

EATING OUTSIDE | POLICING THE POACHERS | LEADERS CLASSIFIED

MAY 23, 2004 VOL. 1, NO. 5

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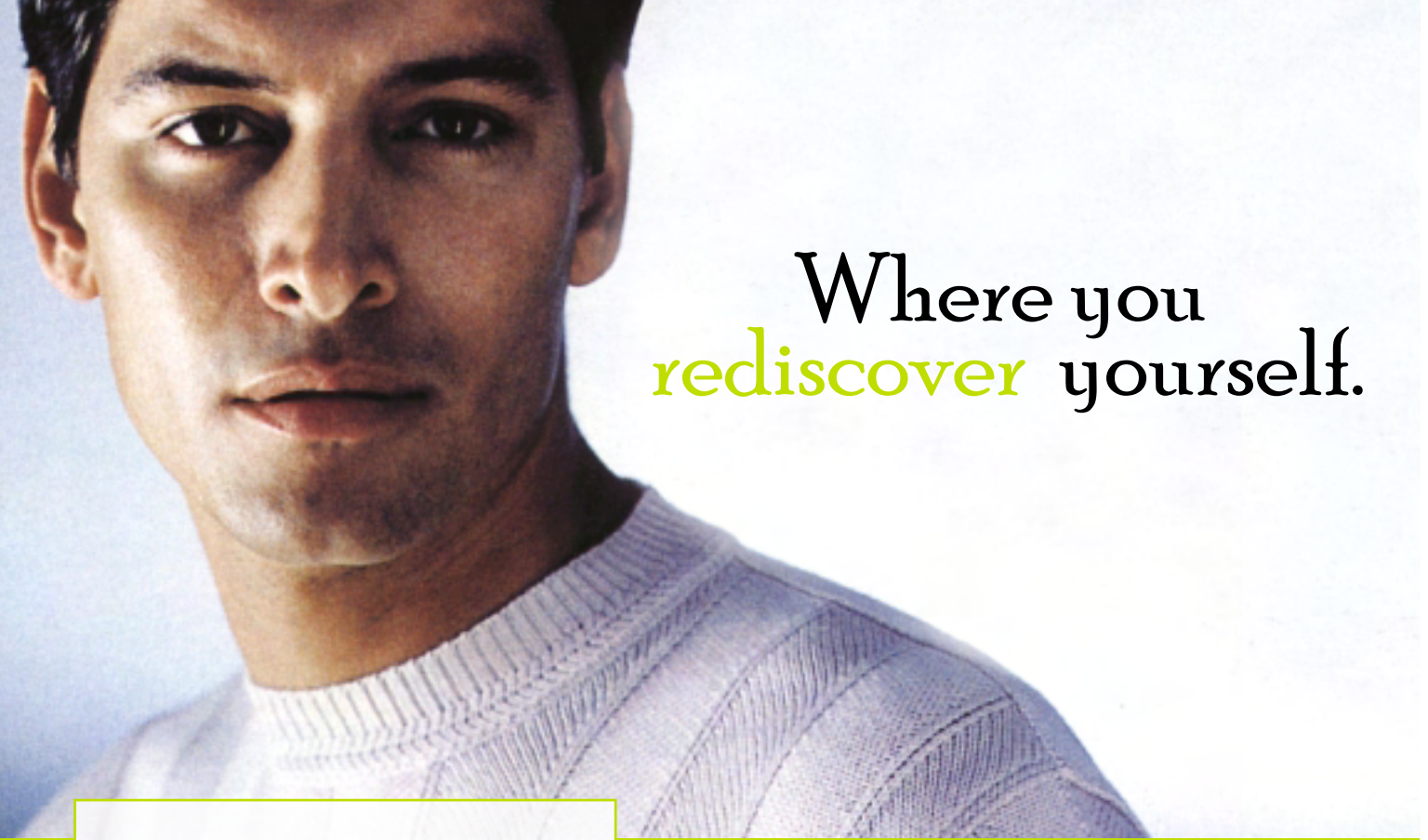
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Public intellectuals with formidable mass support, charismatic and incorruptible: these are the progressives who are as much at ease in the fishing villages of Saptari as when sharing lobster meals with statesmen in Oslo.

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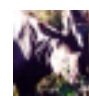
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**nation**  
WEEKLY

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Kathmandu, Nepal (Regd. 113/059-060).  
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PUBLISHER: The Mirror Media Pvt. Ltd

AD ENQUIRIES: Tel. 4229825, 4261831, 4263098  
COLOR SEPARATION: ScanPro, Pulchowk, 5548861, 5552335  
PRINTING: Variety Printing Press, 4278869  
DISTRIBUTION: R.B. News, 4232784, 4244679

Nation Weekly is published every Monday by The Mirror Media Pvt. Ltd.  
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Vol. 1, No. 5. For the week May 17-23, 2004, released on May 17

C O N T A C T

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WEEKLY

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E-mail: editorial@nation.com.np

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Mail: Nation Weekly

The Media House, GPO 8975, EPC 5620  
Tripureshor, Kathmandu, Nepal.

**SUBSCRIPTION**

E-mail: subscription@nation.com.np

**Nation Weekly**, The Media House, GPO 8975  
EPC 5620, Tripureshor, Kathmandu, Nepal  
Tel: 2111102, 4229825, 4261831, 4263098  
Fax: 4216281

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WEEKLY

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// Nation looks good but you will do well not to ignore issues outside Kathmandu //

BINOD SHRESTHA

Business news finally I WAS ALMOST BEGINNING TO despair whether Nation was ever going to do anything remotely related to “business.” The article by Satish Jung Shahi and Tiku Gauchan on how remittances have fuelled the construction boom in the Valley is timely and interesting (“A House for Mr. Pathak,” Remittance, May 16). As the article points out, little colonies have sprouted on the outskirts of Kathmandu and many of these settlements have now developed into a world in themselves. Dhapasi, Sitapaila, Tikhe Dewal and Kusunti, for example, have clusters of houses not just on the fringes of Ring Road but even quite a distance away and the neighborhoods are ever expanding. What the article ignores, however, is similar construction booms in cities, towns, and tiny highway hubs all over Nepal, particularly in Tarai—along the East-West Highway, for one. Then in Biratnagar, Itahari, Dharan, but also in Chandranighapur, Lalbandi and Birtamod. A lot of these houses are built on remittance money. Whatever little I have seen of Nation so far looks good but you will do well not to ignore issues outside Kathmandu. After all, you have very correctly raised issues of inclusion in your paper.

BINOD SHRESTHA  
CHHATA CHOWK  
DHARAN

WHILE PEOPLE LIKE MR. PATHAK ARE still hoping to return home to Nepal some day, you should also keep in mind the tens of thousands of other Nepalis who are building our houses—and dreams—in our adopted country. I hope some day you will have time to write

about us—and our children. We still are very much Nepalis, though we don’t send money home.

SUMAN  
VIA EMAIL

Uprety’s compassion I AM IMPRESSED BY SANJEEV UPRETY’S Arts & Society pieces. His humane treatment of ordinary characters reminds me of celebrated writer Joseph Mitchell’s profiles in the New Yorker magazine. Just like Mitchell, Uprety elevates what could be boring renditions of marginalized lives by highlighting the alienated man’s will to survive in the face of overwhelming odds, and still come out a better human being. Both the Pheri Jogi (“Not Coming Back Again,” Arts & Society, May 2) and Buddhi Thapa (“The Sky in his Eyes,” Arts & Society, April 19-25) maintain a faith in the greater common good despite upheavals. Uprety’s distillations from such narratives read like compassionate yet earthily funny documentaries made by an ace director. I guess some people do possess the third eye after all.

BHUPAL GURUNG  
VIA EMAIL



Thank you HERE’S FINALLY THE KIND OF magazine I have been looking for. I like

your "Picture of the Week" section and book reviews. The political issues are well covered and there is ample room for those who aren't interested in politics. A thumbs-up to the Nation's team.

JOSEPH GABA  
VIA E-MAIL

YOUR WRITE-UP ON THEATRE ("More Matter With Less Art," by Ajit Baral, May 16) was a welcome break. Indeed, the plays hosted by the International Theatre Institute at Gurukul gave many of us the opportunity to see entirely different types of plays. Probir Guha's Alternative Living Theatre was obviously the star attraction. Committed theatre artists like Sunil Pokhrel do deserve their share of public adulation. Thanks Nation and thanks Ajit Baral.

SURESH MALLA  
BANESHWORE

I HAVE BEEN READING NATION'S web editions for the last two weeks. As a Nepali who has spent most of her life outside the country, news from home gives me a sense of where I come from. In the last few years, almost all the major newspapers have been out there for the asking. Nepalnews started the trail and you are now the new addition. I happily admit that I owe my knowledge of Nepal's politics solely to the Internet and I don't claim to understand much. Politics in Nepal seems to have changed beyond imagination overnight. But I at least have a handle over larger trends now. Thanks.

SARITA SHARMA  
USA  
VIA EMAIL

CONGRATULATIONS ON A commendable job. You offer balanced and analytical contents—arguably there has never been a better time to do so. Keep up the good work and give us more thought-provoking reports and articles on wide range of issues including news and views from the diaspora like "New Nepali Dream" (by Yubaraj Acharya, May 16).

SURENDRA R SHRESTHA  
ARUNKHOLA, NAWALPARASI  
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VIA EMAIL

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Mailing Address: Nation Weekly  
GPO Box 8975 EPC 5620  
Media House  
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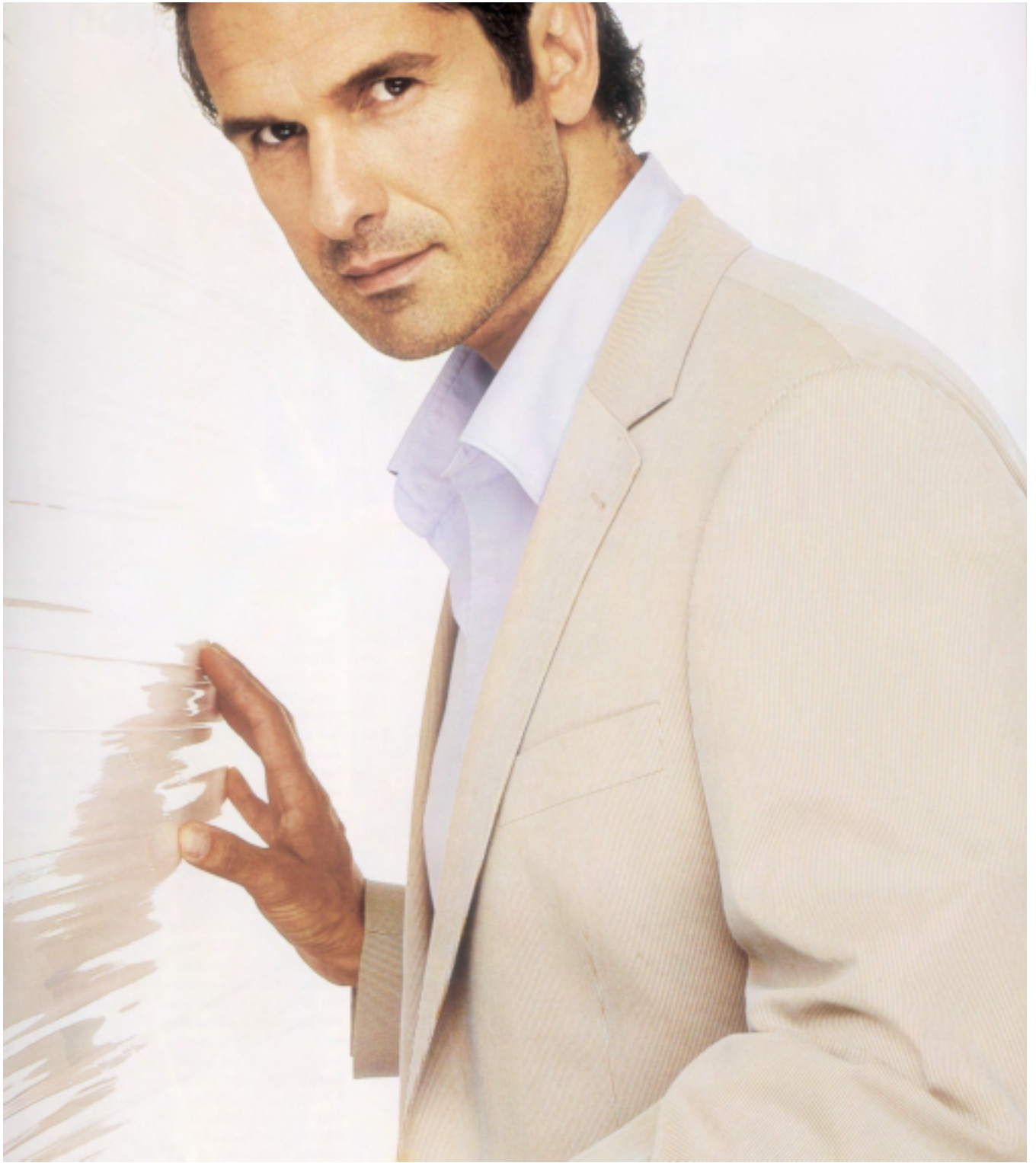
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**SWEEPING THE REMAINS:**  
Somebody's gotta get the streets back in shape after the protests

nw/Sagar Shrestha



# The Gall of Gallup

Why don't pre-poll and exit poll surveys quite work in India unlike in western democracies? Casting of vote in the west by and large reflects individual choice. In India, and in the region in general, the individual vote is still part of a larger 'deal'

BY YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

**P**olls outcome at times throw surprises, especially in countries where voting is influenced by factors other than politics or issue-based commitment. The outcome of the Indian poll is a classic example. Not only did it surprise the media channels who had spent huge sums of money in conducting opinion and exit polls, it apparently injected a sense of complacency among the projected winners and demoralized the 'losers.'

Opinion polls on a national scale was first conducted in India by Pranoy Roy for India Today way back in December 1984. The polls accurately predicted unprecedented victory for the Congress Party led by Rajiv Gandhi who was riding high on a wave of sympathy sweeping across the country after the assassination of his mother Indira Gandhi.

Ever since, opinion and exit polls have become an integral part of pre-electoral exercises, but they have not always been accurate. Whenever the poll results have tallied with the opinion or exit poll figures, the factors behind the final outcome have emerged differently from the ones projected during the pre-poll survey. But such opinion poll and exit poll exercises are known to have influenced those who are not committed to any party ideologically or otherwise. And numbers of such voters run in millions in India.

Some Congress and non-BJP leaders raised this issue in the form of disapproval when the final tally ran counter to almost all the exit polls. In the final count, the Congress and its allies cornered more seats—although short of the magic figure of 272—far ahead of the BJP. They accused the media of trying to create an artificial euphoria in favor of the BJP. Atal Behari Vajpayee resigned promptly conceding defeat and with no sign of return to power in the near future. But the opinion poll conductors will continue to get censored.

In fact, some people had tried to seek judicial intervention to stop exit and pre-poll surveys on the plea that it would influence voters. But the

Supreme Court decided not to issue any dictate in the domain of the media and research groups.

Why don't pre-poll and exit poll surveys quite work in India unlike in western democracies? Casting of vote in the west by and large reflects individual choice. In India, and in the region in general, the individual vote is still part of a larger 'deal.' Even within the family, it's influenced by men and other patriarchal phenomena. Those who defy this will not admit to others that they voted for someone out of free choice. In some cases, the 'mukhiyas' or traditional leaders even issue 'dictates' in the areas of their hold, and defiance is not an easy job.

Exit polls and pre-poll surveys enlist what they have been 'dictated to do,' rather than who they have voted or would be voting for. Along with this controversy, erosion in credibility of the poll surveyor

is something that will continue to cast shadow on their future business prospects. They will also continue to get grilled both by losers and winners notwithstanding their projects. The Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition—the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)—had begun demonstrating overconfidence even during the electioneering, under the false notion that the 'India shining or feel good factor' had cast a magic spell on the voters, and that 80-year-old Vajpayee would lead the country for another five-year term. In the absence of such a prediction, the BJP leaders would have perhaps tried to assess the people's mood through party network and other agencies which could have been much



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more objective and closer to the reality.

On the other hand, the polls prompted the Congress Party to put an extra effort to improve their prospects. It will be difficult to say how much this 'warning factor' worked, but the Congress Party even with a mix of jibes will continue to thank the surveyors.

(Ghimire is the Editor of Samay) **N**



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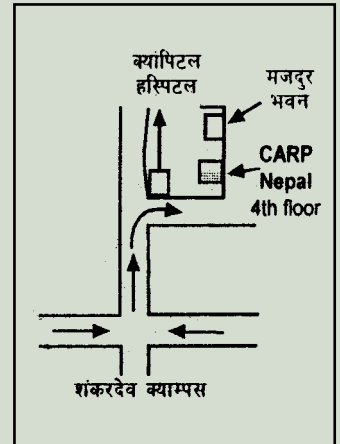
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## Peace rally

The Samata Party attempted to organize what they called a peace motorcycle rally during the second day of the five-party called Nepal Banda on May 11. But the rally turned violent after the five-party cadres burnt three motorcycles and beat up some rally participants at Bhrikutimandap.

Later, the Tata Mobile that Samata President Narayan Singh Pun was using that day had onboard wooden boards and bricks, apparently to hit back at the assailants. Pun, a member of the Royalist government headed by Lokendra Bahadur Chand, hit the headlines after the ceasefire last January. Pun, it turned out, had been a go-between in the pre-ceasefire Palace-Maoists talks.



## New Machhindranath

The builders of the Rato Machhindranath that ominously fell last month have their task cut out. They are trying their best to get the chariot up and running by June 4, the deadline set by the priests who say it is inauspicious to pull the chariot for quite a while after that date. The builders then will have to wait as long as August 31 or September 5—other auspicious dates—for the annual chariot-pulling. The Guthi Sansthan that oversees the Machhindranath festivities estimates that the reconstruction will cost an additional Rs. 600,000.

## Civil servants on strike

It's the civil servants now. Taking cue from political parties, civil servants came out on the street against the outgoing Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa government and regression. Singha Durbar looked empty with only a few secretaries sitting tight in their office. Even payment booths of Nepal Water Supply and Nepal Electricity Authority remained closed. This is one of the rarest times that the civil servants have participated in a street protest against their own government.

## Trekking hub

Maoists targeted a tourist hub, Ghandruk, killing two prominent locals. Sixty-year-old Dilman Gurung was the president of the Hotel Owners Association in the area and 31-year-old Ishwore Gurung ran a telephone booth and cable television. The killings occurred on the day the Maoists had announced a blockade of the Ghandruk area. Tourism operators fear the Maoist action could hit tourist arrivals in the area hard. Popularly identified as a launch pad for the Annapurna circuit trek, Nepal's prime trekking destination, a number of hotels in the Ghandruk area have already closed down amid widespread extortions.



**LIVING LEGENDS:** Singers Prem Dhoj (L) and Phatteman share a light moment at the Image Award ceremony

## Stop the attack

Amnesty International has urged the Maoists to stop attacking civilians and targeting aid agencies. There has been an increase in the bombing and ambushing of civilian targets as at least 14 civilians have been already killed by Maoists since the beginning of May, the rights group said in a statement. It also expressed concerns over alleged mass abductions by the Maoists and called on the Maoist leadership to order an immediate halt to all attacks on civilians and uphold Geneva Conventions. The London-based organization also expressed concerns at reports of threats by the Maoists towards aid organizations. Ten major bilateral



donors last week suspended their programs in five districts in Far West and Mid West-Kailali, Jumla, Humla, Mugu and Dolpa. Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, Germany, Japan, Norway, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the European Union said in a joint statement that the Maoists had issued threats against a number of development agencies.

## Sahid Smarak standings

Three Star Club leads the current standing along with the most number of goals scored (16) during the ongoing Sahid Smarak Football League. The Mahendra Police Club is second in the table with 12 goals but has conceded none. Both the teams have won all five matches played so far. By the time we went to press, the Brigade Boys were at the bottom of the league table. It had conceded 18 goals in total.



## Highland marathon

The second Tenzing-Hillary Everest Marathon will take place on May 29. The 42-km race starts at Everest Base Camp and the finish line is Namche Bazaar. The event is open to all runners (you need a doctor's bill of health to participate). Last year, the marathon took place on May 19 but from this year on the event will be held on May 29, the date of first Everest ascent. The event is organized by Himalayan Expeditions and the entry fee for a foreigner is Rs. 1,000. Nepalis are waived the fee.



### Walking to exams

The two-day banda last week was especially harsh for some 115,000 eleventh graders, most of whom had to walk to their exam centers. On Wednesday, after the five-party alliance refused to waive off the day's banda, hundreds of youngsters decided to either walk or cycle to one of the 56 centers in the Valley.

### Cement shutdown

Udayapur Cement Factory, Nepal's largest producer of cement, closed down due to the unavailability of limestone. This happened because the ropeway that was being used to haul limestone broke down. Spare parts for the repairs have to be imported from Germany.

### Poll spillover

India's general elections were not followed with as much interest as in the past by Nepalis, who were caught up in a fresh bout of political instability that started with Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa's resignation. Observers, however, were quick to point out one interesting parallel: Thapa's fall came almost together with his counterpart Atal Behari Vajpayee's, though amid entirely different set of circumstances. Others were quick to point out Nepali monarchy's—particularly King Gyanendra's—growing ties with India's saffron brigade and asked how BJP's de-

parture would be viewed by King Gyanendra. Most observers however were of the view that Indo-Nepal ties will remain unchanged who-soever comes to power in New Delhi.

### Faster Internet

Subisu Cablenet's subscribers will, within the next week, be able to connect to the Internet through the same cables that bring TV channels into their homes. That is, if they subscribe to Subisu's cable Internet services. Cable Internet, at its lowest bandwidth, is still twice as fast as the conventional dial-up system commonly used in Nepal. Subisu Cablenet, which primarily provides cable TV service in the Baluwatar and Thamel areas, will soon extend its network all the way upto Patan. Subisu obtained its cable Internet license from Nepal Telecom in December last year and competitors Space Time Net got theirs soon after. Space Time Net is primed to start cable Internet services too. Subisu

will charge Rs.2,200 per month for its Internet services.



### More planes in

Flight JA 9W 4107's landing in Kathmandu last Saturday marked the beginning of Jet Airways services in Nepal. Jet Airways, a private Indian airline company, will have daily flights between Kathmandu and Delhi. One-way tickets for the economy class will cost Rs. 6,824 and Rs. 8,856 for business class.

### Euro 2004

Euro 2004, sponsored by Carlsberg, brings 16 European teams together next month. The event already has Nepali football fans excited. Hosts Portugal and France, second in FIFA ranking after Brazil, are hot favorites. The free-flowing Dutch team

could be a wildcard in the quadrennial tournament. Nepali football fans, however, are expected to root for England, thanks to the English Premier League's increased popularity in Nepal. ESPN and Star Sports will beam the matches live while it is not yet clear which of the local television network will get the broadcasting rights.

### Another Thapa

ANFA plans to sign up former Indian international, Shyam Thapa, as coach for Nepal's youth teams. ANFA president Ganesh Thapa plans to rope in Shyam (no relations) by the end of this month, according to the Himalayan Times. The contract will last for four years. Born in Gulmi in 1948, Shyam Thapa started his illustrious career with the Indian football giant East Bengal in 1966. Nepal is also on the lookout for a foreign coach for its national team. Nepal finished sixth in the SAF Games early this year, its worst showing in the regional Games.



DIPLOMATIC LICENSE: UN vehicles ferry their employees during the banda last week

# POLICING THE POACHERS

Conservationists are nervous that Nepal's sterling conservation efforts—revival of the one-horned rhino, for one—will continue to take a backseat for some time due to overwhelming security concerns and political uncertainty

BY PRAKASH SHARMA

Last month, security forces at Tatopani made a huge seizure of tiger skins from a Tibet-bound truck. Many quickly remembered three major hauls made at the border post between 1989 and 1999: elephant bones weighing 1,040 kg, and 115 of kg and 218 kg of shahtoosh, a fine wool extracted from necks of Tibetan antelope or the Chirus.

The news however got drowned amid the din of street protests in Kathmandu where wildlife officials voice concern that the poor security situation has contributed to growing instances of poaching and possibly growing volume of trade in animal parts, too. They and other conservationists are nervous that Nepal's sterling conservation efforts—revival of the one-horned rhino, for one—will continue to take a backseat to overwhelming security concerns and political uncertainty.

"When we have a deep political crisis in the country," says a senior official at the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), "the traders become active. They find new tricks and discover new routes." And when 15 people are dying each day, deaths of animals draw far less attention.

While documents show that almost all the border points between Nepal and India have recorded illegal wildlife trade of some kind or another, in the north, the trade is concentrated in Darchula, Taklakot, Lo-Manthangs in Mustang, Sankhuwasava, Taplejung and Tatopani.

And despite frequent seizures, like the one in Tatopani last month, the economics of demand and supply continues to fuel the trans-border trade. Oriental medicines made from tiger bones and other animal parts are widely consumed in China and in places with large Chinese communities the world over. The contrabands are said to provide remedy for a wide range of problems; the tiger bones and rhino horns are believed to work as aphrodisiacs. Oftentimes, wildlife watch groups say, the illegal traders operate in the guise of regular trans-Himalayan traders.

"Lhasa is a major center for the trade in in wildlife goods and

in Sigatse the trade is thriving," says Mangal Man Singh, a journalist, whose new book, "Trading for Extinction," documents the movement of animal parts from Nepal to Tibet.

**Kathmandu has become so infamous for the trade of parts of different endangered species that shops openly sell coats made from leopard, tiger and snow leopard skins.**



From the market to the jungle, it's a long chain of command. Poachers, who are active in and around the protected areas, target everything from the one-horned rhino in Chitwan and Bardia to the Royal Bengal tiger to the Himalayan bear to different species of deer. The contraband then passes different layers of middlemen before it hits the road. At times, Nepal is just a transit.

"The main problem," says Shakya, who heads the Kathmandu-based Wildlife Watch Group, "is that Nepal shares porous borders with India and China." While officials and experts may decry the movement of animal parts, stopping the trade is a very complex affair. The other problem is the lack of awareness about wildlife contrabands among officials—the police, and officials with the forest, customs and security agencies.





Smuggling techniques are ever changing and police and customs officials have little experience in monitoring illegally traded wildlife products. Evidences suggest the officials are largely unable to detect the illegal trade due to lack of training on identifying the smuggling techniques like the concealing of musk pods in butter vats or the inserting of tiger bones in cigarettes.

"This lack of knowledge has meant that trade in wildlife is going unabated," says Shakya, who insists that trade is "going right under the nose of law enforcement authorities" in some posh neighborhoods of the capital. His book lists areas where wildlife traders are operating and how the trade is thriving.

Kathmandu, according to Shakya's new book, has become so infamous for the trade of parts of different endangered species that shops openly sell coats made from leopard, tiger and snow leopard skins. Such shops—in Thamel and on the premises of fancy hotels—also sell python skin handbags and shoes, and ivory-carved bangles. It's been 14 years since the government banned the sale of such wildlife products.

Nepal already has at least four legal regimes discouraging and banning such trade, says a wildlife expert preferring to remain unnamed. "But the law enforcement mechanism is so ineffective and corrupt that the smugglers easily make it through the border points no matter who guards them," he says. You can, for example, wrap a shahtoosh shawl and pass through the Tribhuvan International Airport undetected.

Deputy Director at NPWC, Narayan Poudel admits policing wildlife trade can be costly and complex. "We are working to chalk out a new strategy to stop the illegal trade via Nepal. But we need highly skilled, sincere and motivated informants. And we need plenty of financial resources for that." That is a luxury wildlife officials are not going to enjoy anytime soon. ■



LICENSE TO KILL: Dorpatan Reserve is open for hunting

# THE KING AND THEM



While the stalemate over the choice of the new prime minister may eventually be resolved one way or another, the inordinate delay clearly underscores the King's fundamental lack of trust of the parties, particularly their leaders Madhav Kumar Nepal and Girija Prasad Koirala. On the other hand, the delay has already heightened suspicions among political parties that the Palace is not going to let go off its executive powers anytime soon, and even if it does, it won't be easy for the parties to keep them





Kishor Kayastha

OFFERINGS OR OFFAL: The parties have rejected the King's offers for darshanbhet



BY SUMAN PRADHAN

**On** an otherwise uneventful Tuesday, the first day of the two-day banda called by the five-party alliance last week, the Western Gate of Narayanhity was abuzz with activities. King Gyanendra had summoned former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, leader of the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) Pashupati Shumsher Rana and leader of the splinter Nepal Sadbhavana Party Badri Prasad Mandal for separate audiences. Journalists and photogra-

phers waiting to hear from the Royal invitees jostled for space and sound bites as the trio emerged one by one to air their opinion. The King is not averse to a joint meeting with the five parties, they said. He would soon call them for just such a meeting. The next day, it was the turn of Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, Marich

Man Singh Shrestha and Kirtinidhi Bista—all former prime ministers. Again they emerged from the Royal Palace to say that a resolution of the current stalemate was just round the corner.

But the corner kept moving away all of last week. By the time we went to press, days after the resignation of Surya

Bahadur Thapa, and numerous meetings with contenders, spoilers and advisors, the King would not bring himself to do the one thing the political parties wanted: call them for a joint audience.

Outside Kathmandu, there were ominous signs that the Maoist rebellion was turning increasingly violent. The rebels made numerous strikes—in Bhojpur, Dhading, and Mainapokhari—killing more than a dozen security personnel and at least six civilians, perhaps to capitalize on the fluid political situation.

While the stalemate over the choice of the new Prime Minister may eventually be resolved one way or another, the inordinate delay clearly underscores the King's fundamental lack of trust for the parties, particularly their leaders Madhav Kumar Nepal and Girija Prasad Koirala. On the other hand, the delay has already heightened suspicions among political parties that the Palace is not going to let



BR

go off its executive powers anytime soon, and even if it does, it won't be easy for the parties to keep them.

The gulf between the Palace and the parties was evident all week. The Palace's various emissaries made known that the monarch is averse to the 18-point demand put forth by the parties as their precondition to meeting the King. Their demands include bringing the Army under the purview of parliament, giving no discretionary power to the King, and cutting down Royal privileges and perks.

The Palace emissaries also told in no uncertain terms that the King is averse to appointing either Nepal or Koirala to head the next government. "I think the King would like the parties to put forth names other than Koirala or Nepal," says a RPP leader who is close to the Palace. "He doesn't trust the duo."

The five parties, who've overcome initial grumbling and remain united as of now against a common adversary, want

to hear none of that. "It's not for the King to select the prime minister," asserts Amrit Bohara, the CPN(UML)'s powerful Kathmandu Valley coordinator and the party's Standing Committee member. "This is what we are fighting for. He should call the five parties and hand over power to the prime minister selected by the parties."

In the first few days after Thapa's resignation, the five parties, which have been spear-heading an anti-King movement for the last one year were hopeful that they would be asked to form the next government. The party leaders even met at Koirala's residence in Maharajgunj on Wednesday to forge a common agenda to discuss with the King. But the exercise proved futile.

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**The five parties,  
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By late Thursday, as it became clear that the Palace was intent on dragging out the stalemate, the parties were in full battle mode again, ordering their supporters and various affiliates to "intensify" the street protests to force the King's hand. "Only a few days ago, I was

summoned by my top leader who asked me to tone down the street agitation to create the space for reconciliation with the King," says a student leader who asked to remain anonymous. "But now the same leader is ordering me to intensify the

movement."

At this point in the crisis, both sides are playing a risky game. As the nation awaits a new government which can strike peace with the Maoists, many ana-

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lysts think the Palace appears to be following a strategy of divide and rule. Much like his father did in the early years of the Panchayat, King Gyanendra, these analysts say, seems to be trying to wean away politicians from the opposition.

As a result, the Nepali Congress has become increasingly suspicious of its one-time star, Speaker Taranath Ranabhat, who hasn't helped himself by questioning the parties' movement. "As much as I respect him, I don't think he can have the backing of the party now," says Dr Ram Sharan Mahat. And there are other supposed fence-sitters, such as K P Sharma Oli of the CPN(UML), though Oli himself denies it, saying he wants to be more a leader of the party than of a Royalist government. There is also talk of a technocratic government comprising former Supreme Court justices.

While these maneuverings go on, an early equation which seemed to be developing between Deuba's Nepali Congress (Democratic), the RPP and UML, also seems to have hit a snag. Though RPP's Rana is trying hard to forge the alliance, the UML doesn't seem to be in the mood now, especially since its mass of cadres are dead against any splitting of the five-party alliance.

"This is not about who becomes the prime minister," asserts Rajendra Rai, the president of the UML's student wing ANFSU. "It's about where sovereignty lies. The five parties have remained united and they will continue to be united."

This leaves Deuba in the contention. As it was his government which got sacked in October 2002, Deuba has long since argued that the King must restore his government if the "regression" is to be corrected. But in recent days, he has changed his tune. Deuba now says if his government cannot be re-instated, then he has no problems with an all-party government as is being demanded by the five parties,



FREQUENT FLYERS: Mandal, Rana, Deuba have all been to the Palace twice



LOYAL SOLDIERS: The Army leadership feels more comfortable with the Palace than with the parties

in effect putting more pressure on the King to compromise.

But the King does have an ace up his sleeve in the form of Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. Ever since Bhattarai met the King last week, rumors have been circulating that he could be picked as the next Prime Minister. Indeed, even the Deuba Congress is not averse. "We haven't discussed it formally in the party yet, but we won't have any objections if Bhattarai is made the Prime Minister," says Dr Mrinendra Rijal, the press and publicity chief of the NC (Democratic).

If the King is seeking to cut down Koirala and Nepal down to size, Bhattarai offers the perfect opportunity. As a widely revered senior Congress figure who ably led the country during the difficult transition from Panchayat to democracy in 1990-91, his appointment, if it happens, is certain to put the Congress in a bind. They can't publicly oppose him since he is one of their own, and they can't support him either because he has not been nominated by the five parties.

This leads to the ultimate question: will a Prime Minister nominated by the King, even if it is someone of the stature of Bhattarai, be able to bring the parties on a track of reconciliation with the Palace? Perhaps not. For, as the five parties have maintained throughout, they are not against any individual but against giving the King the right to make executive appointments.

The parties have it simple. Says Bohara of the UML, "What we want is that the King should nominate a prime minister selected by the five parties. That Prime Minister will form an all-party government, which will then revive the Pratinidhi Sabha, make peace with the Maoists, discuss amendments to the constitution and only then hold elections based on the new constitution." ■



JOB SEEKERS: Long lines in front of the Egyptian Embassy for visa interviews

# DOES ANYBODY CARE?

Deportations of Nepalis workers have almost become a routine affair: angry newspaper headlines followed by the customary silence

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

**F**ifty-four Nepalis made headlines last week and for all the wrong reasons. All were deported from Malaysia on charges of holding fake visas. Possible casualty: a bilateral labor accord to be signed by Nepal and Malaysia. Malaysian authorities now say that the accord will materialize only after the visa scam is resolved.

Back in Nepal, the government has responded by locking up all those deported as it busted a visa racket at the Malaysian Embassy in Kathmandu, though Malaysian officials continue to deny any kind of involvement of their staff. For their part, the manpower agencies, who handled the documents for the Malaysia-bound Nepali workers, maintain the documents are legal and that the workers didn't know their visas were fake. Trade unions are furious.





Nepal now has an embassy in Kuala Lumpur and another one close by in Bangkok but that hasn't helped matters much. GEFONT's Rimal adds, "The government as usual is parroting the same words—that they have already read the news in the press. But what are they doing?"

Hopes were high in early 2001, when Malaysia put Nepal among its top labor suppliers. Others in the list include Cambodia, India, Kazakhstan, Laos, Myanmar, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam. The then Minister, Paltan Gurung, flew to Kuala Lumpur to convince Malaysian authorities to open up an embassy in Nepal to make things easier for Nepalis headed for the East Asian country. Last year, Malaysia started providing a 14-day visa-on-arrival to Nepalis.

The number of Nepalis working in Malaysia has gone up ever since and is

Lumpur two times a week and tour operators say the flights are running full with group seats booked by manpower companies. With the country's security situation in dire straits, the figures are bound to go up.

Disturbingly, the number of labor problems has also sharply increased. Most complaints include difficult job conditions and exploitation by middlemen. Many of the Nepali workers who go abroad are not well versed in the rigorous paper work and legal procedures that foreign employments entail, says Ganesh Gurung, executive chairperson of Nepal Institute of Development Studies that has carried out research works on migrant workers.

Groups of Nepalis following a single "leader" are common sights at the airports of Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, and Doha. "Most of them are flying for the first time," says Rimal of GEFONT. But the hardship does not end here.

Most workers take up difficult jobs and work under the so-called '3-D' conditions—difficult, dangerous, and dirty—and they are willing to do anything for a meager income, says a study by GEFONT.

Though the government made an important decision a few years ago to post Labour

Attaches in places where more than 5,000 Nepalis are employed, the decision hasn't translated into action yet.

The Foreign Employment Act 1985 has been amended twice in 1989 and 1998 to clearly define the role of foreign employment agencies in order to avoid problems for workers. A 2000 study points out that the Act has focused only on the control and regulation side of foreign employment while ignoring the all-important issues related to the welfare of migrant workers.

"The precise role of the Department of Labor, the Royal Nepalese Embassies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, commercial banks, immigration and the police need to be clearly demarcated," says Gurung of Nepal Institute of Development Studies. "It will take a lot of time but something has to be done right away to avoid the kind of fiasco that took place in Malaysia recently." ■



ROUTINE DIPLOMACY

"This is only one harassment that Nepali workers have to go through," says Bishnu Rimal, secretary-general of General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions, GEFONT. "In most cases, the government is caught unawares even weeks after newspapers report of Nepalis' trauma in foreign countries."

To officials, it has all become almost a routine affair. Deportation of Nepali workers, angry newspaper headlines and the customary silence.

On February 7, 45 Nepalis got stranded at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport while they were trying to enter Malaysia, where laws require local employers to be present at the airport to claim responsibility for incoming foreign workers. Three months on, government officials in Kathmandu still offer no explanation when asked why no one showed up at the airport to receive the hapless Nepalis.

estimated to be above 100,000, though the last government figures stand less than 500. Still, most Nepalis in Malaysia, as in neighboring Singapore, are said to be working illegally—mostly in construction, farming and in shopping malls.

This partly explains why the Nepali workers get into trouble. Though a legal provision requires prospective workers to obtain permission from the Department of Labor, there are many who reach East Asia without putting anything on the government records, officials say. The remittance from the region, including Brunei, Hong Kong, Japan and Macao, in 2001 was estimated to have reached over Rs. 23 billion, according to government records.

Qatar Airways and RNAC last April introduced direct flights to Kuala Lumpur in view of the growing numbers of Nepalis traveling to the region. Both Qatar and RNAC now fly to Kuala



# THE LUNCH HOUR RUSH

There are thousands of professionals who lunch out regularly. Kathmandu, after all, is literally littered with eateries. That's good news for office workers

BY TIKU GAUCHAN

**P**rasanna Banskota and his colleagues at Lumbini Bank eat out almost every working day. When the 31-year-old supervisor in the bank's credit department wants to pick a place for lunch, he has a plethora of choices before him. The bank is located bang in the heart of

Kathmandu's restaurant district—Durbar Marg—and everything from Hot Breads and Delicatessen to Dudh Sagar is open game.

And even though summer is here, when conventional wisdom cautions against eating out, Banskota says he will not forgo his lunch-about-town. Last week's record-breaking temperature

highs hardly broke his habit and the continuing heat wave will probably do nothing to blunt his appetite.

There are thousands of professionals like Banskota who lunch out regularly. Kathmandu, after all, is literally littered with eateries. That's good news for office workers. And the fact that office workers turn out in droves to haunt restaurants, chiya pasals and momo-joints during their lunch break is good news for the restaurant industry too. In these troubled times, the lunch-hour is what keeps the popular restaurants in business. Shiva Ram Khatri, the owner of Bagmati Sweets in Tripureshwore, figures that the lunch hour crowd makes up more than 70 percent of his clients.

Try to find a table at the Downtown Restaurant in Pulchowk between noon and 2 p.m., and you'll probably have to cool your heels while the early birds finish their meals. Across town at Everest Momo Center in Naxal, you may be relegated to sitting with your momos on a bench parked

outside the eatery, for want of available seats inside. At the Amazone restaurant near Durbar Marg, be prepared for a scramble from the parking lot to the tables if you want to enjoy their pork curry and rice.

Why this mad rush during lunch hour? Maybe it's because, increasingly, the typical eight-hour-day at the office seems to be packed with more than 24 hours worth of work; and lunch hour is the only time when you can let it all hang out. Meeting deadlines, putting up with clients' demands, and making sure all your ducks are lined up in a row just like the boss wants it can be taxing. So to compensate, office workers need to indulge themselves. "What better way to indulge yourself than through your taste buds? As it is, there is nothing else you can do that is as much fun in the span of an hour," says Ravi Shrestha, an executive at Amadeus, a French firm with its country office in Kamalpokhari.

It's not just the young upwardly mobiles who find reprieve at their watering holes during high noon. Everyone—government employees, middle-aged small-scale business owners—all cherish their afternoon time out. Sushil Shrestha, proprietor of Wallstreet Money Changer at Thamel sees lunch time as an opportunity to sample new fares offered by the

many restaurants in the tourist district. And no, he says, it doesn't bother him that he spends quite an amount during lunch even when businesses like his may not be doing so well these days, given the lower turnout of western tourists post-1996. At Bagmati Sweets, government employees who work at the Agricultural Development Bank and National Sports Council line all the benches. Bagmati Sweets, where one can enjoy a puri, tarkari and jalebi meal for Rs. 15, is a major crowd-puller. These government employees would rather eat here than bring lunch from home.

Bringing lunch from home is a no-no for the young upwardly mobile crowd too. Other than a wallet and a mobile phone, carrying anything else would be a hassle. For the young upstarts at private companies like Lumbini Bank, who earn around Rs.11,000 a month, spending more than Rs.2,000 on lunch alone is not exactly a wise choice. But many of these graduates come from affluent families, and spending such amounts on lunch is no great shakes. Most live with their parents and don't have to worry about paying for rent and utilities.

In fact, there seems to be a trend catching on among the smartly attired young office workers. Ravi Shrestha, for example, often meets up with friends who work in other offices, and together on their motorbikes, they zip to various restaurants spread across the town. Depending on his mood, you might find him at a Newari-food restaurant in Sorakhutte or riding all the way to

### “Everest” has become a generic tag for momo

Patan to try *bara* near Krishna Mandir. Rajesh Ranjitkar, who works for Lomus Pharmaceuticals in Lazimpat, makes it a point to swing by Everest Momo Center in Naxal at least six or seven times a month during his marketing runs.

Loyal customers like Ranjitkar have kept Everest Momo Center in Naxal thriving. Started 15 years ago, Everest Momo today dishes out at least 400 plates of momos a day. With a plate of momos costing Rs. 20, the eatery is a hit with office workers. The restaurant is so popular that its brand name, “Everest,” has become a generic tag that's been adopted by other momo restaurants, much like Xerox signifies photo copy machines.

The more upscale restaurants are doing well too. Pulchowk's Downtown Restaurant, located in prime INGOland, is now almost three times the size it was 14 years ago when it set up shop. It has expanded not once, but twice, to keep up with the customer flow. With the security checks and commuter hassles at night, there is less of family night outs happening, and the lunch hour is a blessing for the restaurant owners.

The talk is the same all around town. You only need to see the number of white-coated doctors at Tidbits near Teaching Hospital, the people queuing up at the samosa shop inside the bahal near Tip Top Tailor's or try to get a leg in at the sardine-packed New Dish in Khichapokhari to figure out that the lunch industry is on high gear. Like most of the urban populace elsewhere, the lunch-crowd proves that to enjoy your downtime during a hectic day, feed your basic instinct. The lunch hour rush will not let up, economic downturn or not. Like Prasanna Banksota says, “No matter what, we have to eat well. And that's that.”



DIMINISHING RETURNS: Late-night family outings are getting rare



# LEADERS CLASSIFIED

Public intellectuals with formidable mass support, charismatic and incorruptible: these are the progressives who are as much at ease in the fishing villages of Saptari as when sharing lobster meals with statesmen in Oslo. This league of leaders, epitomized by BP Koirala, could have included more. The leaders who come close are Madan Bandari, Subarna Shumsher and Ganeshman Singh

BY SWARNIM WAGLÉ

Whoever the new Prime Minister, the rot in governance appears so grim that any immediate difference in quality will be marginal. But that's less of a point. A larger issue today is about creating and nurturing real people's rule in a peaceful Nepal; en-

cluding the recent five-party posturing, have been about getting closer to such a resolution. How, then, are our "people's rulers?" What are their defining characteristics? Can this stock teach anything



sure that ordinary folks from Rautahat and Dadeldhura get to rise, fall or stagnate in public life, and govern only with the mandate of those being governed. This is how it was supposed to be since 1952, when Matrika Koirala, born into privilege, but not nobility, became the Prime Minister. Although the idea of thrusting leadership upon men (rarely women) by the accident of birth is dated, there has still not been a conclusive resolution of this issue in Nepal. Benignly interpreted, events in 1990 and after, in-

useful to future leadership? Or, are we doomed like the Nepali proverb: *joon jogi aaye pani kanai chireko* (all fakirs have their ears pierced)?

Here's a citizen's report card:  
**Grade C** (4 out of 10): Leaders in this grade were in office, but never really in power. Their authority was derived from the Palace, which has run the kingdom for 40 of the past 54 years. Type I—Matrika Koirala, Tanka Acharya, Kirti Nidhi Bista, Lokendra Bahadur Chand—were decent people. But they were picked for being weak and loyal, to maintain the status quo, which they did to the best of their ability under their patron's shadow. The Type II—Tulsi Giri, Surya Bahadur Thapa, Marichman Shrestha—were stronger, but less honest. Zealous in their pursuit of protecting their regime at any cost, they compromised on principles and dived deep into the murky waters of realpolitik. How would the unsullied Giris and the Thapas of the 1950s have evolved if they hadn't joined the Panchayat? The problem in politics is we can rarely resort to counterfactual logic.

**Grades B** (6 out of 10): These leaders resent the Palace's hold on to absolute power, and have fought to transfer sovereignty from the crown to the people. Better democrats in theory than in practice, they nonetheless fight elec-

tions, mingle with the masses, and claim to represent their interests best. While they erred gravely when they had their chance in the 90s, their badge of honor remains their willingness to subject themselves to constant voter scrutiny and battering. As the King's experiments of the past two years showed, the technically competent or the morally upright can be handpicked, but without a popular base to land on, they are like hot air balloons at the mercy of the slightest gust of wind.

Type I leaders of Grade B had integrity and intellect, and they compensated their lack of mass-appeal with strength of character. Manmohan Adhikari and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai belonged to this group. Ramchandra Poudel would like to be an heir of this pedigree. Notwithstanding a series of misjudgments that his peers say has cost him credibility, there used to be a time when Taranath Ranabhatt was also one of them. With limited support among cadres though, the elevation of Type I to the top is always conditional on their shaky dependence on the Type II and the Type III. This is where it gets dodgy. The Type II are people like Sher Bahadur Deuba and Madhav Nepal who command popular constituencies, are educated and exposed to the outside world—but are

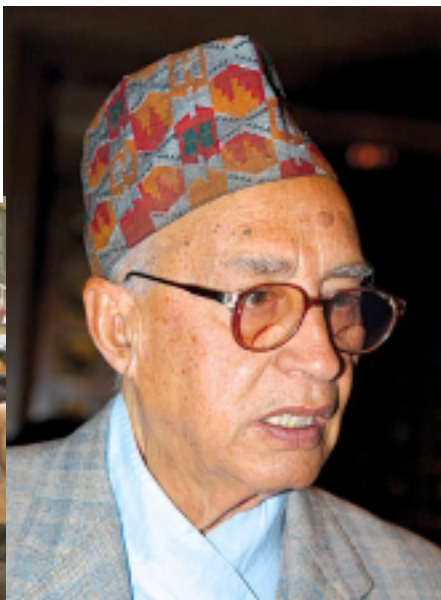
**Grade F** (2 out of 10). This is a depressing wasteland. Populated by the occasionally brilliant, leaders here are voluntary exiles in cloud-cuckoo-lands. They sulk all the time, and relish being counter productive. At the better end of this grade are assorted Puritans like Shailaja Acharya, Mohan Bikram Singh, and Rajeshwore Devkota whose outbursts are fun to watch, but practically worthless. On the left end of the spectrum are the violent types like Pushpa Kamal Dahal. They evoke anger and despair in people who would like to see them do better.

**Grade A** (8 out of 10). Public intellectuals with formidable mass support, charismatic and incorruptible, these are the progressives who are as much at ease in the fishing villages of Saptari as when sharing lobster meals with statesmen in Oslo. Epitomized by Bishweshor Prasad Koirala, Madan

lic offices tomorrow, become more effective players. Largely non-Kathmandu males from caste, as well as ethnic, middle-income groups, educated in public colleges, these young leaders already resemble their Grade B siblings. Our civil society's hope and duty are to help them graduate from Grade B to Grade A, nudge them through sustained pressure to avoid unlawful trappings of public office like corruption and patronage. This stain avoided, there are many good elements they could pick from each of our past leaders. Like dining table etiquette and good reading habits, some worldliness can always be acquired. What seldom works, however, is the edict: "Thou Shalt Behave Better." Our new leaders will thus need the integrity to design party rules, constitutional limits, and legal codes for institutional check-and-balance to self-police their errant discretions.

The Bhaktapur leader Narayan Man Bijukchhe once remarked after seeing idealists of the 80s easily turn corrupt in the 90s: "We used to be honest, but it seems, that was only because we didn't have opportunities to be dishonest." Let us not hope that today's grandkid politi-

**Shailaja Acharya, Mohan Bikram Singh, and Rajeshwore Devkota are fun to watch but practically worthless**



ultimately mediocre in the art of wholesome leadership. Kunwar Indrajit Singh would have belonged to this group, and so does Pashupati SJB Rana. The Type III, strong and resolute, too, lead constituencies that are forces to be reckoned with, but they are less worldly—a handicap if and when they actually make it to the top. Also vulnerable to venal, damaging blunders, Type B-III is best resembled by Girija Prasad Koirala. Possibly, Bamdev Gautam and Khadga Oli are lesser approximates.

Bhandari could very well have made it if death hadn't intervened. Subarna Shumsher and Ganeshman Singh almost make it to this league, the latter for his courage and sheer sense of purpose.

Miracles rarely happen—emergence of national saviors in shining armor breezing through Putali Sadak is as illusory as the sighting of the Yeti. But we can create systems that help today's student leaders, who in all likelihood will grow to occupy major pub-

cos will be better than their grandpas. Let us—the clichéd civil society—help ensure they are. **N**

# Who Art Thou?

The excitement of installation lies in its novelty, its use of mixed media and its daring breakage of narrative. In Kathmandu, installation is still a new art form, still in the act of destabilizing the supremacy of painting

BY SUSHMA JOSHI

**B**ig signboards painted on fabric greeted the viewer with this question last week in Babar Mahal Revisted: Who art thou? Usually, the answer would be: Thou art part of the expatriate crowd, the upper middle class and the poor journalists who frequent the openings at the Siddhartha Art Gallery. This gathering, fortunately, was a bit more mixed—it had attracted a substantial number of people from the Nepali art world, along with little girls decked out in fashionable outfits who had come to view their cousin's art opening.

Sujan Chitrakar, the artist, has published an entire text to accompany his art-

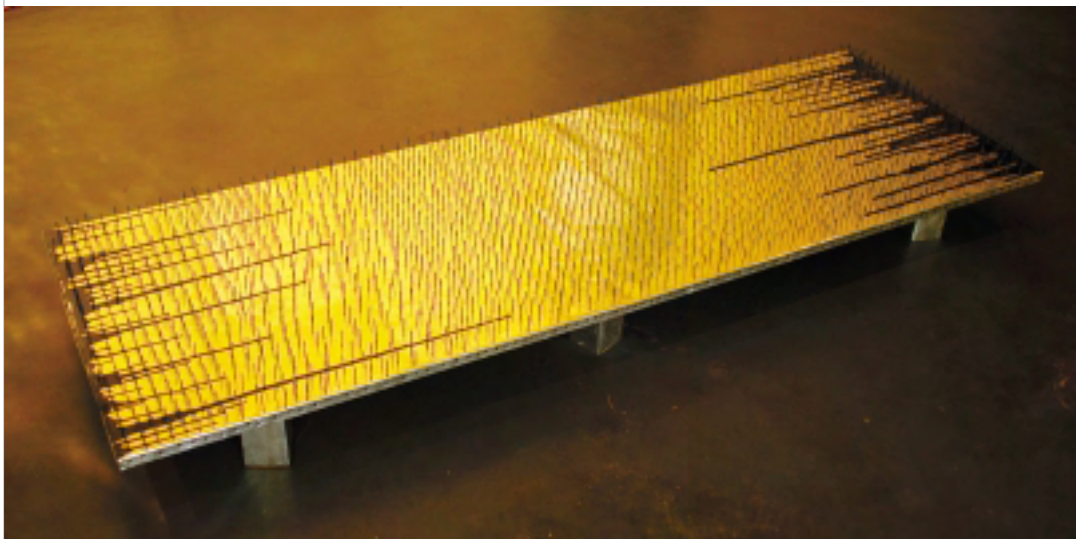
mation. In between, they thought long and hard about the question of life, which seems to have led them to the “mystery of man” as envisioned by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Even Dostoyevsky, however, might have been alternatively baffled and amused by what his words had inspired. The final art products, which must be seen to do them justice, are polished, technically sophisticated and full of the chutzpah that would make them equally at home in New York City as they do in Kathmandu.

The excitement of installation lies in its novelty, its use of mixed media, its daring breakage of narrative. In Kathmandu, installation is still a new art form, still in the act of destabilizing the supremacy of

canvas, photographs, film) are here to stay. Perhaps the reason why traditional media has stuck around for so long is its coherence, and accessibility. The challenge with installation, as with any other art form, is to capture this magnetism that keeps certain media like paint, photography and sculpture solidly entrenched in the popular imagination.

The other challenge is more difficult—indigenizing a borrowed form. Chitrakar makes liberal use of recycled tinned milk cans as prayer wheels. In a corner of the gallery, one can find a panel pasted with objects that inspire memories—trinkets and junk one can only find in Nepal. As a viewer, I wished there had been more of these playful, juxtaposed forms that play with the notion of Nepal and Nepaliness, and less of the shiny hammered and nailed works that carry the stamp of generic transnational art that fill the main gallery.

The enthusiasm of the artist dispels any confusion. Sujan Chitrakar is direct, engaged and intense as he talks about his art. Meditateonself.com, an online website that is part of this exhibit, is a satire on how meditation is being commercialized and being brought straight to the home, like take-away food. His mixed media work include within them symbols of four religions—Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism. He feels it is important to be introspective, and create an utopia within oneself, and not look outside for this divine place. He wants to share this idea with his viewers.



SSWU

works. The text, titled “Utopian Introspection: Random Expressions within Defined Periphery” is heavy reading, but as you read along you get flashes of insight, kind of like a hammer hitting a nail on the head. Sujan Chitrakar, along with colleagues Salil Subedi, and Saroj Bajracharya seemed to have spent a lot of time introspecting in front of mirrors, musing on the concept of nails and hammers, and arranging votive earthen *diyas* in perfect for-

painting. In western countries where art has fallen over the edge, climbed up and mutated every season since then, installation itself is starting to take on a dated look and feel. Walking through a gallery in New York City, one starts to see installations that evoke *deja-vu* of a genre, like seeing yet another Monet inspired painting on a McDonald's wall.

Paintings may be “sooo last season!” but in spite of it all, old media (paint and

A work of art is the interface that allows a viewer to commune with the thoughts and ideas of the artist, its creator. Like “Being John Malkovich,” Chitrakar's Utopian Introspection often gives the viewer entering the caverns of his thoughts more than they bargained for. Taking the advice of the artist then, perhaps the best thing to do after a viewing is to sit down, take a deep breath, and introspect. **N**



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# Ram Man Dai

Ram Man Dai's search for an all-purpose medical panacea began in 1960 when he started experimenting with various combinations of ghee, local herbs like *saldhoop* and *gokulldhoop* and *fitkiri* to create *Himali Malam*

BY SANJEEV UPRETY

Ram Man Dai is 76-years old. Born near the temple of Pashupatinath, he comes from a family of *bhandaris* who have been assisting the *bhattas*, the main priests of Pashupatinath for generations. In addition to fulfilling his obligations as a *bhandari*, the last 40 years of Ram Man Dai have been consumed by a singular passion: that of preparing *Himali Malam*, an all-purpose ointment which, he claims, cures diseases ranging from itching skin to indigestion. In addition, *Himali Malam* cures sleeplessness, reduces tension, strengthens heart valves, purifies blood, heals warts and rashes, prevents premature ejaculation and induces energy and hope to the tired and depressed minds.

Ram Man Dai's search for the medical panacea began in 1960 when he started experimenting with various combinations of ghee, local herbs like *saldhoop* and *gokulldhoop* and *fitkiri* to create *Himali Malam*, a white ointment that could be applied externally to the body or could be swallowed with water to heal inner malfunctions. Encouraged by Narahari Acharya, the well known if slightly controversial spiritual guru and an interpreter of ancient Sanskrit scriptures, Ram Man Dai's experiments continued. He added the golden dust of a specific type of *shankha* to his connotations and worked late into the night to perfect a cure that would heal everything from high blood pressure to faulty kidneys. It was only in 1970, 10 years after he first began his experiments, that Ram Man Dai felt confident enough to go public with his invention.

Mostly optimistic in his outlook, Ram Man Dai has recently turned into a bitter, disgruntled person. In his apartment near Kailash Umakunda temple

near Guheshwori—the place where he first began the experiment leading to the production of *Himali Malam*—he explains how his family house near Pashupatinath was taken over by the municipality without any compensation.

Ram Man Dai, a proud descendant of the *bhandaris* and the inventor of *Himali Malam*, is now forced to live in a rented apartment with his wife and two daughters. "I spent my entire life trying to perfect the technique of *Himali Malam* to help the people of this nation,"



SANJEEV UPRETY

he complains bitterly. "Is this a way to reward common people like me who dare to dream not only for themselves but for the entire country? The politicians and leaders of this country lack real energy and vision, they are often impotent and incompetent."

He goes on to describe how during his experiments he realized that the human body was a collective whole rather than a collection of individual parts. The important thing was to find a cure for the total human being. The diseases of the heart were related to the malfunc-

tions of bowels and kidneys. Skin ailments were the consequences of faulty blood and digestive systems. He then extends his metaphor to point out how a holistic approach to solving problems seems to be lacking on the national level as well: Opposed to the "holistic" approach of people like Ram Man Dai, the leaders and policy makers of the nation were trying to seek temporary solutions to the national problems ranging from poverty to terrorism to bad governance. One singular permanent solution to the national ailments was yet to emerge.

He keeps up his rant as he walks around Pashupatinath. But when he nears a small pond within the Kailash Umakunda temple complex, Ram Man Dai brightens up and a warm toothless smile lights up his creased old face. His innate optimism and sunny outlook towards life is returning. This, after all, is the place where his journey began, the site where he first mixed *gokulldhoop* with

ghee and dreamed of creating an ointment that would heal both body and mind. He explains how, after the establishment of multi-party democracy in 1990, he departed slightly from his earlier practice of preparing a singular ointment for all diseases by trying to make medicines that would heal specific diseases. The national atmosphere of widespread enthusiasm and hope provoked the creator

within him, leading him to experiment with new materials.

"In the last seven years or so I have worked hard to invent a new medicine," he says. "An energy boosting tablet that improves memory and concentration, cures impotence, and increases sexual pleasure. I am hoping that politicians, businessmen, leaders and other powerful and rich people of the community will come and buy my tablets. If they do, then my hopes of building and living in a house of my own once again might come true." ■





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# Diversity Unchained

The 1990 Constitution was designed to perpetuate the monolithic Hindu state as a check against the competing demand of the 'Diversity.' In this respect, the democracy ushered in 1990 has not been democratic enough

BY UJOL SHERCHAN

**T**he Nepal Development Forum 2004 is over. Mind if I propose a Nepal Diversity Forum in a country where the only diversity focus many Nepalis have known in the last few years is the Diversity Lottery? Here's why.

"Unity in Diversity," which underpinned the divide-and-conquer strategy of the past regime, is no more. The 1990 Jana Andolan undid all that. It, for instance, unchained 'Diversity' from the shackles of stifling 'Unity' by opening the floodgate of pent-up frustrations and desires of the peoples, which continue to find more visible expressions in a proliferation of civil society, media, political parties, street demonstrations, and clamors and demands for rights of all sorts.

However, the multiparty system that rode to power on the back of the democratic movement for over a decade singularly neglected the agendas of the 'Diversity,' or of the peoples, thereby creating an opening for the Maoists to hijack them. This partly explains the ascendancy of the Maoist movement. Not surprising, given the gross under-representation of janjatis, adivasis, dalits, women, and minority groups (who together comprise over eighty percent of the population) in the Nepali polity: the government, civil service, and civil society.

Marginalization or exclusion on this scale is nothing new. The attempts of past rulers or the emerging modern state to 'unify' diverse peoples of varied races and of even more ethnicities, tribes, cultures, languages, and religions under one monolithic Hindu structure under one hereditary king through conquest, the draconian Muluki Ain, and the Panchayat system had exactly the same effect.

In actuality, the 1990 movement was a power struggle between the upper-caste leadership of the political parties, and the ruling Thakuri King. A twin achievement of this movement—multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy with army on its side—has been a convenient power-sharing arrangement, a compromise. The Constitution was designed to perpetuate the monolithic Hindu state as a check against the competing demand of the 'Diversity.' In this respect, the 1990-ushered democracy has not been nearly democratic enough.

Against this backdrop, the multiparty system dominated by Nepali Congress and CPN (UML) could hardly be expected to function prop-

erly, much less carry out far-reaching political reforms that entail sharing or devolving of power, or modifying the power structure to be more accommodating. What it instead did while in power was replicate the structure of its predecessor—the Panchayat system—characterized by the exclusive dominance of upper-castes in the government and civil service as well as its twin culture, nepotism and corruption. Today the multiparty system is atoning for its sins on the streets, and increasingly realising that without the support of the peoples it is difficult to carry the day. Politics is unforgiving that way: what you couldn't secure for all or denied others, you can't keep for yourself for very long either.

Although the Nepal Development Forum is over, donors can still use their clout to push for the creation of a more inclusive and socially just Nepal. They can do this, for instance, by constantly pressuring the government to undertake reforms so that it, and the civil service increasingly reflect the sociologies and demographics—the diversity—of their beneficiaries at all levels. They can likewise pressure the civil society

institutions, including the NGOs, and the grassroots organizations, that they routinely fund. Truth is: the dominant structure and the culture surrounding it—the marginalizing forces—have a tendency to replicate across the polity and at all levels, and have. The donors can check this disturbing trend by calling for diversity policy wherever possible. This can be a good first step.

Moreover, the Nepal Diversity Forum can serve as a non-partisan platform to bring the disparate disadvantaged groups or any other social group together as a unified voice to influence mainstream political debates. Truth is: the elected governments of the past didn't address their issues, and there is little reason to expect them or the Palace-

appointed all-party government to do so. And the Maoist leadership is only interested in using them as cannon fodder. Therefore, this is no time for these groups to continue to be islands onto themselves, or lone cowboys. Instead, they can come together under one umbrella to amplify their clamors and demands for what they have been denied for too long. They must come together in a show-of-you guessed it—the peoples' version of 'Unity in Diversity.' **N**



# CITY: This Week

## ART EXHIBITION

### FREE MOVIES

Time: 7 p.m.  
Venue: Lazimpat Gallery Café.  
For information: 4428694.  
*True Romance, May 18*



"True Romance" is anything but your typical love story. After all, when you have a movie based on a script written by Quentin Tarantino (of "Pulp Fiction" and "Reservoir Dogs" fame), you know you are in for a quirky, violent, high-energy drama where love has to be found somewhere between the flashing film-frames. In "True Romance," Clarence (Christian Slater), and Alabama (Patricia Arquette) are newlyweds for whom honeymoon means running from both the Detroit mob and the police.

*Fight Club, May 20*



The unnamed protagonist of "Fight Club," played by Edward Norton, is the archetypal yuppie with a nice but boring life. To escape his 9 to 5 existence and let off steam he joins therapy groups. But when he meets Tyler Durden, played by Brad Pitt, Norton discovers real therapy. Durden takes him on a wild ride of rebellion both against the self and society. A great movie to help you rewire your safe-concepts about the world.

## EVENTS

### Fun and Food Carnival

Organized by UNWO to help the underprivileged. Date: May 22. Venue: Hyatt Regency, Baudha.  
For information: 4491234.

### All That Jazz...

Presenting "JCS Trio" & The Best Of Jazz In Nepal. Venue: Fusion Bar, Dwarika's Hotel. Time: 7 p.m. Price: Rs. 555 (includes BBQ dinner, a can of beer/soft drink). Every Friday. For information: 4479488.

### Drum Circle

Bring your djembe, madal, dholak or just a plain gourd shaker and jam with Bobby Gurung and Sanjay Shrestha. Venue: Moksh. Every Tuesday 7 p.m. Entry fee: Rs. 150.



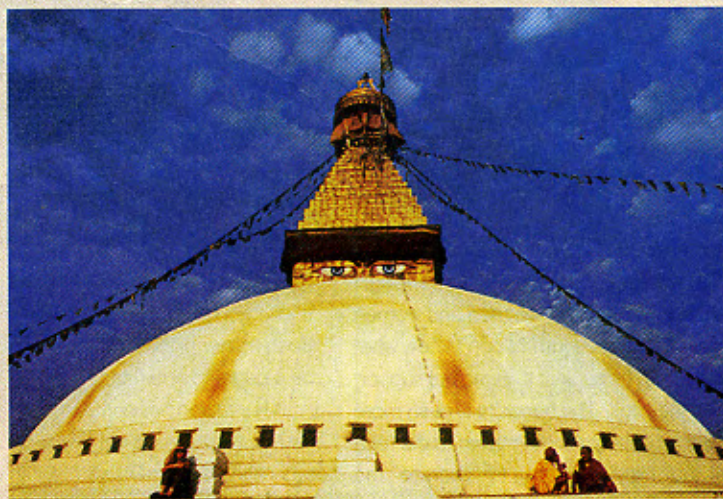
### Afternoon Jam Sessions

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## "Faces and Aspects of Nepal"

MANI LAMA'S PHOTO EXHIBITION. TILL JUNE.



**GALLERY 9** "Transformations": An exhibition of paintings by Sushma Joshi. Opens May 25.

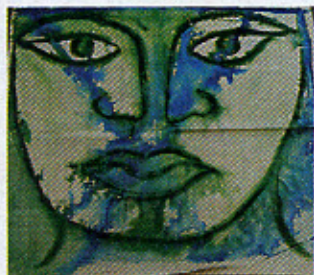


Photo exhibition at the same venue on Gender, Sexuality and Discrimination. Event hosted by the Blue Diamond Society. Till May 23. For information: 4428694.

### SIDDHARTHA ART GALLERY

"Utopian Introspection": A multimedia Exhibition by Sujana Chitrakar. Till May 28. For information: 4218048.

### BUDDHA GALLERY

"Traces of Buddha": Photographs by Godam Choi. Till May 20. For information: 4441689.

A selection of Mani Lama's photos is being exhibited at the Saturday Café, Boudha. Lama is one of the most well known senior Nepali photographer. He learned his art in the United States and teaches photography-as-visual-anthropology to American students from the University of Wisconsin and Cornell University at his studio in Lazimpat. Lama has also been working as a photographer for most of the INGOs in Nepal for decades. Saturday Café lies adjacent to the Boudhanath Stupa, occupying three floors of space. The first floor also serves as a boutique within the café. For information: 2073157.

BY DINESH RAI



# Bush Begone!

I've called America home for the last 20 years, but since George W. Bush took office in 2001, and especially after 9-11, I've lived in a political nightmare

BY SAMRAT UPADHYAY

All right, I'll come clean. I'm interested in the Abu Ghraib prison scandal because I see a ray of hope: George W. Bush might be gone in November presidential elections. It's not that I don't feel for those prisoners—hooded and wired for potential electrocution, dragged on a leash, performing mock fellatio on their colleagues, cowering naked before vicious dogs—but I had depleted much of my compassion on earlier images, shown on alternative U.S. media, of injured and dead Iraqi civilians when the “shock and awe” invasion began last year. Now my compassion has taken a backseat to the galvanizing possibility that we might get rid of this president once and for all, and the United States could end this nightmare and start to heal.

I've called America home for the last 20 years, but since Bush took office in 2001, and especially after 9-11, I've lived in a political nightmare. I'm tired of this president's manipulation of the post 9-11 fear among Americans, most of whom are very nice people, with great openness and honesty and integrity. I'm tired of a president who pronounces “nuclear” as “nucular,” who says he gets his political advice from the Great Father above. I'm tired of the so-called Patriot Act that treats all immigrants as potential terrorists. I'm tired of a president who expresses “deep disgust” at the photos, then in the next breath commends his defense secretary for doing a “superb job.” Before the prison abuse scandal, it seemed that many Americans would go wherever Bush would take them, not asking questions. Those who dared to challenge were called unpatriotic or traitors.

There's a thing in America called “supporting our troops.” You see banners with this slogan hanging outside store windows. Churches that dot the midwestern town where I live declare: Jesus is the Son of God We Support Our Troops. The words emerge from the mouth of politicians like Vedic incantations. Even those vociferously against this war feel compelled to support the troops, “This war is illegal, immoral, and wrong. I oppose this war, but I support our troops, those brave men and women of our military who give up their lives for our freedom.” I don't know what “support” means anymore. How can you be against the war, but support the troops (and by extension what they do)? The opposite is even more baffling: how can you support your troops by sending them to die for a dubious war, letting them think that they're fighting to “liberate” the Iraqis?

The prison photos have changed the American mood—you can smell it in the air. There's horror at the thought that Americans could inflict such acts on the very people they'd gone to set free. A recent poll has nearly 80 percent Americans upset by the photos. Even members from Bush's Republican party are now casting doubts about the war's success. Sad that it's taken this long for the reality of this bloody misadventure to sink in. Sad that no horror and furor arose when Iraqi civilians were bombed out of their bazookas before Baghdad fell. Blame the mainstream media, which deliberately chose not to show those images. One prominent television anchor said showing images of Iraqi civilian casualties, now surpassing 10,000, would be “tasteless.” Embedded journalists, who used the language of the military and frequently referred to Iraqis as “enemies,” further blurred the line between reporting and propaganda. Military analysts, on the payroll of the television channels, presented precise details of attacks and counterattacks and offered strategic advice on how to win the war. An Orwellian nightmare.

But the truth is emerging, in snapshots of torture so vivid and compelling that it's hard not to make comparisons to the images that helped end the Vietnam war, another “quagmire” that haunts America today: a young girl screaming burning from Napalm, a Vietnamese general about

to shoot a man at point-blank range. The deceptions of Bush's government keep piling up: no weapons of mass destruction, no mission accomplished, no direct Al Qaeda link, no happy and forever-grateful Iraqis, a stupendous war budget (\$150 billion by next year). And now, photos of torture and laughing, thumbs-upping torturers.

During the Bush-Gore presidential debates in 2000, I recall a moment in the Cleveland hospital where my daughter was born. Having just brought dal-bhat from home for my wife, I paused

to watch the debate on television in the hospital lobby, and I remember thinking: I hope my daughter will not emerge into her birth country with Bush as her president. I had an intuition, just looking at his face, that he'd degrade America.

My intuition has come true. And now I find myself praying to my Great Father above, good old Pashupatinath (who I'm sure has broad global authority) that come November, Americans will whisper to Bush, “Dumbya, you're fired.” **N**



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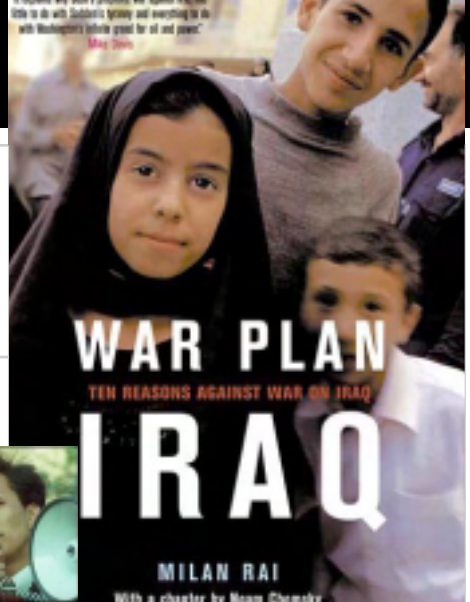
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# No Longer A Voice In The Wilderness

**L**ong before the western media started splashing stories of American abuse in Iraq, people like Milan Rai were spearheading the anti-war movement in Britain and the United States. His books, “War Plan Iraq,” “Regime Unchanged” and



“Chomsky’s Politics” have been hailed by academics as required reading for anyone who wants to understand today’s wars. “War Plan Iraq” has sold more than 20,000 copies and had been translated into eight languages. In 2002, BBC World Service’s web site ran a series of Rai’s anti-war columns. His work has been published and discussed in The Times (London), the Japan Times, and the American political weekly, Counterpunch. Rai, who was awarded the Frank Cousins Peace Award for Research by the Transport and General Workers Union in England in 1993, was one of the first activists to break the sanctions against Iraq by taking medicines into Baghdad. He talked with Sushma Joshi of *Nation Weekly* about his work on Iraq, and his impressions of the similarity of the situation in Nepal. He lives in Britain.

**What similarities do you see between Iraq and Nepal’s present situation?**

There are lots of parallels. In my book, I write about how the Iraqi armed resistance has been fueled very largely by feelings of revenge of unpunished killings by occupation forces. I don’t claim to know a lot about the situation in Nepal—I don’t follow events closely here. But I feel there are a lot of similarities here. In both Iraq and Nepal, you cannot take the U.S. government’s commitments to freedom and democracy at all seriously.

**What changes have you seen since the last time you came to Nepal?**

I was last here four years ago. There’s a lot more militarization and urbanization. The atmosphere is very brittle.

**You’ve advocated non-violent methods of resistance for Iraq and Britain. What would you suggest for the current political situation in Nepal?**

My sense of it is that there are much more opportunities to be explored, like non-violent interventions for justice and freedom.

**You’ve written a book with Noam Chomsky, one of the most well-known leftist intellectuals of the west. Do you have a personal relationship with him?**

I asked him if I could use an essay by him, and he agreed. I wouldn’t say it’s a very personal relationship. I have met him four or five times. I interviewed him for my first book “Chomsky’s Politics.”

**I feel there are a lot of similarities here. In both Iraq and Nepal, you cannot take the U.S. government’s commitments to freedom and democracy at all seriously.**

**What were your impressions of him?**

Chomsky is one of the great minds of our generation. I was not just influenced, but revolutionized by his ideas on a whole range of issues. On a personal level, he’s an incredibly unassuming and approachable man. We have a culture of celebrity. We treat some people as superhuman and some as less than human. He doesn’t have that to him.

**You’ve been regarded by the Nepalis as one of their own, even though you have concentrated your activism and spent most of your life in Britain.**

I felt a sense of inferiority as an Asian when I was young. Fortunately, I got over those feelings. Reading about the achievements of other Asians helped me in this process. It is important to identify with the people you respect.

**Which experiences helped you to get over your internalized racism?**

I read the autobiography of Malcolm X, which helped me to find my own path. A book about the Chinese Revolution called “Red Star Over China” was also very influential to my development. This book talks about the time before the revolution took off in China. Obviously the Chinese revolution has problems, but one can learn a lot from it.

**Has the western notion of Iraqis as “terrorists” lessened since the war began?**

Since the war, there’s been another current—anger and bewilderment from people who don’t understand why Iraqis are fighting the coalition forces. People are feeling a bit stuck about how to respond. There are pro and anti-war people on both the Left and the Right. There is a very confused picture in the west regarding Iraq. If the war continues, the potential costs to the Iraqi people and the wider world could be quite high. Now the United States is putting a “sovereign” Iraqi government at the end of June. It’s a new mode of controlling the country. **N**



## Maoist Movement of Nepal: A Selected Bibliography

BY RAMESH PARAJULI

**W**ritings on Nepal's Maoist movement have kept pace with the history of the insurgency. Some writings precede the movement and serve as a context for studying Nepal's contemporary political history. All these writings, in vari-



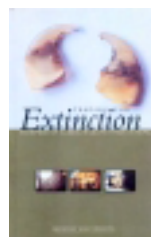
ous languages, lie scattered in periodicals, books and reports. "A selected Bibliography" brings together key writings from English and Nepali from various sources, including the Internet. It provides a basis for works by future researchers and writers concerned with the movement and Nepali politics in general.

## Trading For Extinction

BY MANGAL MAN SHAKYA

**D**espite Nepal's obligations to protect its wildlife under the Convention on International trade in Endangered Species of Wild flora and Fauna (CITES), shatoosh from the endangered Tibetan antelope safely land in the United States, Europe, the Middle east, Hong Kong and Australia. A number of traditional Asian medicines (Chinese, Tibetan, Ayurvedic and Yunani) continue to be manufactured from wildlife products like musk pods, bear gall-bladders, tiger bones and other animal parts. Similarly, rhinohorns, ivory and crocodile skins reach wealthy consumers in the Middle East and Japan.

The Nepali media has covered a number of anecdotal stories relating to



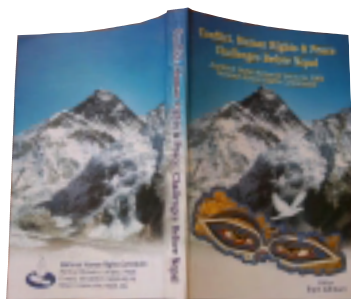
wildlife trade, but there has been no systematic pursuit to disseminate factual information through investigative journalism. It is heartening to see a journalist like Mr. Mangal Man Shakya create a niche for wildlife reporting by undertaking dangerous journeys to remote areas and inside the secretive circles of trade links to investigate the workings of the trade. This experience has enabled him to come up with "Trading for Extinction," which should prove an important point of reference for conservationists.

FOREWORD BY DR. TIRTHA BAHADUR SHRESTHA

## Conflict, Human Rights & Peace

EDITED BY DR. BIPIN ADHIKARI

**T**he National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) came out with its publication, "Conflict, Human Rights & Peace: Challenges Before Nepal" on January 21. Edited by Dr. Bipin Adhikari, the book features a compilation of articles and papers presented in a lecture series organized by the National Human Rights Commission in 2003. The book is dedicated to the human rights leader late Rishikesh Shah. Prominent contributors to the book in-



clude the Assistant Secretary General to the United Nations Kul Chandra Gautam, international scholar Johan Galtung and the former Resident Representative of the UNDP in Nepal, Dr. Henning Karcher and the NHRC's Sushil Pyakurel. The book also analyzes the international experiences of conflicts in Guatemala and Sri Lanka and draws pertinent lessons from these experiences amid the ongoing conflict in Nepal.

# Book Mar



Photo Courtesy: cybernepal.com.np

**S**inger Nalina loves short stories and popular magazines. She wants to read longer works but her hectic schedule—studio recordings and live shows—do not leave her with much reading time. She says she'll probably have to start reading in snatches soon, to catch up on the books she wants to read.

### Favorite short stories:

Bhenajuko Sweater, Jhagadako Okhati

### Favorite book:

Basai, Muna Madan

### Favorite writers:

Bal Krishna Sama and  
Bhimnidhi Tiwari

### Preferred reads:

Mostly magazines—Wave, Aaaha Sangeet, Mystic, Samaya, Himal, Nepal

### Currently reading:

The Jungle Book by Rudyard Kipling

### Earliest reading memories:

Tintin, Archies, Chacha Chaudhary, Betaal comics



# A Suitable PM

**K**ing Gyanendra and the political parties have been at loggerheads ever since he dismissed the elected government of Sher Bahadur Deuba in October 2002. If anything, their subsequent meetings have only made matters worse. The story is: the King listens patiently to party leaders, explains to them that he is deeply committed to multiparty democracy, and even has some of them leave Narayanhity with the happy thought that they are the King's choice for the new prime minister.

But as it has so far turned out, the King does not seem to be taking them seriously. On two occasions—once after the sacking of Sher Bahadur Deuba and later after Lokendra Bahadur Chand's ouster—he pointedly refused to anoint the five parties' prime minister-designate after what looked like numerous rounds of cordial talks with the leaders.

So this time round when the King invited party leaders for talks to the Palace after Surya Bahadur Thapa's resignation, the five-party alliance quickly set their conditions. First, the King has to make a public announcement that sovereign rights have been handed back to the people, and second, they are not going to meet the King separately (and fall prey again to his seemingly divide-and-rule game plan).

Critics of the political parties offer an interesting spin to the story. The rationale behind meeting various personalities is simple: keep the irate politicians engaged in a guessing game even as the King looks for ways to resolve the insurgency. The thinking seems to be that for the people suffering from years of violence, it wouldn't matter who is in Singha Durbar so long as they got what they wanted—peace. Return to normalcy

holds primacy over democracy. And the plan seemed to work when the Chand government pulled off a ceasefire, taking everyone, including the political parties, by surprise.

But the fact is even though non-representative governments can take tough measures, their hands are tied when the status quo is threatened. The ceasefire collapsed last August when the government refused to give in to the Maoist call for a constituent assembly. In hindsight, it was never possible for the Thapa government, appointed by the King, to even discuss a constituent assembly and open the proverbial Pandora's Box, though an increasing number of Nepalis now say constituent assembly is a progressive move. This could be why the Palace fears the return of rule by the sovereign people. But perhaps the more sensible thing for the Palace to do is to court



the political parties and present a united front against the republican calls made by the Maoists. That remains a possibility even now, but who knows what will happen when the students' rallying cry against the monarchy is taken up by the parties themselves. **N**

Editor

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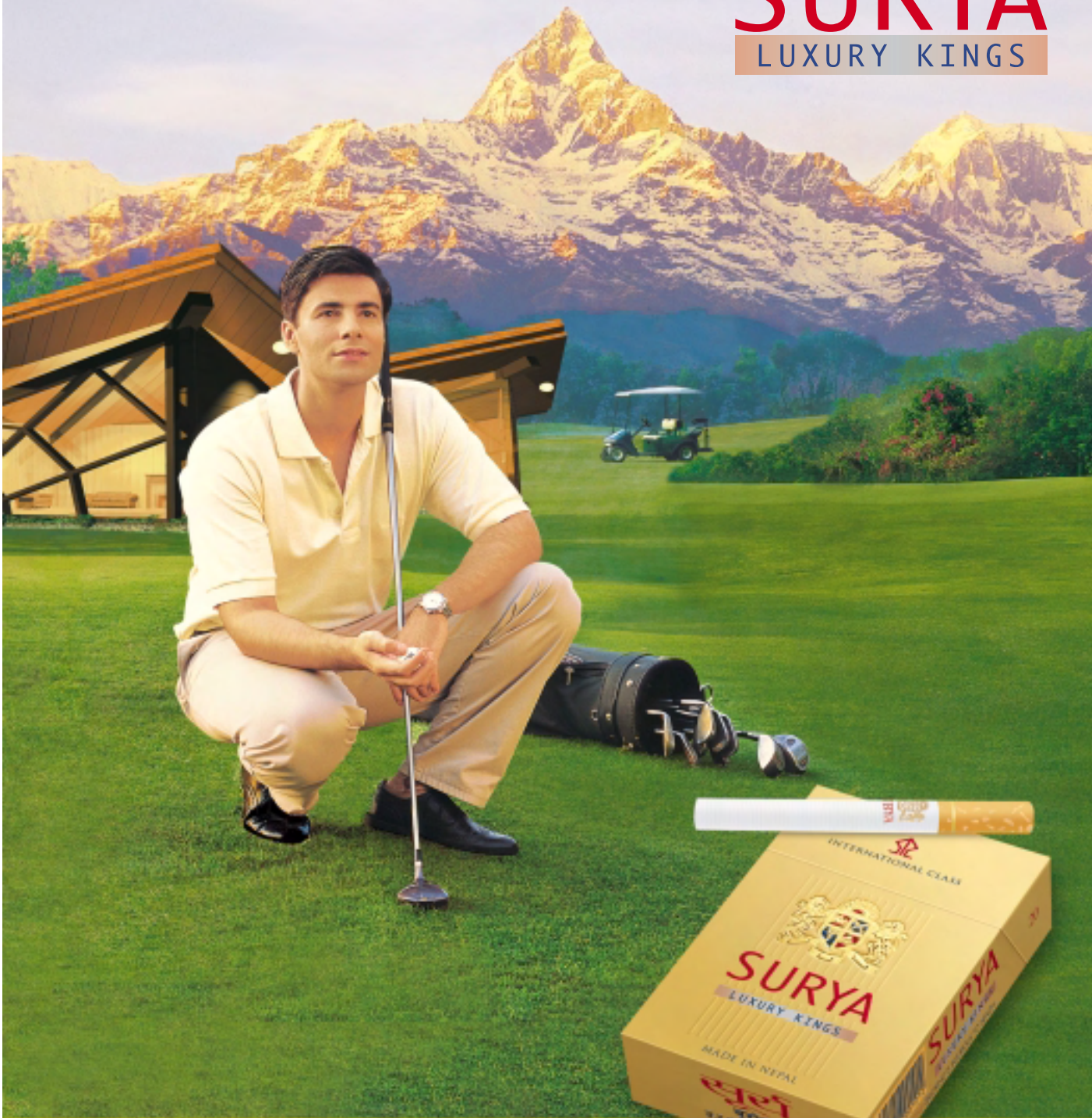
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