost unbelievable story, reported in the Kathmandu Post, of a child suckled by a bitch.

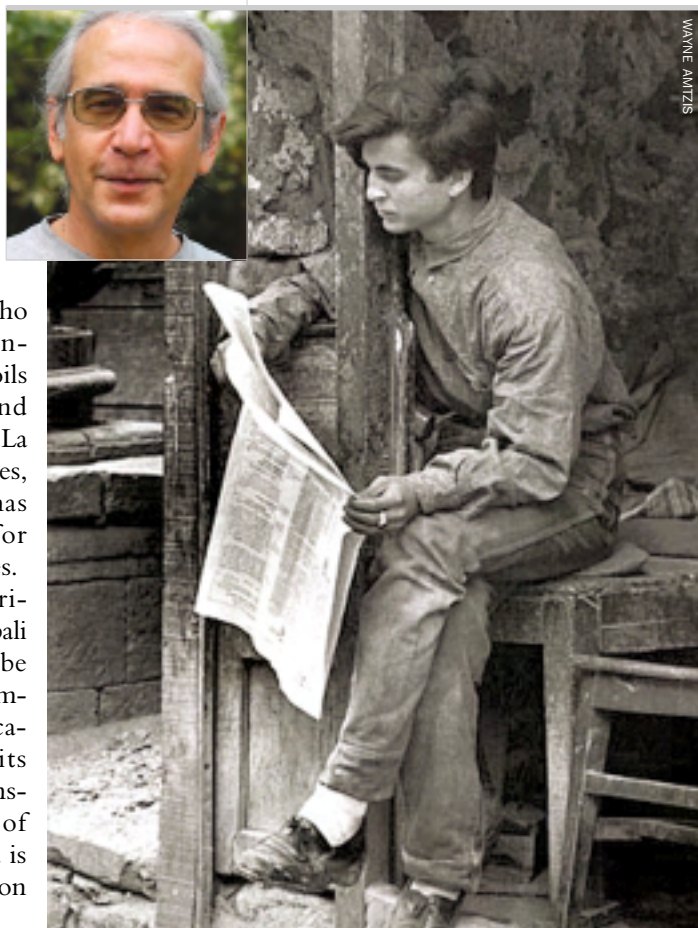
His photos, taken in black and white, are moved and angered by the same existence that troubled Prince Siddhartha—stark portraits of a little girl struggling with a heavy steel bucket; a man slumped tiredly over himself holding the stub of a dying beedi; a body sleeping beneath wall graffiti which proclaims a national conference.

Wayne has been writing poetry and creating photographs of Nepal for many years. His deep commitment to social justice is palpable. Unlike the Beat poets who came, saw, conquered the turmoils of their soul, and then left Shangri-La for greener pastures, Wayne Amtzis has stuck around for more painful times.

Wayne's contributions to the Nepali art field cannot be counted by the number of his publications or exhibits alone. He has translated poems of Nepali poets, and is currently at work on

a book of poems about water written by a Newari poet Purna Vaidya. He, along with his wife Judith, who works for the Cornell Nepal Study Program, are also behind-the-scene mentors to young Nepali artists and writers, providing vital and generous support to the burgeoning arts movement in Kathmandu. More importantly, he has allowed a sense of playful experimentation to seep into a world otherwise tightly regimented by gallery requirements and canonical dictates. After all, who but Wayne could dare put a torn vest found on the street up as an art object at a Nepali art gallery?

At the opening of his photography series, Wayne read aloud his poems. "Listen to the sounds," he urged, "don't try to assign meaning." Like his photographs, which have softened with the passing of time, his words are full of compassion. Outside in the streets, protests are raging. Blood flows and fear moves beneath the surface of the country. Listening to the impassioned voice of Wayne Amtzis, it is not difficult to understand that dukkha still stalks the people and land of Nepal. **N**



WAYNE AMTZIS



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Double Standards

As long as dalits continue to remain at the receiving end from janajatis, it somewhat dilutes the latter's case of state discrimination since they too are guilty of being party to state-sanctioned social discrimination

BY DEEPAK THAPA

On a recent trip to a predominantly Gurung village in northern Kaski, the group I was traveling in was feted by the local Aama Samuha in recognition of the support provided by one of us in their efforts to run a day-care center for pre-school children. It was rather late in the evening when we arrived, but the village mothers were out in force. They felicitated us all and sang and danced to show their appreciation. This was all fine except for the discomfort we felt when we noticed a number of women assembled outside the house jostling for space at the barred windows to peer at the festivities within. The community building was off-limits to the village dalits.

The Gurungs from the village must be aware that their community leaders in Kathmandu have been campaigning for a secular state and that their activism extends to a call to renounce Hinduism and revert to their indigenous religious practices. That, by definition, would also mean rejecting one of the fundamental tenets of Hinduism—the caste system. That message, however, seems not to have gone down strongly in this village or with the many other janajati communities, for janajatis across the country still adhere strongly to the 'water line' embodied in the long-defunct Muluki Ain of 1854.

This is obvious from the reports of atrocities against dalits covered by newspapers. Janajatis form a high percentage of those committing outrages against dalits, whether it be over marriage relations or simply a question of the age-old problem of access to water sources. Given their proclaimed disavowal of Hinduism, one would expect the janajati leadership to be quick to condemn such practices by those they claim to represent. One would assume that since janajati leaders attribute almost everything that has gone wrong in the country to the Hindu domination of the state, they would seek common ground with groups that have been historically discriminated against by the 'Manubadi' Hindu state in dismantling it. Dalits would be the most obvious fellow

travelers in this fight. Yet, not a word of protest is uttered by janajati leaders either individually or through the various organizations against the inhuman treatment of dalits by janajatis.

This begs the question: are janajatis involved in a straightforward power struggle against a state that manifests itself through 'bahunbad' or are they advocating a more egalitarian society? It probably is a combination of both but it seems to have slipped their mind that a just society also means justice for all. As long as dalits continue to remain at the receiving end from janajatis, it somewhat dilutes the latter's case of state discrimination since they too are guilty of being party to state-sanctioned social discrimination against an even more hapless group.

All the literature from janajati groups contain a laundry list of demands and no attention is paid to the issue of social reform within their own ranks. While their own place in the caste hierarchy enjoined upon by the Muluki Ain has been shrugged off by the janajatis as an imposition by the Hindu state, they seem quite comfortable consigning dalits to the

lowly status accorded them by the same document. The notion of 'untouchability' is as strongly ingrained among the country's janajatis as among its caste groups. And even though one can argue that, in the first place, caste rules were foisted upon the janajatis by a religion that the state identified with, the quest for justice should be able to embrace everyone, including dalits.

That is why it behooves upon janajati activists to take the message of equality down to the village and community level. While such a campaign would certainly be more desirable if it were undertaken at the national level by all social groups, and that is indeed happening gradually, it is all the more impera-

tive for janajatis to take the lead in their own communities. If nothing else, that would allow them to retain the moral high ground in their struggle against the monolithic structure of the Nepali state. Abnegation of Hinduism has to go hand in hand with a total rejection of the 'pure-impure' divide. These are, after all, two sides of the same coin. **N**



DEEPAK THAPA

SIDDHARTHA ART GALLERY

"Utopian Expression": A multi-media Exhibition by Sujan Chitrakar. Till May 28.
 Twenty-nine-year-old Sujan Chitrakar believes that his art is a medium for opening up newer dimensions to what he sees



as holistic growth through arts. "I feel my art will come alive only when the viewers can relate their own inner self with the presentation" says Sujan who diffuses his existence while fusing with the viewer's perception and playing with their senses to convey his own meanings of the "inner self" of each human being.

At times Sujan feels that his art tends to preach a message with a positive tone. "I know I cannot impose my beliefs upon the audience. But if I myself am going through a positive transformation, a change within me, it is likely that the audience will equally see their own self within the artwork, which could perhaps lead to transformations."

BY SALIL SUBEDI

ART EXHIBITIONS

GALLEY MOKSH

Diary of Portraits III by Carolyn Boch
 More than 40 portraits of people met in Nepal from 1996 to 2000. Till May 15.
 For information: 5551455.

GALLERY 9

Photo exhibition on gender and sexuality. Starts on May 10.
 For information: 4428694

BUDDHA GALLERY AND ZEN CAFÉ

Cho Go Dam's photographs of the exquisite stone statues and carvings at Ajanta, Ellora and Aurangabad.
 For information: 4422915.

SRIJANA ART GALLERY

Paintings and Sculptures by prominent contemporary artists. Till May 13.
 For information: 427889.

INDIGO GALLERY

Healing elements: Acrylic paintings by Chungpo Tsering and Reiki carpets by Rupert Smith. Till May 16.
 For information: 4413580.

SATURDAY CAFÉ, BOUDHA

"Faces and Aspects of Nepal": Mani Lama. Till June.
 For information: 2073157.

AWON PRESENTS

AWON is organizing its 2004 major fundraising event. "From the Austrian Alps to the Himalayan Foothills." On the list of performers are Karin Leitner on the Flute and Duccio Lombardi on the Harp. The Duo Medici is sponsored by the Embassy of Austria and proceeds from the event will go to the many charitable projects that are carried out by AWON in Nepal.

May 14 Matinee for Children at Babar Mahal Revisited. Time: 4 p.m. Tickets: Rs. 500 per child.

May 15 Gala Opening Night. A Formal Dinner will accompany this concert performance at the Regal Ballroom, Hotel Yak & Yeti at 6:30 p.m. Tickets: Rs. 1999 per person.

May 16 Final performance. Cocktails and concert at the Regal Ball Room, Hotel Yak & Yeti at 6:30 p.m. Tickets: Rs. 1000.

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HOTELVAJRA

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 Folk tunes of Nepal-Drums and Flute. Every Wednesday and Saturday at 6:30 p.m. at The Explorer's Restaurant of Hotel Vajra. For information: 4271545.

JUNELI SPOTLIGHT

Open mike night at the Juneli Bar in Hotel Annapurna. Come as you are, grab the mike onstage (there's a guitar provided if you need to use it), and step into the limelight. Time: 8 p.m., May 14.
 For information: 4221711 (Extn 4204).

EDUCATIONAL FAIR

2nd Direction Educational and Career Fair with Symposium topic "Education: Opportunities, Challenges and Realities"
 Inter-college musical contest, fashion show/ design contest, on the spot quiz, e-mail, Internet access and more. May 14-17. (10:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m.) at Bhrikuti Mandap. For information: 4258977.



Promotional concert tour organized by Taal Music. A great opportunity to check out Sabin Rai the husky voiced new entry into the Nepali pop scene. Sabin's album Sataha has already received rave reviews for its great hooks and his Bryan Adam's style vocal delivery. Accompanying Sabin will be stars Deepesh Kishore Bhattarai and Jems Pradhan.
 May 15: Biratnagar; May 17: Dharan; May 22: Kathmandu (BICC).
 Tickets: Rs. 100.

And Justice For All

For citizens sick of stories of corruption in high places, the quick fall of Sharbendra Nath Shukla from a cabinet perch marked a happy ending to a dirty story. But was it a case of over-reaction on the part of CIAA, the watchdog agency, that led to his ouster?

BY JOGENDRA GHIMIRE

I am no great fan of former minister Sharbendra Nath Shukla. Nor do I have any sympathy for Rastriya Prajatantra Party leader Rabintra Nath Sharma, who is facing corruption charges at the Special Court for acts committed during his days as finance minister. But the circumstances under which Shukla was forced to resign as minister makes one wonder if Shukla was hauled for an act of alleged malfeasance or merely to satisfy the ego of the powerful Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA).

As a big fan of the CIAA and its current Chief Commissioner, I can't help but find it troublesome that all indications point to the latter.

For starters, Shukla was named as a witness in the defense filed by RPP leader Sharma, in response to the CIAA charge-sheet, with the Special Court. One can question the wisdom behind naming a minister as a witness but Sharma, the defendant in a criminal proceeding, presumably felt comfortable about having Shukla, a close political associate, as one of his witnesses who would vouch for his integrity. And that is what Shukla did. Upon receiving summons, he presented himself before the Special Court and questioned the intention of the CIAA, accusing the constitutional body of conspiring against his mentor Sharma. The very next day, the CIAA made a written representation to the Prime Minister. It raised objection over his claims, insisted that he had cast aspersion on the constitutional body, and demanded action against him. The hint was more than clear. Shukla tendered his resignation the next day.

For citizens sick of stories of corruption in high places, the departure of Shukla marked a happy ending to a corruption story. After all, an audacious minister had fallen from the cabinet perch for showing solidarity with an accused in a corruption case.

But the story does not quite end there. In fact, the manner in which Shukla was shown the door raises a few questions about the due process of law that every accused in a CIAA-initiated prosecution—no matter how unpopular—is entitled to. And for that reason, this episode deserves a closer scrutiny.

Granted, that Shukla was a sitting minister and granted too, that after the CIAA files its charge-sheet with the Special Court, the government prosecutors take up the case. That makes the government a party to the case, and it was probably unethical for Shukla to present himself as a witness against the government's case. However, the question that the CIAA raised was not about this apparent conflict of interest between Shukla the minister and Shukla the witness. By all indications, the CIAA was okay with the idea of having a sitting minister as a witness for one of its accused. Shukla got into trouble when he spoke against the CIAA. It would then mean that the CIAA would only tolerate defense witnesses who would at best help it gather supporting evidences, and at worst do minimum damage. Anybody who didn't fit into either of the categories could be a potential target for persecution.

Considering that most of those investigated by the CIAA are public servants, and the likelihood that most of their witnesses could be subject to the government's disciplinary rules, the CIAA's reaction to Shukla's criticisms will have far-reaching implications. It was a case of overreaction.

After all, the system of justice demands that two parties in a court of law are adversarial with each other. The wisdom behind this common law rule, which we follow to a great extent, is that zealous representation of their respective positions by the opposing parties helps the judge in pursuit of truth. If we take that adversarial dimension away, there is a real danger that the system could tilt in favor of the party that has more support outside of court. It is to ensure that parties put forth their case

without fear of persecution that the arguments and assertions made by a party in a court proceeding are not accepted as evidences of defamation. In any case, it is unlikely that Shukla's rhetorical outburst helped his defendant's case, all the more reason for the CIAA not to be disturbed by his testimony.

As an institution that has acquired considerable powers—and teeth—for investigation and as one of the very few constitutional bodies which commands a great deal of public respect, are we expecting too much when we ask the CIAA not take short-cuts to investigations?

In fact, the lofty—and difficult—objective of taking on the rich and powerful will have few short-cuts. And short-cuts like the Shukla episode are more likely to harm the image of the Commission in the long run. **N**



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Wanna Go For Coffee?

Four years ago, when four young entrepreneurs—two of them 26 and two others 27—took over the distribution of Nescafé’s coffee vending machines, things didn’t look so rosy. They had to convince Nepalis, through exhibitions and on-site demos, that machine-made beverages were safe to drink—and easy to access. Then, last February, the four

friends—their company is named RAYS, after the first letters in their names—started making their own vending machines in Nepal. To date, they have sold 12 of the Nepal-made machines and half a dozen are on the production line. Not exactly a success story, one may say. When you consider that it’s not just the machines that they are selling but a concept of new eating habits, their modest success takes on an entirely new dimension.

Subodh Das Shrestha, executive director of RAYS International, talked to Satish Jung Shahi of Nation Weekly about Nepalis’ coffee (or tea) habits, the vending machine and his young team.

How is business?

Business is okay so far, though things don’t look very rosy in the long term due to the current conflict. Our market may be small but it’s a virgin market and a lot more can be done. People have slowly started accepting the concept of vending machine. We sold 12 new locally made machines in the last four months. That brought our total to 65 machines (including those made in India), which have been installed in different locations in the Valley.

How does the vending machine work?

It just requires mineral water and ingredients (for tea and coffee), which are placed manually. The system is then controlled by a motherboard (to control the machine) that our engineers have designed. Everything from then on is automated. You just place a cup on the dispenser below and wait for the machine

to fill it up with tea, coffee or anything the machine has been designed to deliver. The machine can cost anywhere between Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 45,000 depending upon its specifications.

How is the machine made in Nepal?

All of the outer casings come from India. Our engineers build the metal cast, and the motherboard is assembled here. The engineers—four of them—are all young entrepreneurs like us who have their own ideas. Even Nescafé appreciated our efforts, as our machine turned out to be much cheaper (Rs. 10,000 saved on every single machine) compared to the machines that had to be imported all the way from Delhi.

How is the coffee trend in Nepal?

Nepalis still don’t think anything other than *chiya* when it comes to work breaks or casual get-togethers. They think coffee is a luxury and expensive. It is this concept that has made coffee cost much more than tea. (People think tea is cheaper, buy more tea; and obviously because of economy of scale, tea ends up costing less.) Coffee has been selling for Rs. 10-12 whereas a cup of tea costs Rs. 5-8 on the machine. The coffee vending machines are mostly used by corporate houses. We would like to see it being used even at public places.

Why should we use vending machines when getting served is fun?

Machines are efficient, hygienic and cost effective. It prepares coffee within six seconds and has a brand name—Nescafé—

attached to it. Why hire a peon just to make *chiya* for you in office? It is waste of human resources. The fun part is that there will be people right from the boss down to the ground employees drinking from the same vending machine. This sense of camaraderie is very motivating.

How did you get into the business?

The four of us are school friends. Rohit Maskey, Antu Charan Shrestha, and Yalamer Khairgoli and I came up with the idea for RAYS four years ago, while we were doing B. Com. Earlier, we had plans to run a fun world with video games and go-carts but we thought that wouldn’t work out, as Kathmandu was still a small market. It’s a lot more fun to do business together since we have known each other from the first grade (St. Xavier’s, Godavari).

Is the business tough for young entrepreneurs?

The problem in Nepal is that while the young are not actually discouraged, they are not encouraged either. Luckily our families were very supportive of the new venture. Many people who have studied abroad come back with great ideas.

Do you want to keep selling tea and coffee?

Definitely not. We are all young and that is our biggest advantage. We would like to keep growing. There is still much to do to attract the mass to the coffee machine. We are also thinking about vending machines for newspapers, confectionaries and even condoms. **N**

Basic Geography

The true story of a lone genius who solved the greatest marine problem of his time

BY SMRITI JAISWAL

Dava Sobel's engaging venture "Longitude" is the story of the man who gave us the magic box known today as the marine chronometer. Today an ordinary phenomenon, and for most only a time-keeping machine, it was before 1737 a mere fantasy, the necessity for which then transcends our need for it now. Before Harrison's marine time-telling machine was invented, navigation was a dangerous undertaking.

Without an accurate knowledge of time sailors could not know their longitude, which meant they could not know their location. As a result they drifted off course and many a time floundered in the endless expanse of water, often without hope of finding port. Ships ran aground on unexpected islands and drowned.

There was no alternative to creating an accurate marine chronometer: commerce needed the sea; and seafarers needed to know their longitudes. To encourage inventors, the British Parliament put up an award of £20,000 for anyone who could design a chronometer that would overcome the longitude problem. In 1737 John 'Longitude' Harrison presented to the world the first virtually

friction-free, inelastic pendulum time clock.

Sobel deftly outlines the history of

the two methods that worked towards creating the first marine chronometer. One was the popular, revered, complicated astronomical method. The astronomers (including Isaac Newton) charted the stars, the moon, and the planets. They studied their paths and eclipses, indulged in heavy mathematics and diverse calculations. The other method, adopted by Harrison, focused not on working with the heavens but with creating a virtually inelastic pendulum. The astronomers were not only more popular, they were also immensely powerful and looked down on horologists (clock-makers).

Against this background Sobel paints Harrison's pursuit. A self-taught Yorkshire man, Harrison is a miracle because he was actually a carpenter and received no horological education. The marvel of his accomplishment is further foregrounded when Sobel reveals that his earlier clocks were "constructed almost entirely of wood.... The wooden teeth of the wheels never snapped off with normal wear but defied destruction by their design." Plus, they were almost friction resistant—an amazing feat since no clockmaker of the time had accomplished this. The clock pendulums of Harrison's day contracted or expanded with changes in temperature, thereby ticking off inaccurate time. Harrison also defied the powerful astronomers by proposing a solution that needed no celestial mathematics at all. A country bum could use his instrument!

Although "Longitude" is a book about scientific concepts, readers need not possess preliminary knowledge of clocks and naval-navigation to enjoy the work. Sobel is a master at simplifying the most complicated of ideas and her lucidity makes the writing both engaging and easy to follow.

A story about accolades, wars, political intrigues, personal envies, establishment dogmas and high moral standards, "Longitude" is a tribute to determination and intelligence. And like Harrison's watches—a wonderful blend of science and art. **N**

Mysticism Demystified

THE INNER LIFE OF KRISHNAMURTI

When Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) was 14, early Theosophists proclaimed him the next messianic world leader and introduced him to ancient perennial wisdom. He was educated in Great Britain and spent his life sharing insights around the world. He became one of the greatest spiritual teachers of the 20th century. Among the millions he has influenced are the Dalai Lama, Deepak Chopra, Joseph Campbell, Dr Jonas Salk, Henry Miller and Aldous Huxley.

Krishnamurti was a revolutionary in the truest sense.

For over 60 years he publicly eschewed belief systems and presuppositions of any sort, including the esoteric systems of the Theosophists.

In "The Inner Life of Krishnamurti," Aryel Sanat explodes the myths at the heart of the controversies surrounding this much-loved and complex man. Sanat's meticulous research reveals that, contrary to appearances, Krishnamurti's inner life was rich in esoteric happenings. Privately, he never denied the existence of his perennial "Masters," nor did he deny being a vehicle for the manifestation of the Lord Maitreya or the Christ. In fact, according to Krishnamurti, these inner realities were present every day of his mature life and intimately related to his work.

The admittedly strange story that unfolds is critical for understanding Krishnamurti's life and views. It is also essential to Buddhism, the teachings of Gurdjieff, the perennial renaissance—in fact, most of contemporary spirituality.

(Reviewed by Aryel Sanat for Pilgrims Books)

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Ray Of Hope

Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa resigned on Friday admitting that he had failed in his mandate to put together a political consensus and resolve the Maoist issue. By that reckoning, he should have quit the day the Maoists called off the ceasefire in August. Thapa's efforts to get the political parties to work together had proved ineffective for more than two months while his government's offer of talks to the Maoists had come far too late. Despite these setbacks, the Prime Minister clung tenaciously to his chair—with grave implications for the country.

Even though it came late, Thapa's resignation has offered the country yet another opportunity for a fresh start. But we feel compelled to advise cautious optimism; there are too many uncertainties about the future. For any government that comes to power will not only have to signify the end to "regression" but it will also have to assume the more difficult task of bringing lasting peace to the country.

Obviously, the major question for the moment is who is going to lead the future government. King Gyanendra's insistence on someone with a "clean image" may not go down well with the agitating parties. It was a similar qualification that saw the formation of the Lokendra Bahadur Chand government in October 2002, and the beginning of the political protests that have reached this stage today. The logical step would be to give the parties in the last parliament the right to decide who should become Prime Minister for the simple reason that they represent the sovereign people's will the last time it was exercised.

With the golden apple so close in sight, the tenuous unity the five political parties have so far managed will be stretched to the utmost. Past experience should have taught the leaders that striking out on their own can only lead to disaster and they have to do everything they can to preserve their united front. But the five parties should also remember that their claim to being the people's representatives also extends to the other two parties in the last parliament, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party and the Nepali

Congress (Democratic)—even though the idea of conferring the claims to the latter may seem loathsome to the Nepali Congress, and despite the equivocal role of the former since October 2002. Any political consensus without the concurrence of these two parties cannot be construed as the voice of the people.

A very important point, whether one likes it or not (parties most certainly don't) is that the King is an important player in present-day Nepal. He has a loyal backing of the Army. And monarchy—if not everything that King Gyanendra represents—still enjoys a degree of legitimacy. Maybe the country now needs another K.P. Bhattarai, who as the head of the 1990-91 interim government tactfully handled volatile issues related to the transfer of power from the Panchayat King to the constitutional head of the state. The parties most definitely should give their best in taking the King along. It's not about settling personal scores, it's about putting the country back on track. Of course, this applies to the King as well.

The political parties have indicated that should they come to power, their first priority will be a dialogue with the Maoists. They would be well advised to remember that two phases have yielded nothing and that while driving a hard bargain is an accepted strategy of negotiations, it has to be accompanied with real concessions. Without a broad political understanding on this, any dialogue will be akin to groping in the dark, which could lead to disastrous consequences for a country already hamstrung by nine years of fighting.

Celebrating Thapa's ouster will mean nothing if all these issues are not addressed. It is up to the parties, the monarchy, and the Maoists, to make the most of this opportunity now. Failing that, Nepalis will be condemned to yet another gratuitous cycle of political uncertainty and wanton violence.

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