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# nation

WEEKLY



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COVER STORY

## 20 Just A Breather

By John Narayan Parajuli

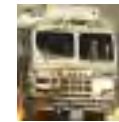
The reopening of 47 businesses comes as a huge relief, but there is uneasiness that it might just happen all over again. The fact that the Maoist threats were enough to shut down major businesses proves that the Nepali state is under severe strain.

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By John Narayan Parajuli  
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दुई फलाम  
दुई चुरा



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## “Sumi, who defied social taboos to opt for artificial insemination, is my hero”

SUSHMA SHRESTHA

### To my hero

Your September 19<sup>th</sup> issue was excellent. I particularly enjoyed Dhriti Bhatta's "Call Me Mother," a profile of a daring single woman who defied all the social taboos to opt for artificial insemination. To Sumi Devkota, her deeply personal need to be a mother outweighed all the potential social stigmas attached to motherhood outside the wedlock put together. Sumi, you are my hero.

SUSHMA SHRESTHA  
NEWROAD



### Shame on us

Your coverage of riots was exceptional (September 12). However, I am not sure I agree with the position taken by a lot of journalists, including by Nation Weekly, that the government should have negotiated with the obscure terrorist organi-

zation by meeting them somewhere in the middle of the Iraqi desert. According to a recent New Yorker report, kidnappings are becoming extremely rampant in Iraq—both of Iraqis and foreigners—and the survival rate decreases sharply after the first 24 hours of abduction. Small-time kidnapers often sell their prey to bigger, more brutal groups.

Given that we have hundreds of thousands of Nepali in the Gulf, paying ransom to secure the release of Nepali captives couldn't have been viable as a state policy. It makes a lot of sense to think that those Nepalis were abducted by incorrigible brutes. Now that the unimaginable has already happened in the hot deserts of Iraq, we as a state should do everything to help Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Illawi and his government ferret out the criminals and bring them to justice.

Where the Nepali government failed, and failed big time, was at home, right in the capital—in front of the Royal Palace, next to police stations, left of Singha Durbar and right of the Bhadrakali Army headquarters. That is where the government failed. And in case we think we are absolved from the guilt, the civil society failed right where the government failed. We shamed ourselves with what we did to the minority, all right, but also with the deafening silence of the majority that followed. This was a result of a combination of things—a gradually weakened civil government and the Nepal Police that has been eclipsed by the Royal Nepal Army; a self-serving bunch of Kathmandu-based intellectuals who don't know how to stand up for the convictions they so dearly hold; a monarchy, which is los-

ing its support base; the rise of Hindu fundamentalism; and the rise of urban gangs and the sense of impunity among them. In this context, to single out a couple of ministers for the catastrophe is just a knee-jerk reaction.

We need to look beyond the obvious. We should conduct transparent investigations and public trials of the hooligans and their bosses responsible for the riots, so that when our progeny learn of this despicable day, they don't blame us for not doing enough. If the incidents were unprecedented, so should be the investigations and trials that follow.

BISWO NATH POUDEL

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY

## Pampered rebels

Sagar Shrestha's viewfinder found an image perhaps no other photojournalist noticed (Picture of the Week, September 19). The latter always run after Girija Prasad, Madhav Nepal and cruel and ruthless Maoist guerillas. In fact, the plight of 11-year-Dhana Bahadur Bhujel (you always tend to miss this part, though: I want to know where is this fellow from and when and how did this landmine accident happened to him), mirrors the plight of modern-day Nepal, of the tens of thousands orphaned, of the tens of thousands widowed and hundreds of thousands caught in this senseless cycle of violence. The Nepali media has pampered the rebels a lot, and last month the rebels showed their true face when they attacked and killed journalist Dekendra Thapa in the Midwest. It's the classic case of your pet dog biting you. It's about time Nepali journalists and the civil society introspected, corrected their mistakes and charted out a new path—one of peace and humanity. Please show images that are often ignored and are yet very, very powerful, like that of Dhana Bahadur. Would any Nepali national daily, or the state-run Radio Nepal or TV care? The Maoists are more than insurgents; Nepali Maoists are terrorists, just like al-Qaeda, the Khmer Rouge and the like. Poor Bhujel's damaged limbs—just like the country's ruined economy and tattered social fabrics—are a testimony to this. Still, Bhujel holds a pigeon and is about to release it. He must have done that. Yet peace continues to

elude Nepal. Only if, and when, the warring addicts agree on a ceasefire will a lasting peace be restored in the country. Or else the Maoist terrorists will go the al-Qaeda way, inviting foreign invasion and, in the end, doomsday for Nepal. Let's get it over with.

SUMEET GURUNG

NOIDA, NEW DELHI

## Dangerous militarization

Ujol Sherchan's column "Collateral Damage" (Through The Looking Glass, September 12) is right on, except that he has failed to mention the untold damage increased militarization has done to the five-party alliance and democracy. The gun-butter tradeoff he mentions also underpinned the agenda of this year's Nepal Development Forum, which more or less resolved that peace and security must come before development. India, the United States, Britain and the donor community as a whole appear to be towing this line. No wonder, this is a bonanza year for "ambulance chasers," arms merchants, self-proclaimed conflict resolution specialists and human rights groups.

The inevitable consequence of all this has been that we are now blessed with a prime minister, never the one interested in resolving the Maoist insurgency in the first place, who returns from New Delhi with promises of military aid as if the unspoken mandate of his government is: "Well if the Nepali people cannot have bread, let them eat bullets."

The guns that can be used against the Maoist rebels can also be used against the innocent people (and they have been) and the Palace. Lest we forget, it was a gun that took out the entire family of our late King. The RNA is the Lord of the Rings of Nepal; he who controls it rules us. Beware!

KRISHNA PAUDEL

JHAPA

## More humor

As a regular reader of your magazine, I would like to see more humor injected into it. What about short ads and more happening columns?

PRAWSUN

VIA EMAIL

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Nation Weekly, The Media House, Tripureshor,  
Kathmandu, Nepal (Regd. 165/059-060).  
Tel: 2111102, 4229825, 4261831, 4263098

EDITOR: Akhilesh Upadhyay  
editorial@nation.com.np

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR: Suman Pradhan

COPY EDITOR: John Child

SENIOR STAFF WRITERS: Sushma Joshi, Satish Jung Shahi,  
Tiku Gauchan

STAFF WRITER: John Narayan Parajuli

PHOTOJOURNALISTS: Sagar Shrestha, Das Bahadur Maharjan

DESIGNER: Raj Kumar Shrestha

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS: Indra Adhikari, Yashas Vaidya

AD & CIRCULATION DIRECTOR: Krishna Shrestha

OPERATING MANAGER: Ashish Bhattarai

ASSISTANT MARKETING MANAGER: Rameshwor Ghimire  
ad@nation.com.np

SUBSCRIPTION OFFICER: Akshaya Shrestha

subscription@nation.com.np

ASST. SUBSCRIPTION OFFICER: Jeshna Karmacharya

DISTRIBUTING MANAGER: Angiras Manandhar

MARKETING CONSULTANT: Kreepa Shrestha

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Nripendra Karmacharya

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E-mail: editorial@nation.com.np

Fax: 4216281

Mail: Nation Weekly

The Media House, GPO 8975, EPC 5620

Tripureshor, Kathmandu, Nepal.

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E-mail: subscription@nation.com.np

Nation Weekly, The Media House, GPO 8975

EPC 5620, Tripureshor, Kathmandu, Nepal

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T H E T R U E C O L O R S O F L I F E





EVERY WEEK. EVERY MONDAY.



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WEEKLY

THE NOTION  
OF NATIONHOOD

## Picture of the Week



**MADE IN NEPAL:** Tripana Budamagar of Rolpa weaves a yarn at an exhibition on cottage industries at Bhritkutimandap

nation weekly/Sagar Shrestha



# Useful Idiots

The Maoists do not want to antagonize the media and the human rights community. They want ‘useful idiots’ in these communities to continue to serve them as apologists

BY JOGENDRA GHIMIRE

Finally, Comrade Krishna Bahadur Mahara, the spokesman of the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist, faxed a statement last week on behalf of his party to the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, the FNJ. This came in response to an ultimatum that the umbrella body of Nepal’s media persons issued after the murder of journalist and human rights activist Dekendra Thapa by the Maoists. The FNJ had threatened to boycott all Maoists-related news if the Maoists failed to state clearly their position on freedom of expression, especially the way they viewed the media.

As was expected, Mahara said that his party had no policy of attacking or persecuting journalists and indicated that all attacks on media by the rebels were aberrations. He also insisted that reporters had all the freedom to report from wherever they wanted, provided they took necessary permission from the local Maoist leaders for such visits and made the visits under their supervision.

Already, questions are being asked about how committed the Maoists are to their pledge, and what stops them from releasing a couple of journalists they have taken hostage. But on the whole, Nepali society’s “useful idiots” are likely to take the assurance as gospel and give the Maoists a clean chit, despite their systematic attack on free speech.

Lenin, the Soviet communist leader, used to refer to the apologists of the Soviet system in the western world as “useful idiots.” These were people who, in their desire to appear objective, liberal and tolerant, debated about the virtues of the new Soviet communist order and tried to convince their peers in the democratic west that things were not as bad in the Eastern Bloc as they were believed to be.



One of the most infamous of Lenin’s band of “useful idiots” was a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Walter Duranty, The New York Times’ Moscow correspondent. Stationed in Moscow during Stalin’s man-made famine of the 30s, Duranty reported authoritatively that there was neither famine nor starvation nor was there likely to be one. He accused “rumor factories” in the west of an anti-Soviet bias. It was not until the official Soviet statistics on the famines were released during Mikhail Gorbachev’s presidency that the true extent of famines became clear to the rest of the

world. Chairman Mao’s famine in China is supposed to have killed in the region of 20 million people, and yet there were useful idiots who were vigorously opposing claims that the famine was a reality in the People’s Republic.

In hindsight, many more died of Soviet famines than in the hands of Hitler’s fascist regime in the Holocaust, and far more died due to the Chinese famines.

Through his statement addressed to the FNJ, Mahara and his party leadership were essentially trying to allay any concerns that Nepal’s civil society—especially the media and the human rights community—may have finally begun to develop and express about the Maoist party’s tactics of targeting individuals by orchestrating kangaroo court judgments that are based on such charges as “enemy of the revolution.”

Clearly the Maoist party does not want to openly antagonize the media and the human rights community and wants to ensure that the band of “useful idiots” in those communities continue to serve them by

being vociferous apologists for them.

By all indications, the rebels have been admirably successful in leveraging the voices of these “useful idiots” to put the Nepali establishment on the defensive. While attacking the lonely soldier on a leave of absence from duty or a helpless schoolteacher in a far off village for failure to adhere to their dictates, they have been extremely careful not to ruffle the feathers of human rights workers and the media. These are groups with a voice.



When they killed Dekendra Thapa, Mahara and his leadership were essentially testing the waters. They wanted to see if the apologists in the media and the human rights community would take it as just another death. As was evident, they did not. But despite having got the message loud and clear—that the Maoists will come at the media and the human rights workers when they feel sufficiently confident—it is unfortunate that the civil society declines to confront the fundamentals of an armed offensive.

As a reaction to the insurgents’ killing of a fellow journalist, all that the FNJ would ask of the Maoists was an assurance that no more journalists would be killed. Doesn’t that, by implication, mean that it condones the killings of other groups—thousands of innocent Nepalis who are neither journalists nor human rights workers? **N**

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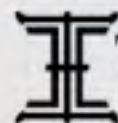
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**REEL WORLD:** Actor Nikhil Upreti jumps off a helicopter over Chobhar. Upreti has made a name for himself as a stuntman.

## Peace Corps closure

The U.S. government officially closed down Nepal operations of the Peace Corps, a volunteer program that started in 1962 in Nepal. The decision to close the program for six months came after an attack on the American Center on September 10. The police claim that the Maoists carried out the attack. More than 80 volunteers were working in Nepal when the decision came. Over the years, more than 4,000 Peace Corps volunteers have served in different sectors like environment, education, health, forestry and family planning. At one point, Nepal was the most sought after Peace Corps destination and had the highest rate of Peace Corps returnees in the world.

## Maoist escape

The committee that inquired into the breakout of the Maoists from a Kanchapur prison reported that the security personnel helped them escape. Nineteen Maoists escaped from the prison after breaking the toilet and the outer wall of the jail on September 11. A Maoist prisoner who was hit by a police bullet was found dead near the Shukla Phanta National Park the next day. The district level inquiry committee claimed that

Tejsingh Karki, a sentry, helped the Maoists drill holes in the wall and stage the dramatic breakout. The Maoists claimed that 15 of their comrades, including policeman Karki, were now in their contact.

## Everest record

The government declared Pemba Dorjee Sherpa the fastest Everest summiteer after a Cabinet meeting. On May 21 Pemba scaled Everest in eight hours and 10 minutes. But the previous record holder, Lhakpa Ghelu Sherpa, filed an official complaint questioning the veracity of his claim. A committee was formed by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Civil Aviation to investigate the controversy.

## Government offer

The government has decided to provide Rs. 500,000 each to the manpower agencies that were vandalized during the September 1 protests over the killing of 12 innocent Nepali workers in Iraq. The amount will have to be returned to the government within a year. According to reports, the government decided to provide the sum from the amount the manpower agencies had deposited while registering their company.

## Illegal detention

The government will soon legalize detentions of suspected Maoists under the Public and Security Act 1990 and Terrorist and Disruptive (Control and Prevention) Ordinance, 2004. The Kathmandu Post reported that the Maoists who are being illegally detained in the Army barracks will be shifted to Sundarimal Old Arsenal, where an inquiry and investigation center has been set up as a unit under the Central Jail. Quoting a highly placed source in the Home Ministry, the Post said that detainees would be interrogated at the center primarily by the civil police. The Army will also be allowed to enter the center to investigate if needed. The move to legalize the detentions came in wake of mounting pressure from the national and international human rights groups.

## Maoist warning

Maoists have threatened to use suicide bombers in India if it goes ahead with its plan to provide military assistance to Nepal, the

BBC Nepali Service said. The threat was made through pamphlets pasted on walls in Jhulaghat of Pithoragarh district, India. This threat came in the wake of Indian promises during Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's India visit to provide military assistance to Nepal to fight the Maoist insurgency.

## Riot arrests

The Home Ministry said 66 persons have been arrested for vandalism and arson during the protests against the killing of 12 Nepali hostages. It said that action would be taken against 50 persons involved in the violence and the destruction of property. Investigations are underway on 16 remaining cases. In total, Rs. 218,000 has been recovered from those arrested, and 1,200 passports found during the investigation have been handed over to the Department of Labor and Employment Promotion. The government said it is committed to bringing the culprits to book.

## End of closure

Forty-seven businesses that had remained shut due to Maoist threats opened their doors after successful negotiations led by human rights activists. The negotiation team comprising Sudhip Pathak, Padma Ratna Tuladhar and Malla K Sunder was able to bring the government and

the employers around to the demands of the Maoist-aligned trade union, All Nepal Trade Union Federation. Surprisingly, the agreement came a few hours after Minister Mohammed Mohsin, the government spokesman, had said that the government would not negotiate with the Maoist sister organization "on a piece-meal basis."



### Petroleum hike

Nepal Oil Corporation has raised the price of diesel, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and kerosene. This is the second time the NOC has increased the prices of petroleum products in a month. A month back the government had formed a five-member committee headed by Yubaraj Khatiwada, member of the National Planning Commission, to adjust the prices to those in the international market. The prices were hiked on the basis of the report of the committee. According to the revised prices, diesel will cost Rs. 35 per liter, up Rs. 4; kerosene Rs. 28 per liter, up Rs. 4; and a cylinder of LPG Rs. 750, up Rs. 25.

### Homeward bound

Twenty-three Iraq bound Nepalis who were stranded in Lebanon are returning home, reports quoting Nepal's acting ambassador to Egypt, Dhan Bahadur Oli, said. Oli is in Beirut in an attempt to rescue the Nepalis stranded in the Lebanese capital.

### Mobile license

The Supreme Court annulled the government's decision to grant a license to United Telecom

Limited (UTL) to operate mobile phone services in Kathmandu. A special bench comprising judges Bhairab Prasad Lamsal, Khilaraj Regmi and Min Bahadur Rayamaji delivered the judgment by majority vote. The judges said the government neither studied the UTL proposal properly nor appointed experts to examine the feasibility of the services it said it would provide.

### Counter terrorism

Some 100 Nepali policemen are undergoing training in counter-insurgency operations near Hyderabad, Indo Asian News Service reported. The secret training at the headquarters of an elite anti-extremist force, Grey Hounds, at Gandipet on the city outskirts, might deal a blow to ongoing talks between the Andhra Pradesh state government and the People's War Group, the report said. The training, which had been kept secret, came in the wake of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's visit to India.

### Death sentence

A Tibetan court has sentenced two Nepalis to death for smuggling weapons. The Foreign Ministry has ordered the Nepali

Consulate in Lhasa to gather further information about the incident, the RSS news agency said. According to the details received, the Shigatse Intermediate Court issued death sentences to two Nepalis while two others were sentenced to four to seven years in prison for smuggling weapons. It wasn't clear what the weapons were.

### British citizenship

British Prime Minister Tony Blair has said that his government will look into the possibility of providing British citizenships for retired Gurkhas. Blair said that the British government was studying the issue, according to the AFP. Only a handful of Gurkhas have received British citizenship to date despite having served in the British Army for nearly two centuries. Public pressure is growing in Britain to grant Gurkhas British citizenship. Over 600 retired Gurkhas live in Britain.

### Indian arrest

Indian security forces have apprehended six Maoists in a raid at a Patna hotel in Bihar. Among those arrested, two have been identified as Rambabu Chaudhari and Agendra

Parajuli. Chaudhari is reportedly a central leader of the Maoist-aligned Madhesi Liberation Front while Parajuli is said to be an area commander of the Maoist "people's army." Security forces also have recovered important documents from the Maoists, reports said. Indian authorities so far have not contacted Nepali officials regarding the arrest. In June, the Bihar Police had arrested 11 Maoists including two central leaders from Patna.

### Koirala verdict

The Supreme Court quashed writ petitions filed by Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala, against the decision of the CIAA to summon him for inquiries. Koirala and some of his party members had filed separate writ petitions at the apex court 14 months ago challenging the anti-corruption body's jurisdiction to issue them summons. The CIAA had summoned Koirala and other NC leaders Govinda Raj Joshi, Arjun Narsingh KC and Laxman Ghimire on the basis a probe report on all public officials post-1990. The two-member bench of the Supreme Court, comprising Chief Justice Govinda Bahadur Shrestha and Justice Hari Prasad Sharma, said the CIAA had summoned Koirala only for an inquiry and had not filed any charges against him.

### Royal visit

King Gyanendra will visit India later this month. His week-long visit, which gets underway on September 30, comes nearly three weeks after Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's New Delhi visit. The King will meet Indian President Abdul Kalam, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and other senior leaders. The details of the visit, however, are yet to be announced. The King is expected to discuss the Maoist insurgency during the visit.



PEACE AND PROSPERITY: The call for peace was a common theme among women observing Teej this year

**MORE TOURISTS FROM SPAIN AND ITALY**

The number of visitors coming to Nepal by air during August rose by 3 percent compared to same period last year according to the Immigration Office at Tribhuvan International Airport. The number of non-Indian visitors grew 17 percent, and the Indian market fell by 22 percent.

In comparison to August 2003, the biggest growth came from the Spanish and Italian markets, which grew 91 percent and 102 percent, respectively. These two markets contributed 25 percent of arrivals for the month. The number of French visitors has also gone up by seven percent. The other major non-Indian markets for Nepal—American, German and British—all fell. With this month's decline, Indian visitors made up only 27 percent of the total. This is the third consecutive month that the number of Indian visitors has declined.

**FIGURES FOR AUGUST 2004:**

- Spain up 91% to 3,345 visitors
- Italy up 102% to 2,476 visitors
- France up 7% to 1,193 visitors
- India down 22% to 5,960 visitors
- US down 14% to 1,014 visitors
- Germany down 23% to 708 visitors
- Japan down 1% to 1,460 visitors
- China down 1% to 349 visitors



**NIC BANK OPENS BRANCH IN POKHARA**

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Transfer to facilitate inward remittances from Nepalis working overseas. In the financial year 2060/61 NIC Bank recorded increases of 158 percent in net profit, 64 percent in deposits and 46 percent in loans, compared to the previous financial year.

**NATA CHANGES ITS NAME**

The 39<sup>th</sup> annual general meeting of the Nepal Association of Travel Agents has decided to change the association's name to the Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents. According to a press release issued here today by NATA, the change in name will clearly specify the working areas of travel agents, since they are doing both ticketing and tour operations.

**WORLD BANK ASSISTANCE**

The International Development Association of the World Bank has agreed to provide an assistance of Rs. 3 billion to Nepal for two projects—the Second Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project, and the Poverty Alleviation Fund Project. The bank will provide Rs. 1.89 billion loan assistance for the water supply project and Rs. 1.12 billion in grant assistance for the poverty alleviation project. The loan assistance for the water project will be utilized to improve rural water supply and the sanitation sector's institutional performance. The project also plans to put the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Fund Development Board within the government system and to support local community water supply and sanitation users' groups to plan, implement and operate drinking water and sanitation infrastructure. The group is expected to deliver health education to rural households in a sustainable manner.

**NABIL BANK AWARDED BANK OF THE YEAR**

The Banker, a Financial Times publication, has recognized Nabil Bank as Nepal's Bank of the Year 2004. The Banker is a leader among international banking and financial publications. This year it presented the Bracken Bank of the



Year awards to the leading bank in 133 countries, nine regions, 14 investment banking categories, four technology functions and two corporate responsibility categories. Several leading banks from Nepal participated and were evaluated. Nabil Bank, the first joint venture bank in the country, was chosen for the prestigious award.

**NT PRE-PAID LANDLINE CARDS**

Nepal Telecom will distribute pre-paid landline phone cards before Dashain. The cards will come in denominations of Rs. 200, Rs. 500 and Rs. 1000. The pre-paid cards can be used to make local, long distance and international calls through any ordinary telephone, with or without STD/ISD facility.

**IRRIGATION CANAL BUILT THROUGH LOCAL FUNDS**

The construction of the Manyangkhol Khardi irrigation project at Bhimeswor has been completed at a cost of Rs. 100,000. The municipality and locals contributed to the construction of the plant. Fifty households in the ward will benefit from the irrigation project.

**ELECTRICITY GENERATION THROUGH LOCAL FUNDS**

A three-kilowatt capacity peltric electric generator has been installed in Sekhimba in Terhathum district. The peltric set was constructed at a total cost of Rs. 449,784. The district's public fund decentralization and development program provided Rs. 331,730, and local residents provided the remaining amount.



## Died

Suresh Panthi, 49, former national football team captain, died on September 11. He was suffering from a rare form of bone cancer.

In his distinguished career, Panthi remained a member of the national football team for 15 long years, starting in 1971. He played as a defender. In 1983 he was a member of the team that won gold at the South Asian Federation Games. He also led the national team in several World Cup qualifiers. Nicknamed "The Wall," Panthi bagged the Best Player Award for the year 2039 B.S. from the All Nepal Football Association. He retired as a football player in 1986.

Panthi played for a number of local clubs in Kathmandu, including Boys' Union, the New Road Team and the Friends Club before establishing himself as a regular for the Mahendra Police Club. He also served as a traffic inspector at the Valley Traffic Police Office.

In the last couple of years, Panthi had been making regular trips to Bangkok for treatment. He received assistance from the Nepal Police, ANFA and the Nepal Sports Council. Three charity matches were held in Kathmandu to raise money for his treatment.

The National Sports Council organized a two-hour memorial service last week at Dashrath Stadium, where Panthi's colleagues, fans and officials paid tribute to the legendary footballer.

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# nation

WEEKLY

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# nation

WEEKLY

## THE MIRROR MEDIA PVT. LTD.

# GOOD NEIGHBORS

India's growing military assistance is nothing to be afraid of. When your house is on fire, your neighbor has good reason to be concerned.

**BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI**

**L**AST WEEK, PRIME MINISTER Deuba came home a happy man, buoyed by the assurance of Indian support. The key component of the prime minister's India visit was to appraise New Delhi of the poor security situation in Nepal. What he got from New Delhi was indicative of the importance India places on Nepal's internal security.

"Nepal is located at the heart of India's strategic security perception," says Professor Lok Raj Baral, former ambassador to India. "To the north, there is China, which India views as a competitor." India thinks of Nepal as the most vulnerable frontier, with an open border about 1,800 kilometers long. Indian policy still centers around the statement India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, made to the Indian Parliament in 1950: "...as much as we appreciate the independence of Nepal, we cannot allow anything to go wrong in Nepal or permit that [Himalayan] barrier to be crossed or weakened, because that would be a risk to our own security."

Post-cold war, the Nehurvian perception still occupies an important place in India's scheme of things. With a strong Maoist movement flourishing in Nepal, India has stepped up security assistance. New Delhi's recent package includes three advanced light helicopters; 20,000 INSAS

rifles; 15,000 self-loading rifles, SLRs; and 900 trucks, jeeps and mine-protected vehicles. These supplies will definitely help the security forces as they try to create a semblance of order. The assistance is not the first of its kind. India and Nepal have a long history of military relations.

In 1952 the first Indian military mission arrived in Kathmandu to help Nepal reorganize and modernize the Royal Nepal Army. The mission was prompted both by Nepal's need to upgrade its forces and Indian fears after China annexed Tibet, which New Delhi had regarded as a buffer zone, shielding the subcontinent from Chinese threats.

Many believe that the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Nepal and India was signed due to Indian fears that China might eventually subvert or invade Nepal. The treaty required both parties to consult and "devise effective countermeasures" in the event of a security threat to either country.

After Indian and Chinese forces fought a brief but nasty war over disputed territories in 1962, there was a realization in Nepal that it had to play a perilous balancing act as a buffer zone. The era of Nepal as a yam between two boulders had returned; but the balancing act has often proved difficult.

Nepal-India ties suffered a serious jolt after King Birendra concluded an arms purchase deal with China to supply air defense artillery in 1988. New Delhi vigorously protested the deal. Nepal resented India's objection. As the



tension mounted, India closed 13 of its 15 border-points with Nepal in 1989. Relations normalized after 15 months of political and diplomatic trouble; both countries eventually reaffirmed their faith in the 1950 treaty.

Even though the 1989 Indian blockade was an economic one, it had military and security underpinnings. Nepal wanted to avoid being seen as too closely

allied with India, and India feared that the northward tilt of Nepal was the beginning of an alliance that posed a risk to its own security. India's primary interest in Nepal is Nepal's security and stability, which according to India, guarantees its own security and stability. Reckoning the Maoists as a common threat, India has since 1996 steadily increased its security assistance. New Delhi told

Nepal, and it is nothing to be nervous about," says political commentator M.R. Josse. India cannot remain a mute spectator when Nepal is burning, he says.

India realizes the helplessness of the situation in Nepal, though it doesn't believe that its military assistance can quell the insurgency. "Ultimately we don't believe that there is a military solution to the Maoist problem," says Verma. What Indian officials seem to believe is that their security assistance will pressure the Maoists into talks. A stable and secure Nepal is vital to India's own security interests too, a realization that seems to have dawned on the Indian officialdom rather late as far Nepal's Maoist rebellion is concerned.

Despite common security threats, and strong economic and cultural ties, the two neighbors have often regarded each other with suspicion. "There is a love-hate relation between Nepal and India," says Josse. And differences in perceptions have caused relations to oscillate wildly at times. India believes it has a lead role to play in South Asia, and its assertiveness often gets the better of it and its neighbors begin to wonder about its motives. "Relations between any two countries are likely to have points of agreement and points of disagreement," says Josse.

Nepalis hope that India's growing concern about the Maoist problem as a trans-boundary menace will push the Maoists into negotiations sooner than later. The links between Indian Maoist outfits, such as the Maoist Communist Centre and the Peoples' War Group, are no longer tenuous. There are mounting evidences of strong cross-border connections.

Analysts like Professor Baral dismiss suggestions that New Delhi's nervousness over the Maoist problem could spill over the border. "These fears are baseless," says Professor Baral, in reference to speculations that Indian troops may cross over to Nepal to quell the insurgency.

To others, what Nepal now expects of India is just plain, good neighborliness. "When your house burns," says Minendra Rijal, a Deuba aide and NC-D spokesman, "you have to seek help from your neighbors." **N**

nw/SS



**MILITARY HARDWARE:** An Indian made helicopter and INSAS rifles (below)



nw/SS

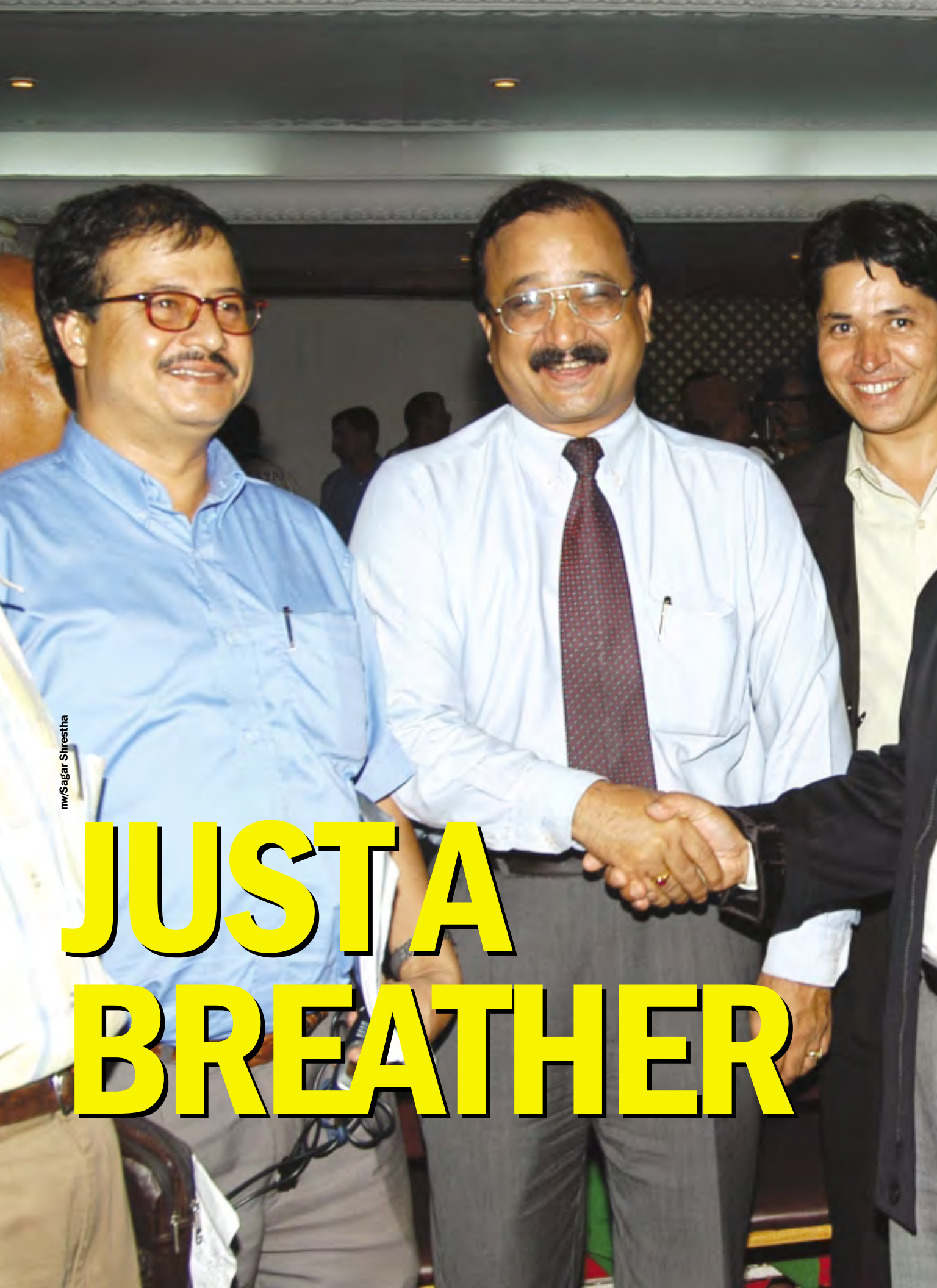


**SOUTH BLOCK:** Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh (right) with Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran

the visiting Prime Minister Deuba that it would provide "all possible help" to Nepal. Comments in the Indian media referred to this as a blank check. The assistance, India says, is in recognition of a common danger. "The Maoists are a shared threat," says Sanjay Verma, press secretary at the Indian embassy.

But many in Nepal don't see things that way. "What is the reason behind Nepal accepting help from India and not from the United Nations?" questioned CPN-UML leader Bam Dev Gautam at a press meet after Deuba's return from New Delhi. "Deuba's heavy reliance on India may result in betrayal. It is the Nepali people who can solve the problem, not India," Gautam told reporters, referring to the security assistance.

But not everyone buys Gautam's argument. "The assistance was sought by



nw/Sagar Shrestha

# JUST A BREATH



The reopening of 47 businesses comes as a huge relief, but there is uneasiness that it could happen all over again. The fact that Maoist threats were enough to shut down major businesses proves that the state is under severe strain.

**BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI**

**T**HE MONTH-LONG ordeal has finally come to an end. The Maoist-affiliated All Nepal Trade Union Federation withdrew its indefinite closure of 47 businesses last week. But the question on everyone's mind is: Is it really over?

"This is a patchwork," says Rajendra Khetan, vice president of FNCCI and executive director of Khetan Group. "Hopefully, we won't be the victims of political issues again."

Khetan's response reflects the hopes of the Nepali business community and the government, both of which were forced to cave in to the Maoist demands. It also reflects the fragile situation on the ground. Nepalis now regard Maoist violence, once a distant risk, as an imminent danger. The business community ignored repeated assurances from the government that it would guarantee the safety of their businesses. They finally opened their shutters only after the Maoists officially withdrew their demands.

The reasons put out in public by the Maoist trade union for their demands: To press for the release of their leaders and to end the exploitation of labor by the employers. The union also talked about promoting "national industries" and discouraging "foreign industries." Though the Maoists say they are concerned about laborers' problems, the underlying motive for the closure could have been to show Nepalis that there is a state within a state and that the rebels can openly defy the government and the state machinery.

Since the beginning of August the Maoists have launched targeted psychological and economic offensives against the state. They have been hitting hard

where it hurts most. The state machinery has been able to do little to counter their tactics, despite the security forces being bigger and better trained than the Maoists. The blockade and the business closures were both part of the Maoist offensive against the state and the government that represents it.

On August 17, the Maoists issued a closure order against 12 businesses and detonated a bomb outside the Soaltee Crowne Plaza to underscore their threat. On August 27, they issued a similar order telling 35 businesses to close. The Maoists first said all businesses except those with American investments could resume operations. After some confusion they then announced that the original closure order slapped on the 12 businesses was still in place.

"The Maoists want to extract more concessions from the government," says Minendra Rijal, spokesman of NC-D, the prime minister's party. "But they are insensitive to the laborers' plight." Insensitive or not, the Maoists seem to have gotten what they want.

#### **PRESSURE TACTICS**

The Maoists trade wing called off the closure only after extracting concessions from the government and the business community. After hectic parleys for days, a group of facilitators, including Sudip Pathak, Padma Ratna Tuladhar and Malla K. Sunder, eventually persuaded the ANTUF, the government and unions representing the jobless workers to come to an agreement. The government agreed to release two central committee members of the federation, Ramesh Lama and Bishnu Thapa Magar, from custody.

Other commitments made by the government, the ANTUF and the industrialists were announced at a late-night press conference in the capital last

Wednesday, the day before the businesses reopened. The government agreed to start making public the whereabouts of 50 ANTUF members who had “disappeared” from government custody, beginning September 22. The process is likely to be completed within a month. The employers of the businesses that remained closed for a month have also agreed to pay their employees’ wages for the time the businesses remained closed.

This concession concerning the workers’ wages is bigger than it appears. “The Maoists have sent a message to workers that a shutdown won’t affect their paychecks,” says Chitra Tiwari, a Washington-based analyst, who keeps a close tab on the Maoist insurgency and has written a number of articles on the subject. Because the Maoists can force the employers to pay, they emphasize the weakness of the state.

#### IS IT OVER?

At least, say business leaders, it’s over for now. “We have come out of the problem, but there is a difficult road ahead,” says FNCCI’s Khetan. Industrialists say that some points of the compromise deal with the ANTUF will be difficult for the businesses, and many fear that giving in to the illegitimate Maoist union will cause bigger problems in the long run. “The labor market is very fluid, and we fear that negotiating with Maoist trade unions could set a bad precedent,” says an industrialist. “The compulsion is that we have to.”

The Maoists must have been jubilant over the concessions. But they may have also realized that their ability to issue demands has a limit. The government has been ineffective, but collective pressure has now caused the Maoists to step back twice. On August 24, the Maoists withdrew their week-long blockade of the Valley. “The withdrawal came following pressure from civil society,” says Shyam Shrestha, editor of Mulyankan monthly. Civil society has been vocal in telling the Maoists that their pressure tactics are unacceptable. The Maoists have apparently started to listen: Public opinion is critical for their own existence; it is the first step towards achieving legitimacy as a political force.

“Any force that aspires to wield the power of the state cannot dare to alienate the civil society,” says Arjun Karki, president of the NGO Federation Nepal.

The closures exacted a heavy price, ultimately borne by all. The total loss of the closure is still to be accounted for, but early estimates run into billions. Each day of the closure cost the government more than Rs. 120 million in revenues, according to one estimate. Twelve businesses remained closed for 30 days while the 35 others had to pull down their shutters for 10 days.

Apart from the direct loss, the closures also told foreign investors that Nepal is a risky place to do business. “Such closure would affect the flow of foreign direct investments in Nepal,” said British Ambassador Keith Bloomfield during an Industrial Security Group press meet on September 11. The group consists of representatives from the American, British, German,



**CHILLED:** Bottlers Nepal, the makers of Coca-Cola, was an obvious target for the U.S.-bashing Maoists

## Peace Corps Goes Home

**T**he U.S. State Department temporarily suspended Peace Corps operations in Nepal in the wake of the explosion at the American Center in Gyaneshwore on September 10. All the volunteers will be sent home or on other assignments. The program may be restarted after six months, the American Embassy said. “It is unfortunate and disturbing,” says Jesse Brandt, a former Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal. The suspension will affect some of the programs, he says. Nepal has long been one of the most sought-after Peace Corps destinations; it also has one of the highest rates of returnees. The volunteers who pulled out last week had been working in many areas including maternal health, neo-natal health and HIV-AIDS prevention.

The suspension is likely to affect many of these projects. There are 87 Peace Corps volunteers in Nepal. More than 4,000 volunteers have served in Nepal after the operation began in 1962.

Along with the volunteers, some other Americans may be going home as well. The American Embassy said it would allow non-essential workers and families of embassy staff in Nepal to return to the United

States for 30 days. “The embassy has received information that the Maoists may attack or take actions specifically against U.S. citizens,” the State Department said. Sources said that the threats were against Americans working with the security forces and NGOs in remote areas of the country, not against tourists. The American Embassy confirmed that no foreigners had been seriously hurt during the eight-year insurrection and said that no American has reported significant problems to the embassy recently. They added that they were deeply concerned about the American Center bombing, which led them to suspend Peace Corps operations and allow dependents and non-essential staff to leave. **N**





Bijay Rai

French and Indian embassies and their bilateral chambers of commerce. Both the closure and the warning come at a time when a report by the Department of Industry says that foreign investment grew 55 percent last year, from Rs. 1.77 billion to Rs. 2.75 billion. The department says it approved more than six dozen new foreign investment projects last year. A reversal would severely hurt the economy.

“It’s both a political and economic sin,” says Ram Sharan Mahat, former finance minister and Nepali Congress leader, discussing the Maoist closure. “If there is no Nepali chow chow, won’t the consumer just eat Indian chow chow?” The Maoists have failed to understand simple economics, he says. But even if they fail to understand Mahat’s economics, they have effectively used economic targets against the state for political ends.

## BRINKMANSHIP

The Maoist economic offensive reflects their brinkmanship, say analysts. They are taking the state to the edge. “They are using economic strangulation as a strategy to bring the government to its knees,” says Mahat. “It is another manifestation of the Valley blockade.” In early August the Maoists imposed a blockade on the Kathmandu Valley to choke the economy, then withdrew it after seven days of intense pressure from civil society.

Public pressure has again worked, but the Maoists are likely to make similar moves. The blockade was their first attempt to prove the failure of the state machinery in its very bastion, Kathmandu; they seem to have analyzed the experiment as a success however others look at it. And there is every reason to believe that such experiments will be repeated. “The Maoists are sharpening their tools,” says former Speaker Daman Nath Dhungana. “This could happen all over again.” Recent Maoist statements suggest as much.

A Maoist statement says that the rebels have shifted their strategy from strategic equilibrium to strategic offensive. And by offensive they seem to mean everything that hurts and weakens the state, including closures and blockades. Those



**BULL'S-EYE:** The Maoists are taking a shot at the state

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**COMMON ENEMY:** Prime Minister Deuba rallied Indian support to fight the Maoists

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BACK TO BUSINESS: Surya Nepal reopens

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are just tactics in the Maoist struggle, which is a manifestation of political differences, says Dhungana. What are the Maoists up to then? Is the state getting run down, or are the Maoists playing a psychological game?

**POLITICAL PROBLEM**

Without discussing the fundamental political issues at hand, the conflict—and economic attacks—will continue, say analysts, and the Maoists will resort to every single tactic to undermine the state. “No permanent solution can be found without resolving the issues of constituent assembly and U.N. mediation,” says Dhungana.

But some of the Maoist tactics are getting confusing. In a recent state-



MEDIATION: Civil society came in handy

nw/ss

ment, the Maoist supremo Prachanda said his party would not talk with the government, preferring instead to hold talks with the King or his direct representatives. The government, led by Prime Minister Deuba, is wary of Maoist betrayal. There have been no visible confidence building mea-

asures as a prelude to a political dialogue from the either side. Following his visit to India, Prime Minister Deuba has hinted he may adopt a carrot and stick approach to deal with the Maoists if they fail to come to the negotiating table.

Whether or not Deuba will get what he wants, the fear is

widespread. Even as businesses resume operations and the government, the Maoist labor union, the industrialists and the laborers seem to be at peace for the moment, the crisis is far from over. “This is just a relief and not a solution,” says Dhungana. “We are headed for a deeper crisis.” **N**



# LIVING DANGEROUSLY

nm/ss

Journalists are facing unprecedented threats from both the security forces and the Maoists. Truth is already a major casualty.

**BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI**

**O**N SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, THE Maoists raised the level of violence again in the Valley, using a gas cylinder to detonate a powerful bomb. The cylinder was left on the Bagmati Bridge in Minbhawan at a busy time of the day. Television footage showed torn pieces of the metal cylinder strewn about.

A Nepal Television cameraman on duty at the scene was among the more than a dozen people who sustained injuries during the blast. Ishwore Maharjan is still recuperating at B&B Hospital in Gwarkhu. Increasingly, more and more journalists feel that their job is getting both difficult and dangerous.

“Our workplace, where we gather the news, is turning seriously dangerous,” says photojournalist Ravi Manandhar. He had a near-death experience more than three years ago when a bomb went off at Tudikhel while he was taking photos for

Himalaya Times, a Nepali broadsheet. He was at a gathering of pro-royalist Rastrabadi Milan Kendra, who were protesting against the Maoists. Manandhar regained consciousness while his friends were dragging him to Bir Hospital. He had a deep cut on his bleeding foot. “If it had been in an explosion like last Sunday’s [September 12], I would surely have died,” says Manandhar.

Deepak Bhattarai of Kantipur Television had a similar experience last April when he rushed to Chhaimale village, southwest of Kathmandu. Bhattarai was one of the first journalists to reach the site with his cameraman Yopesh Pradhan. They had heard that some dead bodies of Maoists still lay in the VDC building where an accident had caused an explosion while the Maoists were making bombs. Suddenly, they heard an explosion from where the Army was defusing the remaining bombs. Bhattarai and his crew had just stepped away from the area. A soldier lay seriously

injured, calling out that he was dying, praying to god and asking for water.

“It was only then we realized that we could have been in his place,” says Bhattarai, who recalls the incident with fear and excitement. “That was the most frightening moment in my career.” The soldier survived the blast and was evacuated by an Army helicopter.

Not all incidents are as heroic and memorable. In many cases, journalists have been harassed and some have even been killed by the parties to the conflict on charges that they are with the opposing side. Matrika Poudel of Nepal 1 television was taken from his office last December by the Army on charges of being affiliated with the Maoists, based on articles he had written in Rajdhani daily.

“Some Army interrogators were decent, but some made threats that they would treat me like they had treated Krishna Sen,” says Poudel. The Maoists say Sen, the editor of the pro-Maoist newspaper Janastha, was killed by the security forces while in the government custody, a claim corroborated by human rights workers. Poudel says he was blindfolded for more than nine hours during the custody. “Some Army personnel said that journalists are the Maoists,” he says.

Rewati Sapkota of Rajdhani daily has been on the receiving end of both the government and the Maoists. Four years ago, the Maoists bombed his house in Kubinde VDC in Sindhupalchowk because police had stayed in his barn. Sapkota's family had made repeated requests to the police to vacate after the Maoists started sending threats. Then two years ago the police took him from his Maitidevi residence to Kamalpokhari Police Station and then Mahendra Police Club, where he was beaten with batons and rubber strips, mostly on the feet, until he fell unconscious. On June 24 this year, the Army took him for interrogation.

"There is no way that I can ever write news freely," says Sapkota. He gets bad headaches and his feet feel sore whenever he works late nights, which he often does. But it's the psychological scar of the incident that's more damaging than anything else. That both parties to the conflict felt threatened by the same reporter shows how precarious the situation of the journalists is.

"Most journalists I know [in Nepalgunj] have received some kind of threats from the security forces or the Maoists over the years," says Rudra Khadka, who reported for Kantipur daily for five years from the Midwest headquarters of Nepalgunj until he joined Samaya weekly early this year. "A lot of journalists end up doing news reports they would never have done. The level of threat, from both the parties to the conflict, is extremely high outside Kathmandu."

And things are unlikely to get any easier any time soon. Recently, the Maoists issued a conciliatory statement after the murder of Radio Nepal's Dailekh correspondent Dekendra Thapa, saying the killing was a mistake. Anyone comforted by that should remember that their senior leaders had apologized for the killing of journalist Gyanendra Khadka in Sindhupalchowk last year.

Maoists still hold two journalists in their custody and have threatened to kill 10 journalists, two of them with Kantipur—even as the Maoists maintain that they support press freedom.

In a letter addressed to the Federation of Nepalese Journalists on September 10, the Maoist leader Krishna Bahadur Mahara assured the federation of his party's commitment to press freedom and said that the central leadership had directed their cadres to leave the journalists alone. The government has also repeatedly committed itself to the constitutional right of press freedom. It



was reiterated with much fanfare when a police inspector and an Army major signed the first florescent press jacket early this year as a symbolic commitment to press freedom. The jackets were distributed by the Nepal Federation of Photo Journalists to the press photographers, who, more than the news reporters, face greater dangers. Camera-wielding photographers are readily identifiable and become easy targets.

"There is a tendency among both the government forces and the Maoists to use journalists for their own propaganda," says Taranath Dahal, president of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists, the FNJ. "Journalists are fine so long as they serve your purpose."

Dahal says that journalists based outside Kathmandu, especially in rural districts, are the most vulnerable lot. They face extreme dangers and their working conditions are pitiable. "In most cases," says Dahal, "neither the government administrators nor the Maoists look at them favorably. And there's the constant pressure of deadlines from their head-

quarters in Kathmandu." District reporters tell Nation Weekly that security forces constantly summon them for questioning, sometimes even demanding to know who their sources are, something a journalist is ethically allowed to guard. According to a veteran reporter in the Midwest, he has been forced to write news by both the security forces and the Maoists on numerous occasions.

Compensation and security, however, are a far cry. "Neither the government nor the media owners seem serious about confronting such important issues as insurance of journalists in case of death or injury, rescues in case of crises or supporting their families in case of their death," says Dahal. "A serious thought needs to be given to this issue. It is a fact that journalists are already taking casualties." When journalists suffer, truth becomes the first casualty. ■





# IN GOOD STEAD

More TV channels are coming online soon, but no one in the industry seems too worried about the competition

BY NIRJAL DHUNGANA

**E**VEN THOUGH THE PRO-longed economic slump has had a debilitating effect on the economy at large, the television industry is in fine form. The sound health of the business is due to the Rs. 2 billion advertising sector, which is witnessing constant growth.

According to experts, 43 percent of total advertisement is allocated to TV in the Asia-Pacific region. The growing market in Nepal, they say, should be no surprise. Of the six channels, five—NTV, NTV Metro, Kantipur, Image Metro and Channel Nepal—are beamed from inside Nepal while Nepal 1 from New Delhi. With two more channels, Avenues and Shangri-La, preparing to enter the market, the competition will heat up. One of the new channels, Avenues TV, ATV, will go on air as early as December this year.

“Since the preliminary tasks, including the procurement of hardware and arrangement of location, are nearing completion, we will hit the market shortly,” says Ajay Mishra, general manager of ATV. Their Rs. 220 million investment is a first for a news channel in the country. “What will set our news apart from other channels is its sophistication in presentation and transmission,” says Mishra. He adds that ATV will have a nationwide network for live transmissions. “Since the promoters of ATV already have some two decades of experience in the field of TV operations, carving a market niche will not be too difficult for us,” he says.



Ad Avenues, one of the leading ad agencies in the country, owns ATV. With their connections with major advertisers, they should also be able to command top rates. “More than 90 percent of total expenditure for TV advertising in Nepal is for news-based programming,” says Mishra.

ATV plans for wide distribution of its signal: More viewers mean higher advertising revenue. According to the general manager of ATV, the channel will be beamed to more than 35 countries across the Asian region. ATV also has ambitious plans for operating multiple channels.

Shangri-La TV, the other upcoming channel, has a deal with

Abstar 5 for satellite distribution of its signal. “The production of software and the acquisition of the equipment required for satellite uplinking is under-



nw/SS

way,” says STV chairman Nir Shah. STV also has identified a niche area: The major thrust of STV will be educational programming for rural Nepal.

But the STV boss is deeply concerned about the state of the nation and fears the current political stalemate could be a roadblock to his venture. Total investments so far amount to Rs. 7 million, but no launch date has yet been fixed.

The existing channels are not sitting idle either. Kantipur TV, launched two years ago, is already planning a major expansion. “From both commercial and non-commercial standpoints, we are doing fairly well,” says Kantipur Television’s chief executive producer, Bhusan Dahal. KTV is believed to have invested Rs. 300 million to date. “Currently, we are in process of charting out the second phase,” says Dahal. Over the next three years, KTV will spend Rs. 200 million for satellite uplinking and 24-hour operations. According to market sources, KTV’s investments could reach

as much as Rs. 1 billion before the ambitious project is over. That money has to come from somewhere.

“Like other channels, programs pertaining to news and current affairs are the prime revenue earners of KTV,” says Dahal. “And, of course, trained crews and sound technical and financial health are our major strengths.” The brand name Kantipur—with a number of major publications and an FM radio station—is their strongest card.

Image Metro, another recent entrant, is said to be nearing the breakeven point. “If everything goes as planned, I may shortly be freed from injecting some Rs. 1 million monthly from my pocket,” says R.K. Manandhar, chairman of Image Metro. Image Metro bought programming time on NTV for eight years and operates an FM radio station. “KATH 97.9 and morning transmissions on NTV substantially added to our resources for the Rs. 70 million TV venture,” says Manandhar.

Going to satellite broadcasting could put them in the black. Image Metro is waiting for a satellite uplink, but claims the government has been slow to issue their license. “Image Metro and Kantipur applied for satellite permission at more or less the same time. Now KTV is up and running while the government has been unscrupulously lethargic as far as we are concerned,” Manandhar complains.

Not to be outdone, the government’s own NTV Metro is also all geared up for satellite broadcasting. “We will uplink our signal probably with either the Asia or Intel satellite very shortly,” says the channel’s Prakash Jung Karki. NTV Metro programming will primarily focus on the youth. It plans to expand news and current affairs, and the channel funded by a Rs. 540 million investment from China hopes to collect Rs. 20 million in advertising revenue this fiscal year.

State-run NTV still rules the roost with almost 90 percent of the market share. It earned Rs. 240 million in ad revenues last year, up from the annual target

of Rs. 180 million. About 85 percent of TV viewers count on NTV for news-related programs, according to a survey. “The soundness of NTV can safely be attributed to strong transmission network, copyright of software, huge archives of visuals, wide geographical coverage and, of course, good international relations,” says NTV Deputy General Manager Bishwa Prakash Maskey.

But NTV’s grand monopoly, already under fire, is all set to crack in the days ahead in the face of aggressive competition from private channels. Already, the state run enterprise is struggling due to high operation costs, bureaucratic red tape, overstaffing and underutilization of assets. But it also has the government’s deep pockets to bank on, come what may.

No such luck for Channel Nepal, once the only private broadcaster. Its monopoly over cable transmission—it is owned by the country’s largest cable operator Spacetime Network—once gave it a crucial edge. The recent government directive to cable operators to carry all the Nepali channels will substantially weaken its market position.



nw/SS

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Remarkably, almost none of the TV channels are too worried about competition. “With the entrance of new players, the market size will also grow,” argues Karki of NTV Metro. “The sustainability of some dozen FM radios operating in the Valley is a case in point.” That is, as long as the advertising pie keeps growing. **N**

# AID AGENCIES RETHINK STRATEGY

A new report urges top humanitarian groups to create local presence in disaster-prone areas—a change from the current firefighting mentality

BY SOPHIE ARIE

**M**UCH OF THE DEVELOPING world is facing crises of biblical proportions—floods, droughts, even locusts. But in the post-9/11 era, these disasters pose new problems. Many fail to capture the attention of a west preoccupied with terrorism; others are complicated by the nexus of humanitarianism and politics. As a result, aid agencies are struggling to respond.

A group of the world's leading nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including CARE, OXFAM, Save the Children and World Vision, have called on the experts to tell them how to cope. The result is a new report, entitled "Ambiguity and Change: Humanitarian NGOs Prepare for the Future." Its advice is brisk.

## HUMANITARIANISM UNDER FIRE

"It's time to realize: You can't sit in the United States and send fire-fighting missions [to the world's disaster zones] any more," says Peter Walker, a disaster-relief expert at Tufts University's Feinstein International Famine Center in Medford, Massachusetts, who led the team that compiled the report. "You have to get local, become embedded in each country. You have to be there before disaster strikes and stay there when the emergency's over."

According to Mr. Walker, a former director of disaster and refugee policy for the International Federation of the Red Cross, western-run aid agencies are facing a "crisis of legitimacy" as they struggle to be neutral in countries where their western faces make them appear to be part of the enemy.

Aid groups have traditionally relied on the principle that their work is free from military or political influence to keep them safe in war zones. While maintaining that principle has always been dif-

ficult, aid groups say it's especially challenging now.

The United Nations confronted this reality last year when terrorists attacked the United Nations' Baghdad headquarters killing, among others, the U.N. special envoy to Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello.

At the same time, senior aid figures say that, because of their direct contact with local people, they are being forced, in countries like Afghanistan, to be the "public relations" branch of the U.S.-led military operation, leading a "hearts and minds" campaign to win the support of the local population.

"We need the partners in the war on terrorism and particularly the U.S. to start respecting humanitarian principles.

We want them to separate their political and military activity from the operations of humanitarian agencies," says Phil Bloomer, Oxfam's head of advocacy. "Otherwise there is a danger that all humanitarians are perceived as nothing more than an extension of...the military operation."

Oxfam has recently decided to stop accepting funds from the British government, formerly one of its biggest sources of funds. And in July, after five of its workers were fatally ambushed, Doctors Without Borders pulled out of Afghanistan. In its press release, the group complained that U.S. military efforts jeopardized its neutrality and endangered its members: "...The United States-backed coalition consistently sought to use humanitarian aid to build support for its military and political ambitions."

While aid agencies battle to be neutral, there are some coun-



HANDS ON: Aid agencies try to get local

B Rai

**BALANCING ACT:** Organizations such as the United Nations need to maintain neutrality in places of conflict

tries that the war on terrorism has now made almost impossible to help.

NGOs have faced a particularly dire situation in North Korea—a country President Bush said was part of the “axis of evil” in 2001. By July, the World Food Program (WFP), the chief provider of food rations for the famine-stricken Marxist state, had raised only 20 percent of the funds it needs for this year’s effort in North Korea. Program leaders have felt compelled to stop feeding some people.

“We have had to stop giving food rations to the elderly. It’s an excruciating decision to have to make,” says the deputy director of the Rome-based WFP.

North Korea is an extreme case. Aid agencies and government donors say donations and budgets have actually increased since September 11, and a large proportion of aid is going to Muslim populations.

But people are thinking more carefully about who will best spend their donations. U.N. agencies are seen as too bureaucratic and tied to the politics of member nations. Instead, donors are slowly shifting toward the big, reliable, specialized agencies. NGOs are finding it difficult to call attention to a crisis that lacks an “evil-doer.”

“These days, because there are so many disasters, there have to be millions facing death before the west is going to notice,” says Brenda Barton, the WFP’s chief spokeswoman at its Rome headquarters. “We have noticed that the media and the public imagination can respond massively when there is a ‘villain’ in the picture. But when the villain is Mother Nature, people find it harder to react.”



Bangladesh’s floods have made headlines, but the response is not proportionate to the 20 million Bangladeshis whose homes are underwater.

“The people of Bangladesh are not the only ones whose plight has gone largely unnoticed,” says John Powell, the deputy executive director at the World Food Program. Powell cites a swarm of locusts in West Africa, droughts in Kenya, Cuba and Afghanistan, and freak

weather conditions in Nicaragua and Peru as other problem areas being ignored. WFP officials say there are so many disasters now that disasters are fighting with each other for media attention.

“On top of that it is hard for us to tell people about hunger when they are obsessed with obesity and trying to lose weight,” he adds from his office in Rome. *(The Christian Science Monitor)*

# DASHAIN AAYO

After some difficult months, optimism is in the air as Dashain approaches

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

**K**athmandu streets are coming to life, and shops in New Road, Ason, Mahabaudha and at major shopping complexes are seeing an upturn in customers. The lead-up to Dashain has slowly begun. The festival starts on October 20, barely a month away. It is a time when Nepalis spend more freely; buying new clothes, household and electronic goods and party supplies. The festive spirit and the buying spree will continue until the end of Tihar, on November 15.

Businesses are very optimistic about their prospects. Already shopkeepers can be seen putting up discount signs and marking sale prices on items to attract more customers. Many others are planning special schemes. "The Dashain feeling has already caught on," says Nilendra Man Pradhanang, office secretary at the China Town Shopping Center in Sundhara. The shopping center is hosting a Dashain Festival with concerts and fashion shows on its premises from September 21-27. Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Bharat Mohan

Adhikari is likely to inaugurate the event. Last year's festival drew huge crowds.

"There was not even enough space to stand last year. We hope it will be much better this year," says Pradhanang excitedly. "Finally, all the bad news for business seems to be over at least for a while."

The events of recent months have not been good for to the business community. First it was the Maoist "blockade" and then the riots of September 1. Then 47 businesses were forced to shut down by the Maoist-aligned trade union. News of daily bombings in public places in Kathmandu followed. "It was like *dasha*, ill-fate, had struck us," says Rajesh Bhakta Shrestha of Kastamandap Supermarket, who, like many others we met, is planning special Dashain schemes for his customers. "But if sales are as high as in previous years, Dashain is likely to bring back smiles on the faces of businessmen like us," he says happily.

Most businesses told Nation Weekly that their transactions shoot up by 70 to 80 percent during the Dashain season. The most popular purchases are readymade garments, food items and







consumer goods. At the China Town Shopping Center alone, shop owners say that over 10,000 customers visit them daily during the Dashain season, three to four times as many as on a regular business day.

Bishal Bazaar, Bhatbhateni Departmental Store, Pashupati Plaza and Ranamukteshwore Complex all expect strong business in the lead-up to the festival too. Last year some complexes conducted raffle draws for high-spending customers; most said they were planning to repeat such promotions this year too. Most shoppers in New Road, Ason, Bagbazaar, Putali Sadak and Mangal Bazaar told us they had already started their Dashain shopping or at least had already prepared their shopping lists. “Dashain shopping starts right from the festival of Teej,” says Rama Neupane, a housewife who was buying *tika* and bangles for Teej in Bhedasingh. “Being a latecomer for Dashain shopping could mean paying more, and the marketplace is likely to be more crowded.”

From past experience, we should expect massive traffic jams and battles for parking spaces during the festival season. Those inconveniences spread far beyond the electronics shops of New Road, the clothing shops at Dharahara or the supermarkets. The Dashain markets for the goats, sheep, ducks and chickens also clog traffic. Traders in Bagbazaar and Balkhu told us they were already stocking up the animals to meet demands in Dashain.

Even the music business seems to be picking up, with lots of new recordings in the shops. “Many in the industry believe this is the right time to launch a new album in the market,” says Nima Rumba, pop singer and this year’s Hits FM Music Award winner in the pop category. “It is a general trend that people purchase more music in between Dashain and Tihar when they have more money.” One of the most awaited albums this Dashain season is from the popular band Mongolian Hearts led by Raju Lama. Based on their previous groundbreaking sales, the band is highly optimistic.

Optimism is the tone everywhere, as it should be in the run-up to the two great festivals. Everyone deserves a break. ■

# Everyday Art

Alex Gabbay and Subina Shrestha make films that offer offbeat perspectives on the things around us. But marketing films like theirs isn't easy, and there are many moviegoers who have never seen their work.

**BY ADITYA ADHIKARI**

If you ask people in Kathmandu 'who has AIDS,' they will say no one. AIDS along with sex and drugs does not exist in the mind of Kathmanduites. Those are the problems of the others. Nobody wants to talk about them."

So begins the 26 minutes of "Kathmandu: Untold Stories." The creators are Alex Gabbay and Subina Shrestha, filmmakers based in Kathmandu. When UNICEF approached them two years ago for a film on HIV/AIDS in Nepal, it took them time to figure out how they could make their work most effective. As the film was meant for policymakers in Kathmandu, they decided that rather than going out into remote areas to show the effects of AIDS, they would concentrate on Kathmandu as seen through the eyes of the youth—a version of the city hidden from the gaze of older people, where drugs and sex are easily available. The film is divided into episodes, each featuring a different character: A heroin user who contracted HIV; a gay

man who, unable to tell his family of his sexuality, is married and has two children; and a depressed dancer at a dance bar. These are people that everybody knows exist in our city, but few know their activities, thoughts and desires. There are startling revelations: The married gay man says that he usually has safe sex but one day in the recent past a friend had unsafe sex with him when he was drunk and passed out. He admits that there's a possibility he might be HIV positive.

Gabbay came to Nepal in 2001 to make "Fistful of Rice," a documentary about malnutrition, on commission from BBC World. That was when he met Subina Shrestha, who worked on the film as translator; since then they have both been based in Kathmandu and have made 12 films together. Shrestha usually works on the research and the script, while Gabbay does the directing, camera work and editing.



KATHMANDU: Untold stories



"To be able to make films is a privilege," says Gabbay.

"There's no point making films if you don't put everything you have into them." So his eyes are always open, looking for opportunities. A project he is particularly fond of is "King for a Day." In 2001, before he came to Kathmandu, Gabbay went to Bangladesh to make a film commissioned by BBC World. While he was there he noticed heavy preparations for a 12-hour visit by Bill Clinton, the first time an American president visited Bangladesh. After the film he was supposed to make was com-

plete, he decided to stay an extra month in Dhaka to make a film about the excitement and anticipation surrounding the visit. The mode he chose to tell the story was through the eyes of a skeptical, lower-middle class journalist. This fictional character, when not on the streets, stares bleakly at the camera or lies in bed smoking cigarettes and reading the newspaper. The writer Ruchir Joshi, who also wrote the narrative, adopts an exaggerated Bangla accent while reciting it: "Salamalekhum! Good morning Mr. President. Welcome to Bangladesh. Welcome to Dhaka Bangladesh. Welcome to the capital of the real world here the heat is hot and the poor are poor and floods are floods and aid is aid. Welcome! Welcome!! Welcome!!!"

In the course of the film we meet many characters: Workers cleaning the streets who are unaware that they are doing so for Clinton's visit, anti-globalization demonstrators and hut-builders who are thrilled that the "King of America" is coming to their little village. Particularly funny is a scene where an elderly man is asked what he thinks about the visit of this U.S. president, who had gone through a sex scandal back home, to a devoutly Muslim nation. "If it is the will of Allah," says the old man, "the president will start following the ways of Islam."

After the journalist is not allowed to come anywhere close to the U.S. president, he focuses instead on the people on the street for whom Clinton's visit means

nothing: No matter how much the U.S. decides to increase garment imports from Bangladesh, the garment workers will still earn a single dollar a day.

Through the eyes of the man-on-the-street, Gabbay and his crew create a witty and pointed critique of globalization. "This film cost only \$1,000," says Gabbay to belie that the common conception that good films require immense investment. The film commissioned by BBC World cost 10 times more than that, but "King for a Day" won more admirers, and it won awards at anthropology and human rights film festivals in the United States and Argentina.

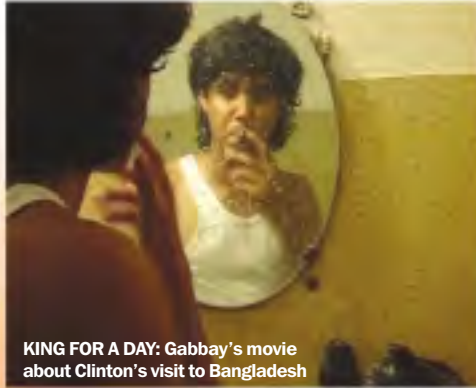
Part of the power of the films Gabbay and Shrestha make comes from their ability to look at events as outsiders, noticing both farce and melancholy in ways that a local would not. Though Shrestha is native to Kathmandu, she spent some of her formative years in Mumbai, the United States and Buenos Aires, and her vision of Kathmandu is detached, colored by her experiences elsewhere. This is not to say that she doesn't care for the city she grew up in: She does feel deeply rooted in it, but finds many aspects of it depressing. "I get upset when anyone

about Kathmandu. "I felt that tango was an apt metaphor for my feelings about Kathmandu," says Shrestha. "The mixture of the pain of loss with intense passion. The sweetness of pain, so to speak."

*jasto.*" Still there have been times when this acute portrayal of a woman lost in her own city has resonated with audiences around the world. Shrestha particularly remembers a showing in Dhaka, where audience members came up to her to tell her that she had exactly captured their feelings about their own city.

So it is among small pockets around the world that Gabbay and Shrestha find their admirers. Film festivals and small groups of concerned individuals, like the teachers' groups who watched "Kathmandu: Untold Stories," remain the chief audience. There cannot be a large market for films of the sort Gabbay and Shrestha make anywhere in the world, and

especially not in Nepal where distribution facilities are inadequate. "It is important to me that Nepalis watch our films," says Shrestha, but marketing films like theirs isn't easy. So far the only exposure their films have had in Nepal are at the film festivals and twice on Kantipur Television. There are plans to hold showings in cafés in Thamel, but private screenings are no substitute for a professionally managed distribution campaign. For the time being the pair is happy to continue creating short films that seek to offer off-beat perspectives on everyday things instead of the mainstream film industry's momentary escape into collective fantasy. **N**



makes a negative comment about Kathmandu," she says. "But when I see the things here, the events in the media, the sight of young people wasting their potential, sometimes I just want to leave this place."

Her conflicting feelings towards Kathmandu are expressed in her 17-minute visual essay "Un Amor sin la Vida" (A Love Without Life, 2002). What is shown is a darkened Kathmandu, awash with rain. A lone young woman, whose face is never clearly seen, walks around town immersed in her solitude. The sight of a figure lost in an urban landscape, completely alone even when surrounded by crowds, is reminiscent of Wong Kar Wai's Hong Kong. The faceless passers-by she encounters are distant, and the heavy rain falling over temples in our ancient squares contributes to the unbroken melancholy that pervades the film. Shrestha herself provides the narrative voice of the young woman protagonist. She speaks of a tango dancer she met in Buenos Aires, a despondent woman in love with nothing but dancing, and then moves on to her own ambivalent, melancholy feelings

Charges that the work is too abstract, that the creator has been too self-indulgent in its creation and that the non-linear narrative line does not sustain the audience's interest may be leveled against "A Love Without Life." Shrestha admits "the film is not for everybody." One of her friends even described it as "*Hawa ma udayko*



A LOVE WITHOUT LIFE:  
Shrestha's 17-minute visual  
essay about her feelings toward  
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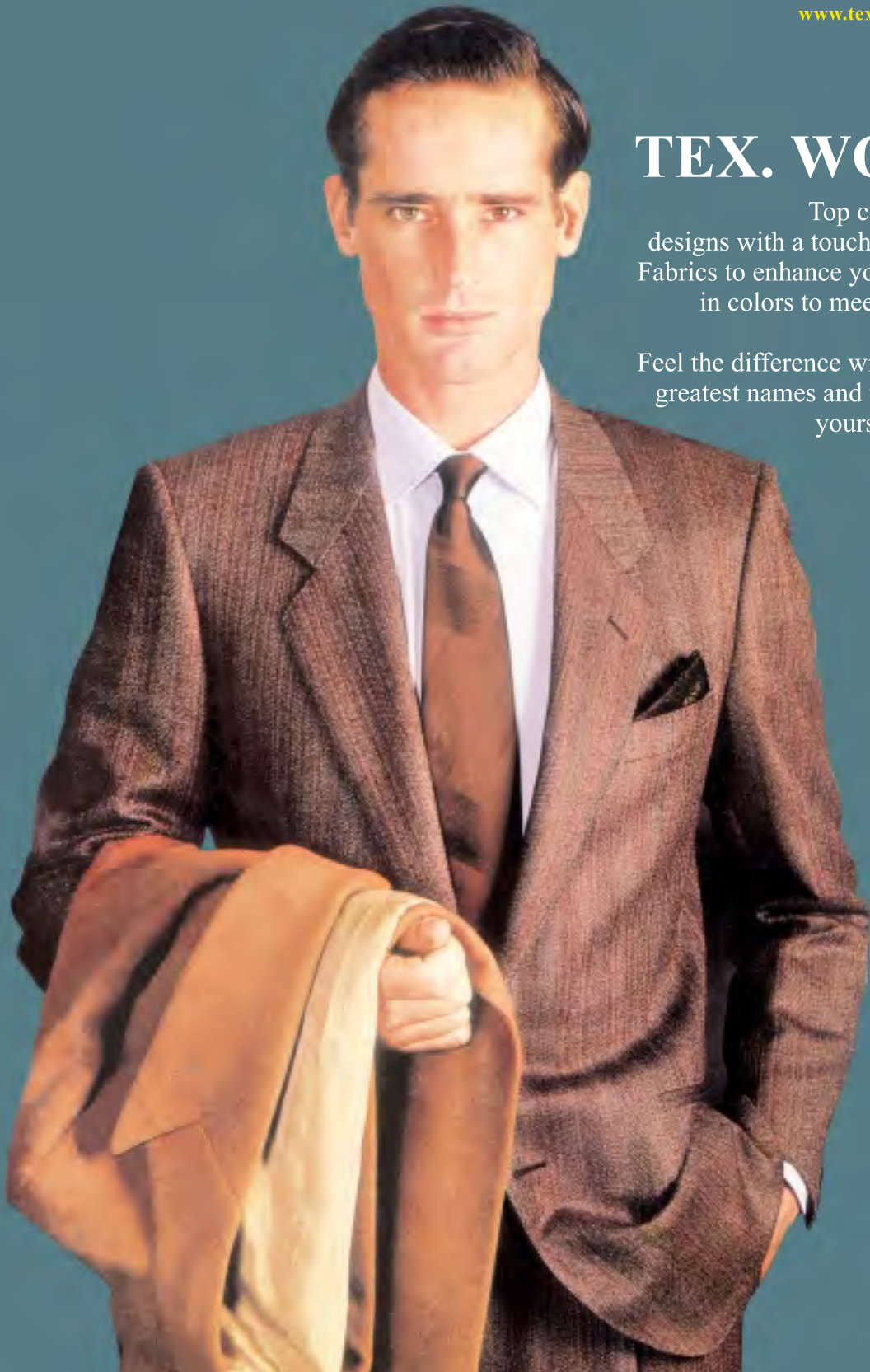
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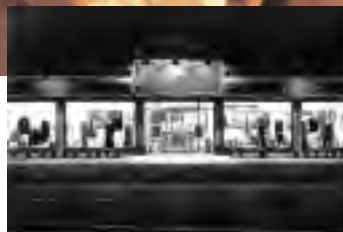
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# Messiniraq

An open letter to American presidential candidate John Kerry

BY SAMRAT UPADHYAY

Dear John,

I'm peeved at you since you're making me eat my words from my last column, where I happily declared that you're trumping Bush on the electoral votes projections. In the past few weeks things have changed. Now, after the Republican National Convention, it's Bushyman The War President who's ahead on polls, and you, Johnny Come Lately, are scrambling to get your message straight. Good thing you came to me last night, and we had one of your Front Porch Tour chats, with my four-year-old Shahzadi riding her bike on the driveway and Babita watering her flowers in this terribly middle class neighborhood in Bloomington, Indiana. The scene was as American as coconut curry—small town, happy family, sounds of a baseball game from a nearby school, neighbors waving hellos—except of course I and my wife still identify ourselves as Nepalis. Since we Nepalis are well-known for offering unsolicited advice, I can't help but tell you how to run a better campaign. I want Bush out in November. This is how to do it:

## 1. ATTACK THE IDEA THAT BUSH MAKES AMERICA SAFE

The Republican convention pounded home one big lie: Bush makes America safe. It evoked 9-11, linked Iraq to terrorism and presented Bush as a resolute, jaw-clenching cowboy who'll keep 'em marauders and murderers at bay. It's working. Most Americans think Bush, not you, is better at fighting the war on terror. You need to demolish this dishonest but brilliantly established connection between "Bush" and "safe." Your recent slogan that "W stands for wrong—the wrong direction for America" is good, but not potent enough. Link "Bush" to "danger." (This might sound sleazy but it's closer to the truth than Vice President Cheney's suggestion that a vote for you would lead to more terrorist attacks on the United States.) Say with conviction: "Bush's rush to war has put America in danger because it has spawned more terrorists." "With no exit plan in Iraq, Bush has put our troops in escalating danger." "The Bush administration's intelligence failures have made us more exposed to dangerous terrorists." Once you equate Bush to danger and the obsessive-compulsive American media starts echoing your words, the public will make the connection and the truth will emerge: Bush is a dangerous president for America.

## 2. STOP THINKING IN FRENCH

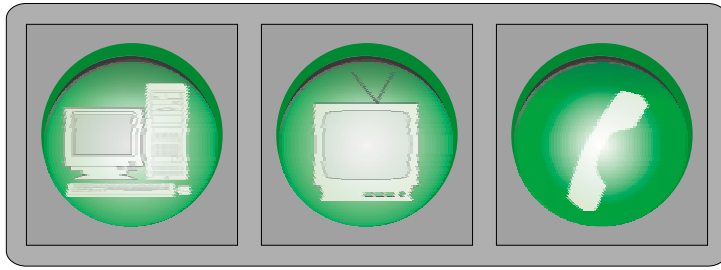
Your calibrated approach to foreign policy is backfiring; so abandon it. Stop the "nuance" nonsense—the American public wants clear-cut an-

swers. Copy some of Bush's shoot-straight-from-hips-strategy. Offer concise, simple answers to the complex Iraq problem, even though we all know that Bush's simpleton approach to fighting terror has angered the world like never before. Come to think of it, from now on whenever you mention Iraq, use the word "mess." Iraqmess. Messiniraq. Think like a poet, but be practical enough to tell us exactly how you'll tackle the messiniraq. You've boldly stated that you'll get the U.S. troops out of Iraq by the end of your first term. Now give us a year-by-year scenario of how you'll achieve that goal. Tell Americans, "This is how I'll fix Bush's Iraqmess." Whether your plan will materialize is another matter, but the public will notice your plan above Bush's no-plan. Also, remind voters every day that people are dying in Iraq: "As of today, 1004 U.S. soldiers and 10,000 Iraqi civilians dead in Iraqmess." Yes, emphasize that we need not only mourn American lives—Iraqis are people too. Please say, "Thousands dead, countless injured/maimed, millions lives shattered." Don't hide the lump in your throat when you say this. It's okay to cry over an insane war. Don't forget to add to your count a dozen of my Nepali countrymen: They only wanted to work so they could send money back home. They are the far-flung victims of this crappy war. Include in your stride the still-war-torn country of Afghanistan. Remind voters that the Taliban is gaining force once again, ethnic violence is flaring up and drug barons rule the country. Repeat after me, "Afghanistan is a mess."

## 3. EMBRACE THE DISENFRANCHISED

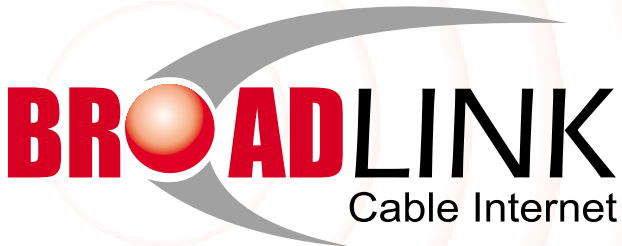
When Bush calls in on the radio show of his "good friend" Rush Limbaugh, a certified racist and misogynist, you know what the Republican Party "really" thinks. Women, blacks, gays and other minorities came out in full-force in New York to protest the Republicans. Doesn't that tell you something? These are the people, if you appeal to them more vigorously, who'll come out to vote for you in November. Keep hammering away at Bush's attempt to marginalize those who are already marginalized: Forty five million Americans without healthcare in 2003. Significant cuts in federal education funding for disadvantaged kids. An attempt to put bigotry into the constitution by federally banning same-sex marriage. Opposing minimum wage increase. Slashing funds for childcare and victims of domestic violence to provide tax cuts for the wealthy. Opposing affirmative action. And all of this in just four years. Make Americans shudder at what the next four years might accomplish under Bush. Yes, America is a mess. Say that in your sleep. **N**





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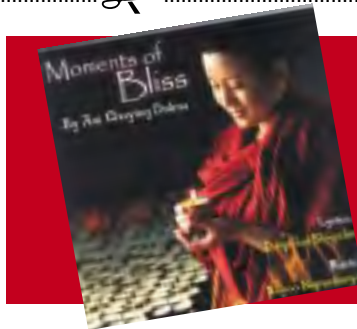


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# We Don't Need No Education

Alphabet soup is not the best way to learn your ABCs

BY KUNAL LAMA

I've taken a strategic decision: I'm not going to write about current events. This decision was imperative: My column would have been dreadfully bleak because the events of the recent weeks have been so cluelessly repetitive, with only nauseatingly minor variations. Take for example the plight of the Department of Labour and Employment Promotion (DLEP) on September 14<sup>th</sup>, a terrible Black Tuesday for them, "9/14." (Edit: In big, black, bold letters please) About 50 persons, led by two representatives of the Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies (NAFEA), vandalized the offices of the DLEP. Incredulously, the two representatives of NAFEA were both owners of manpower agencies. Can anyone see a vague suggestion, a faint outline, of logic emerging here? Oh, you can? Clever you because I certainly can't.

It was Black Monday, "9/13," for Modern Indian School (MIS). The story begins thus (and clearly illustrates the present state of our educational system, schools and the students, all in dire need of edification):

On Saturday, September 11, students of MIS were attacked by a gang of students from Saipal School—armed with khukris, our national weapon—in Golphutar. The Saipal students managed to chop off the fingers of the MIS sports teacher and fracture the hand of one its students. All this over a basketball match that MIS students scored over Saipal. On Monday, furious MIS students damaged property worth lakhs



of rupees of their own school after accusing their principal of not initiating action against the incident on Saturday. Apparently, MIS students were so violent that even the police could not take them under control. MIS is closed until situation normalizes.

I want to say something, a clever commentary on this incident; write a searingly articulate analysis of the troubled minds and nature of our desperately lost and misled youths—our only hope for the future—but I'm

utterly and completely dumbstruck. Imagine my shock and horror that this wasn't an isolated case; in fact, it seems that it's all the rage for students to rail and vent fury at their institutions to prove their point. Instances:

Padma Kanya (PK) College students locked the Department of Rural Development (RD)—started earlier this year—on Black Sunday, "9/12," over issues "colored by politics" and, presumably, darkened by rumors. The objective of RD is "to improve the standard of rural development education in the country." The city scholars are setting an exemplary example to their country cousins, then, aren't they? Well done. Bravo.

On Black Thursday, "9/9," would-be engineers from the Institute of Engineering (IOE) at Pulchowk locked-out the IOE admission committee office until Tribhuvan University (TU) and the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) "solve the problem of reservation quota for dalits, janajatis and women." Furthermore, a joint press release was issued by FSU, ANNFSU, NSU and NSU "close to" NC (D) stating that, "the indefinite lockout was the only way out." I suppose the minds of Nepali engineers are being thoroughly exercised battling this immensely ingenious and complex conundrum while those of other countries build machines, roads, bridges and buildings which soar to the sky defying gravity and human incredulity. While we luck out.

Tables were turned on Black Friday, "9/10," when temporary teachers of public schools closed down their schools throughout the nation. The demands the Temporary Teachers' Movement Central Committee (TTMCC) want fulfilled—or else: displaced teachers to be given placement and temporary teachers to be made permanent. Simple enough demands: How terrible to hold the entire nation hostage though. And how can they ever again hope to expect discipline and good behavior from their students? There is a lesson here somewhere.

Even foreign governments are at it. The American Embassy in Panipokhari has urged the Department of State in Washington to suspend the activities of the Peace Corps in Nepal in the wake of "twin bomb" attacks on the American Center, in what will be seen as a yet another Black Friday, "9/10." The news is that Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) have been asked to leave Nepal for six months. At least this is a not an indefinite but defined lockout of Nepal by the Americans. And how very sweet of them to sweeten the sourness of the lockout by providing us a million dollars in additional security assistance. Gee, thanks, cowboy, it's gonna be real helpful.

And let's not leave out Royal Nepal Airline Corporation (RNAC) when it comes to the unenviable tradition of lockouts.

On another Black Monday, "9/13," the RNAC Employees' Union (RNACEU?), RNAC Employees' Association (RNACEA?) and Nepal Airlines Pilots' Association (NAPA?) gheraoed and locked out the offices of the corporation's managing director and the board. Amongst the demands of RNACEU, RNACEA and NAPA: that RNAC be allowed to fly with wind beneath its wings, à la Bette Midler.

RIP. **N**





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# Restoring Traditions

BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

People normally get their inspiration from constructive works: I got mine from destruction,” says sculptor, restorer and art historian Rabindra Puri. Belonging to a family who boast a lineage in Bhaktapur that goes back to the days of the Malla Period,

Puri was been fascinated by the Nepali arts from an early age, and the rapid growth of ugly buildings has caused him a lot of pain.

His Namuna Ghar, which stands a short distance from the Dattatreya temple in Bhaktapur, was awarded an Honorable Mention in this year’s 2004 UNESCO Heritage Awards for Culture Heritage Conservation. Namuna Ghar is remarkable in its creation of a modern living space out of an ancient Newari building without infringing on the integrity of the traditional structure. “A problem with many restoration projects,” Puri says, “is that they destroy the whole building and then start from the ground up. I put all my energy into using all the original materials and preserving the exact structure of the building.”

The desire to rehabilitate old structures did not come suddenly to Puri: It grew gradually from an early age. When he was 16 he began his restoration work by scraping the walls of the house he was living in. Pointing out of the window of Namuna Ghar, he shows us the house where he still lives with his mother, his wife and his brother’s family: “That house is really old. I was born there; my father and grandfather were too,” he says proudly. What is now Namuna Ghar was, throughout his childhood, a dilapidated, unoccupied building. From the windows of his own home, Puri would stare out at the nearby building and wish he owned it and could restore it. “People used to think this building was haunted and used to call it Bhut Bangala,”

Puri says. “They used to avoid walking in front of it. When I finally managed to buy it for seven lakhs in the 90s, it had become a place to raise chickens. They overran the place.”

To buy a derelict building and attempt to recreate it as a hospitable living space was a big challenge for Puri, but he has never been one to shy away from challenges. Restoration began in 1999. At that time Puri was working fulltime as house program officer at the German development agency, GTZ. He recalls how he was obsessed with the creation of the house even while he was at work. His speech is animated, and speaking of his work clearly gives him a great deal of pleasure. He stops for a moment searching for the right words to describe the feeling of inspiration that drove his project. The expression on his face and the movements of his hands reveal his excitement and he bursts out with: “Bhitra dekhi kaukuti lagayko jasto,” like being tickled from the inside.

Building restoration isn’t the only thing that “tickles” Puri: There are many projects he feels as strongly about. After finishing his SLC he wanted to study sculpture, but his father wanted him to do something more practical: He began by studying law. As soon as he realized that his law classes would be held in the morning, he went to enroll himself at Lalit Kala Campus for classes in sculpture. His

zeal for many different subjects led him to complete four Bachelor’s degrees—humanities and social sciences, law, fine arts and commerce. While working towards his degrees he also got a job as a sculptor at the Patan Museum, which was then in the process of construction. He is responsible not only for some of the sculpture there but also for the design of the rear patio of the museum and the model of Boudhanath that still occupies a prominent position on the second floor. In 1993, Puri, then





**HARMONY:** Creating a modern living space out of an ancient Newari building

nm/ss



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24, went to Germany to study sculpture. After a semester he decided that while he was there it would be wise to take a degree in something practical, so he went on to study development policy at the University of Bremen. Initially it was difficult for him, as all classes were held in German, but he persisted, mastered German and went on to graduate with distinction.

“I don’t understand people who just want to hold a nine to five job and then hurry home to drink and play cards with their friends,” says Puri. “My philosophy has always been to work 16 hours a day, no matter what. Out of those hours I try to sell the work of eight of them.”

With a far off look in his eyes Puri continues: “My dream is...” Then as though catching himself he looks straight at this reporter and smiles: “One is permitted to dream, is he not? My dream is to restore the entire village of Panauti, to make a modern city using only our traditional architecture.” Bhaktapur already has too many new buildings to create such a project. Panauti, in comparison,

is untouched by the types of buildings that now dominate most of the Valley. Puri has already completed restoration work on a home in Panauti and is now working on others. He is also involved in the creation of a traditional-style hotel in Bhaktapur and the development of a homeopathic institute there.

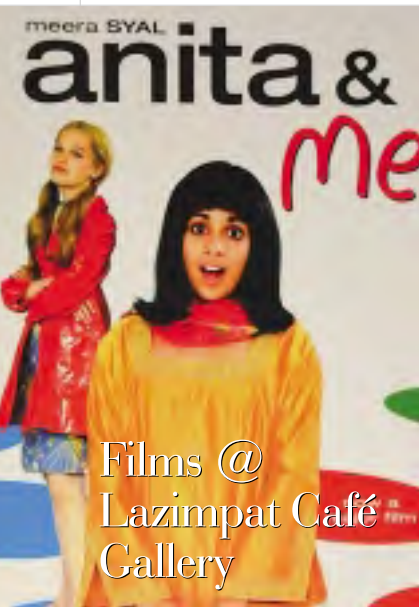
After he left GTZ in 2001, Puri met two Spaniards, Fernando Palazuelo and Jose Ojeda, who work on restoring old apartments in Spain. With their help, there are plans to create two “leisure centers” in Bhaktapur. “It is no longer possible to stand in a place in Bhaktapur and only see traditional architecture all around,” says Puri. “The purpose of the leisure centers is to create a circle of structures, where, if one stands in the center, it will be like re-entering the ancient city.”

He continues to work on his sculpture, teaches sculpture and Nepali art history at Kathmandu University and has plans to write books on Newari architecture and on the tools used by traditional craftsmen. “I have to write,” Puri says. “I have done a lot of research, and I can’t let that go to waste.”

Puri has found a way to bridge the past with the future. He still lives with his extended family, in the same place where his family has lived for generations. His inspirations arise from what lies in his immediate surroundings, and his preoccupation is to change his surroundings in ways that are in harmony with the traditional order. His pursuit is to demonstrate how traditional culture, which many perceive as dead, can in fact be rehabilitated and given a new dynamism. ■

# CITY ThisWeek

## EVENTS



Films @  
Lazimpat Café  
Gallery

### Anita and Me SEPTEMBER 21

Anita and Me, written for the screen by Meera Syal from her best-selling novel of the same name, is a coming-of-age film about Meena, an British-born Indian girl and her 14 year old blonde neighbor, Anita. Each character in the film is well developed without seeming to rely on stereotypes and caricature. Dawdling around these two characters, "Anita and Me" is hilarious, thoughtful and in the end quite touching. Cast: Max Beesley, Sanjeev Bhaskar, Anna Brewster, Kathy Burke, Ayesha Dharker. Director: Metin Huseyin.

### Ghost and the Darkness SEPTEMBER 26

John Paterson was sent to East Africa to build a railway bridge. He had a deadline to meet and was confident he and his large workforce of Africans and Indians would get the job done on time. Someone to keep his word, John demonstrates his skills by killing a pestering lion on his first day. This earned John respect, but it didn't last very long. A few weeks later two man-eating lions start to interrupt his work. After losing dozens of workers, the railroad company brings in Remington, an American "great white hunter," to take care of the problem, but even his reputation for being the best cannot prevent yet more carnage. Cast: Michael Douglas, Val Kilmer, Tom Wilkinson, John Kani, Bernard Hill. Director: Stephen Hopkins.

Show timing: 7.p.m.  
Funds received will be used for a charitable cause. For information: 4428549.



## Insignificant Details of Life

## ART EXHIBITIONS

Mark Jordans, a Dutch artist, puts on show his collection of paintings "Insignificant Details of Life" at Siddhartha Art Gallery. Jordan has been living in Nepal for over five years and works as a child psychologist for the Centre for Victims of Torture. His first solo exhibition was held in April 2003 in Kathmandu. His work evolves around depicting the intensity, beauty and meaning of the details in his life. In this exhibition, he again tries to create images from the search of such details. Date: September 16-24.



**NEXT:** Solo exhibition, titled "The Faces of Time and the Colors of Sensibility," by eminent painter and cartoonist Durga Baral. In the exhibition, Baral makes a statement about the present conflict that is ravaging the country. Date: September 26-October 9. At the Siddhartha Art Gallery. For information: 4218048.

### Seafood Experience At Hyatt

The seafood festival at the Rox Restaurant beckons guests with an exotic, lavish and tempting spread. Be it the luscious lobsters, crispy crabs or savory prawns dipped in palate tantalizing sauces, the wide-ranging menu offers scrumptious dishes. Chef Narender Singh and his team will prepare the food at sight in an interactive open kitchen. This will allow diners to watch the chefs in action as they conjure up innovative seafood. The seafood festival is accompanied by an array of selected and exotic wine. Date: September 15-25. For information: 4491234.



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**Cine Club**

Movie: Les diaboliques (1954).  
Director: Henri-Georges Clouzot. Starring: Jean Brochard. At the Alliance Francaise, Tripureswar. Date: September 26. Time: 2 p.m. For information: 4241163.

**Sunsilk Nepal Fashion Week**

IEC is organizing the Sunsilk Nepal Fashion Week. Here is a chance to feast your eyes on the country's most glamorous fashion collections from Nepal's leading designers. At Hotel Yak & Yeti. Date: September 24 - 30. Time: 6 - 9 p.m. Fashion

show followed by dinner and dance at Club Platinum @ Rs. 600. For information: 4247475.

**Working Together Against torture**

Centre for Victims of Torture (CVICT) is organizing a interaction program on "The Role of Media in Eradication of Torture." At the Park Village Hotel, Budhanilkantha. Date: September 20-21. Time: 8:30 a.m. - 1:15 p.m.

**Discover Thimi**

After three successful years, The Thimi Festival-2061 is all set to hit the streets once again. Enjoy the breath taking landscapes and the culturally rich civilization of the city. Date: September 25-26.

**This Week At Martin Chautari**

Open discussions at Martin Chautari, Thapathali. Participation is open to all. For information: 4256239, 4240059.

**SEPTEMBER 21**  
MANGALBARE DISCUSSION  
Topic: Development Management During the Current Conflict Situation. Pundit: Mohan Das Manandhar, ODC Inc. Time: 5 p.m.

**SEPTEMBER 23**  
MEDIA DISCUSSION  
Film @ Chautari (show and discussion): Michael Curtiz's Casablanca (1942, 1 hour 14 mins). Time: 3 p.m.

**ONGOING**

**Exclusive Ladies Night At Hyatt**

Ladies do you ever feel like having a blast with your friends? We have an exclusive ladies night for you. Join us to have fun every Wednesday at the Rox Bar. Swing to the beat of our live band—The Cloud Walkers or Dj Raju will cater to the needs of the dance floor. Time: 7 p.m. onwards. For information: 4491234



**Fusion Bar @ Dwarika's**

Abhaya and The Steam Injuns play blues, jazz & more at the Fusion Bar, Dwarika's. Every Friday from 7 p.m. onwards. Rs. 555 plus tax per person, includes BBQ dinner, a can of beer or soft drink. For information: 4479488.

**Food program**

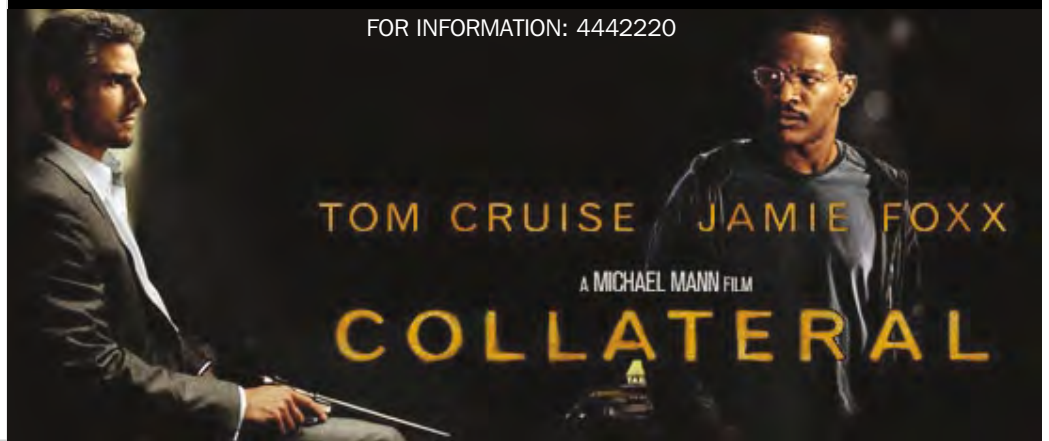
Special barbeque lunch (chicken, fish, mutton) at restaurant Kantipur, Club Himalaya. Every Sunday. Price: Rs 500 per person. For information: 6680080, 6680083.

**Rock @ Belle Momo**

Steel Wheels, a rock 'n roll band, at the Belle Momo, Durbar Marg. Also enjoy Belle Combo meal. Every Friday 6:30 p.m. onwards. For information: 4230890.

**SHOWING AT JAINEPAL CINEMA**

FOR INFORMATION: 4442220



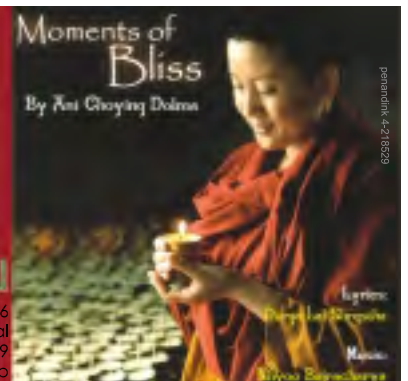
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A GREAT NEWSPAPER



# GUFF ADDAS

Coffeehouse culture is on the wane, but there is still hope

BY AJIT BARAL

In his book "Gone Away," Indian poet Dom Moraes tells how his poetic sensibilities were shaped by endless discussions with fellow writers and artists in the 1940s' London over tea, coffee and drinks at pubs and coffeehouses.

Coffeehouses, teashops and pubs have been the meeting place for artists, writers and academics worldwide; there they discuss various abstruse subjects. Poets Andre Breton and Paul Valery and artists Picasso and George Braque shared ideas on surrealism, both in art and writing, in the pubs and coffeehouses of Paris. Poets Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and their contemporaries would spend hours on end discussing the craft of writing in

the pubs and coffeehouses. Closer home, many fiery communists talked about revolution, Marx, Sartre, Kafka, Camus in the *addas*, coffeehouses in 1970s Calcutta, thick with smoke and the smell of rum.

Nepal has had its own share of *chiya pasals* where poets and novelists launched literary and democratic movements. Scholar Lok Raj Baral and senior advocate Ganesh Raj Sharma deliberated on the political trajectory of Nepal at the *chiya pasals* of New Road, Ratna Park and Dilibazaar in the 80s. And literary figures like Tirtha Shrestha, Sarubhakta and Usha Sherchan carried out *sahitya guff* (literary discussions) at Aamako Chiyapasal in Bagar, Pokhara.

Pubs and coffeehouses have long been places where people from different ideological persuasions and academic backgrounds regularly meet to share information, discuss politics, art and literature. Many established con-

ventions have been shattered and new ones formed over endless rounds of coffee. As importantly, people have become more open to opposing views.

Of late, however, the coffeehouse and *chiya pasal* culture has been on the wane worldwide. In the process, its tenor has been changing as well. Columnist CK Lal says that once political economy used to dominate the talks, but now art and literature are more common topics.

Says Lal, "Coffee culture is dying out even in France, the bastion of café klatch culture." He thinks the slow death started with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the march of the market economy. Traditionally, left leaning intellectuals have been the energy behind *addas* and *guff* sessions. But with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the march of globalization, leftist intellectuals have become disillusioned with Marxism and shed their high idealism. They have become pragmatists, and many of them have



OVER A CUP OF COFFEE: Analysts and writers at Mandala Book Point

been co-opted by the development “business.”

The development sector offers more than \$60 per hour to write reports. Who would then want to waste two to three hours in idle discussion, however important the issues may be for personal growth or to society? Better to stay at home and jab furiously at the computer preparing reports to satisfy the NGOs and their donors. Lal says, “Friends in the U.S. have told me that they have seen the revival of coffee culture.” Surprisingly, it’s thanks to the development industry. “The urban crowd [meaning intellectuals who live on consultancies] is growing in America,” says Lal. “They do consultancies for various organizations for two or three months and live on that money for the rest of year, spending time at pubs and coffeehouses with likeminded people, brainstorming ideas that they could sell.”

Suresh Dhakal, a regular at one of Kathmandu’s premier *guff addas*, located in Chabahil, says that attempts are being made to renew the old tradition of coffee culture.

Sociologist Chaitanya Mishra, writer and poet Govinda Bartman, novelist and columnist Khagendra Sangroula meet every evening for tea at Chabahil. Another group comprising political analysts and writers Krishna Khanal, Lok Raj Baral, Krishna Hachhethu, Hari Sharma,

Abhi Subedi meet each day at the Mandala Book Point at Kantipath, browse through for new arrivals and head to a nearby coffee shop. In tea shops around Pipal Bot, New Road, another set of literary writers meet each day, pore over newspapers and take up just about every single subject.

One common refrain among those who occasionally take part in these conversations is that these *guff* centers are mostly confined to the middle-aged people and are hubs for a set of retirees. They seldom care to induct new companions, especially those from the younger generation. As a result, they end up recycling the same old ideas and attitudes over and over.

This also perhaps points at a changing urbanscape. The *chiya pasals* were especially vibrant before 1990 when there was not a single daily newspaper of repute and the private media was nonexistent. The Internet and television as sources of information were still in their infancy. So the *addas* were the primary forum for discussions and also hubs to exchange information and gossip.

Not everyone though seems to be happy with the new-age information overload, offered by countless TV chan-

nels, newspapers and the Internet. A small group of youths in their late 20s, for example, is running Philosophy Manch. Their idea is to fill the lacuna of philosophy discussion in Nepal. They meet twice every month at Trichandra Campus. Last Saturday, they discussed “How to approach *darshan shastra*.”

Bichar Shibir meets at least once a week, mostly in Kirtipur. The young participants read out stories, discuss books and essays over tea. One of the Shibir members, Netra Acharya, who is working on a Master’s thesis on Nietzsche, says, “Knowledge is power.

So much information passes around you that if you don’t put a tab on it, you feel dated quickly.”

The more the talk forums, the merrier. “If a group of people meet once a week, or better, each day, that does help them update themselves with lots of information,”

says Acharya. “Not all the people read or hear the same thing and everyone in the group always has one new thing or another to share.” Early this month as Kathmandu was slowly returning to normalcy after a nasty riot, the group discussed “Nietzsche as a Poet” at a *chiya pasal* in Anamnagar. **N**

Not everyone though seems to be happy with the new-age information overload, offered by countless TV channels





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	Lukla	YA103	Daily	0710	0745	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA 105	Daily	0715	0750	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA107	Daily	0840	0915	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA113	Daily	0845	0920	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA109	Daily	0850	0925	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA 115	Daily	0855	0930	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA117	Daily	1020	1055	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA119	1,2,4,5,6,7	1025	1100	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Taplejung	YA 901	3	1025	1135	2695	164	DHC-6/300
	Phaplu	YA181	1,3,5	1030	1105	1480	85	DHC-6/300
	Rumjatar	YA 221	2,4,7	1030	1105	1245	61	DHC-6/300
	Manang	YA 601	6	1030	1130	2995	122	DHC-6/300
	Meghauly	YA171	Daily	1130	1200	1340	79	DHC-6/300
	Bharatpur	YA 173	Daily	1200	1225	1160	61	DHC-6/300
	Bharatpur	YA 175	Daily	1400	1425	1160	61	DHC-6/300
	Simara	YA 141	Daily	1330	1355	970	55	DHC-6/300
	Simara	YA 143	Daily	1500	1525	970	55	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	Kathmandu	YA 301	Daily	0700	0800	4800	109
Kathmandu		YA 302	Daily	0705	0805	4800	109	SAAB 340B
Kathmandu		YA 303	Daily	0820	0920	4800	109	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar		YA 151	Daily	0945	1025	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar		YA 153	Daily	1430	1510	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar		YA 155	Daily	1640	1720	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Pokhara		YA 131	Daily	0815	0840	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Pokhara		YA 137	Daily	0955	1020	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Pokhara		YA 135	Daily	1415	1440	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Bhairahawa		YA 163	Daily	1555	1630	2220	79	SAAB 340B
Bhadrapur		YA 121	Daily	1135	1225	2950	109	SAAB 340B
Nepalgunj		YA 177	Daily	1155	1250	3500	109	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar		Kathmandu	YA 152	Daily	1050	1130	2585	85
Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 154	Daily	1535	1615	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Biratnagar	Kathmandu	YA 156	Daily	1745	1825	2585	85	SAAB 340B
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 132	Daily	0905	0930	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 138	Daily	1045	1110	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Pokhara	Kathmandu	YA 136	Daily	1505	1530	1710	67	SAAB 340B
Bhairahawa	Kathmandu	YA 164	Daily	1655	1730	2220	79	SAAB 340B
Bhadrapur	Kathmandu	YA 122	Daily	1250	1340	2950	109	SAAB 340B
Nepalgunj	Kathmandu	YA 178	Daily	1315	1405	3500	109	SAAB 340B
Lukla	Kathmandu	YA 112	Daily	0750	0825	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 102	Daily	0755	0830	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 104	Daily	0800	0835	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 106	Daily	0805	0840	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 108	Daily	0930	1005	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 114	Daily	0935	1010	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 110	Daily	0940	1020	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 116	Daily	0945	1025	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 118	Daily	1110	1145	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 120	1,2,4,5,6,7	1115	1150	1665	91	DHC-6/300
Phaplu	Kathmandu	YA182	1,3,5	1120	1155	1480	85	DHC-6/300
Meghauly	Kathmandu	YA172	Daily	1120	1155	1340	79	DHC-6/300
Rumjatar	Kathmandu	YA 222	2,4,7	1250	1325	1245	79	DHC-6/300
Manang	Kathmandu	YA 602	6	1145	1245	2995	122	DHC-6/300
Taplejung	Kathmandu	YA 902	3	1150	1300	2695	164	DHC-6/300
Bharatpur	Kathmandu	YA 174	Daily	1240	1305	1160	61	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA 176	Daily	1440	1505	1160	61	DHC-6/300
Simara	Kathmandu	YA142	Daily	1410	1435	970	55	DHC-6/300
	Kathmandu	YA144	Daily	1540	1605	970	55	DHC-6/300

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# New Kids on the Block

Nepal's youth team is the best in South Asia. Let's now see how they fare against the titans—Japan, Vietnam and host Malaysia.

## BY SUDESH SHRESTHA

After a string of disappointments from the national team in recent years, fans hope the youth brigade will salvage some of the lost pride. The Under-20 team headed for Malaysia last week to participate in the Asian championship.

The All Nepal Football Association, ANFA, has reasons for hope, thanks to a youth program initiated by ANFA President Ganesh Thapa three years ago. This is the first time that Nepal has made it through to the second round of Asian-level competition since 1990. "Nepal is the only country from the South Asian region to have qualified for the AFC Youth Championship in Malaysia," says Thapa.

The 18-member team led by coach Shyam Thapa left for Thailand last week. The Nepali youth team plays three friendly matches, two with the Thai Under-20 team and one with a premier club, before heading for Malaysia. The 15-nation competition kicks off on September 25. The final will be played on October 9, and the top four teams qualify for the FIFA World Youth Championships to be held in the Netherlands next year.

Following an impressive performance in the qualifying leg in Bangladesh last December, Nepal is anxious to keep

the momentum going. Nepal beat Pakistan 3-0 and held Bangladesh to a 1-1 draw to qualify on goal difference.

"For now, all we are aiming at is to get across the group stage," says Thapa. "That would be the first step toward ANFA's ambition of at least reaching the level of second-tier countries in Asia." He hopes the friendly matches in Thailand will give the Nepali team much-needed exposure in the run-up to the competition in Malaysia. "It is not entirely impossible if the boys remain focused on the task at hand in Malaysia," he adds.

But that will not be easy. Nepal is in Group A alongside Asian powerhouses Japan, Vietnam and hosts Malaysia. Nepal, ranked 35<sup>th</sup> in Asia, has suffered huge defeats abroad. In Malaysia its opening encounter is against Japan, arguably the strongest football country in Asia. The September 25 encounter is followed by games against Vietnam on September 27 and Malaysia on September 29.

"We are not an excellent team, but we are at least a good team, especially when you take into consideration our conditions and compare them to Japan's," says Shyam Thapa, the former Indian international, who was roped in recently

by ANFA as a coach for youth teams. "It is important that the boys don't lose their concentration for even a few minutes." The players were put through tough physical training for over a month and a lot of planning has gone into getting the right combination of players.

"We are now seeing a lot of progress in our team work," team captain and goalkeeper Bikash Malla told Nation Weekly before leaving for Malaysia. "I can assure you everybody will do their best. For me, as a team leader, it is always about trying to win my next game."

Regardless of the outcome in Malaysia, Shyam Thapa, a battle hardened coach, insists that Nepal has a bright future. Football has made rapid strides in recent

times, especially at the grassroots level, he says, referring to ANFA's youth development program. The fact that investment in youth guarantees a good return was underscored in the recently concluded

AFC Asian Cup, where Japan and China, both with strong youth programs, dominated. Japan clinched the title; China finished second.

"Our youth program marks the beginning of a production line which allows Nepal a battery of young players to cement our place in the international arena," coach Thapa says with confidence. But football fans want to see these claims translated into results. **N**

Football has made rapid strides in recent times, especially at the grassroots

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## European Diva

**LAKY ZSUSSANNA**, Miss Europe 2003, is a natural beauty. She needs no media hype, no self-promotion. The European diva was in Nepal last week to attend WOCO-2004. Organized by the Round Table Nepal, a youth forum, the seven-day event was aimed at giving an in-depth view of Nepal and Nepali culture. The reason she was here: To lobby for WOCO-2007 to be held in her native Hungary. As for her experience in Nepal, Zsussanna said she loved the country and wanted to come back again. Aged only 20, she has a lifetime ahead of her to do just that.

## BIG LEAGUE

Nearly a year after his triumph in the *Manhunt Nepal*, **SHURID JYOTI** is all set to make it big. He is headed to *Manhunt International 2004* which will be organized later this year in China. "As the program was postponed last February due to the SARS epidemic, I have already completed the preparations to some extent," says Jyoti confidently. He will be performing a *lakhe* dance for the talent round. A U.S.-educated industrial engineer, he is currently working as a project manager for the Jyoti Group. He has the looks, the brain and the confidence. Well, he has it all.



## Natural-born Artist

**PRAMILA BAJRACHARYA's** second solo painting exhibition, "Nature and Eternity," started last week at the Park Gallery. Her first painting exhibition in 2002, "Images of Landscape," was a success: She received the Arniko Yuwa Puraskar for the year. Her new exhibition, with 40 paint-

ings, shows her deep concern for nature. On show are semi-abstract oil and acrylic paintings of her surroundings. She is a founding member of Kastamandap Art Studios. "I always had a habit of scribbling whatever I had in my mind," says Bajracharya. "That habit turned into my profession."



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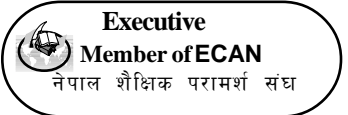
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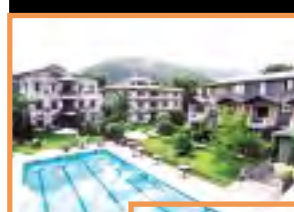


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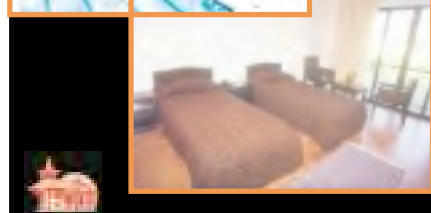
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# Leading The Charge

**I**t's been a victory of sorts for the media. They have made the Maoist leadership come out with an apology for atrocities committed against them. In a statement last week, the Maoists even directed their cadres to keep their hands off journalists. No other professional group has dared publicly rebuke the rebels so strongly as the media have done in the past month and none has



IN/SS

gotten the Maoists to acknowledge their mistakes so openly. And leading the charge is Taranath Dahal, president of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists. In a letter sent to the federation, the Maoists said they are committed to press freedom and apologized for the killing of journalist Dekendra Thapa and others. Satish Jung Shahi talked to Dahal about the Maoist response to the media outrage and the role of the media during the conflict.

**How do you view the Maoist statement saying they have no intention of attacking the media?**

It is the first time that the Maoists have addressed any institution—in this case, the Federation of Nepalese Journalists. They have admitted their mistakes, guaranteed press freedom and have expressed their commitment to take the media criticism positively. More importantly, they now have to translate their commitment into actions. They still have two journalists in their custody, Daan Bahadur Rokka (Radio Nepal) and Kul Bahadur Malla (Karnali Sandesh).

**The Maoists are still insisting that the journalists need to inform them in advance of any visits to their aadhar chetras...**

We are opposed to that. We want free movement of the press. This we demand of both the Maoists and the security forces. There should be no obstruction of news collection. The Maoists say the security forces are disguising themselves as journalists to enter their areas, but we say we will be more vigilant and will try

to stop that, if that's the case. But at least the commitment to a free press has come in writing. It is a historical achievement.

**What has been the Maoist record so far?**

In the past, their apologies, as when they killed journalist Gyanendra Khadka, came through interviews and writings by their senior leaders. This time, it came in the form of a clearly worded public statement. However, we are well aware that this could just be a ploy to revamp their public image. We do not take their word at face value.

**We do not take the Maoists' words at face value. We are well aware that this could just be a ploy.**

**Still, this may not sound fair to others: That it's all right to kill others as long as you keep your hands off the press?**

I have spoken time and again in meetings with other professional associations such as the FNCCI and educational institutions to ask the Maoists to make clear their agenda regarding these sectors. There must be a lot of debate on these subjects but also on the Maoist claims of government atrocities. At least, the modest success of the federation has given the society some confidence. First and foremost, we protested as a united front. That should be a lesson for all others.

**Still, why should the media matter so much when everyone is suffering?**

Right now, the press is the only forum that allows people from all walks of life to express their views. There is no Parliament, no elected local bodies, nor an elected government. The press has an important role to play to resolve the current crisis. We're not demanding a privilege; only protection to perform our own duties well. Journalists have to report from conflict areas and on issues that may neither please the security forces or the Maoists. But such is our job.

**How would you describe the situation of journalists in present-day Nepal?**

Journalists are at a high risk even while performing their normal day-to-day routine. The conflict has vastly increased the dangers they are exposed to. Our role is to discourage militarization from either of the parties to the conflict.

**Do you think that the press lacks analysis and we have routinely been used by political parties, leaders, various interest groups, even the Maoists?**

Our history of professional journalism is very short. It's only been a decade. It is not wrong to have ideological beliefs, either political or otherwise. But it is wrong if one violates the professional ethics of journalism. However, it is worse to divide journalists and take action against them just because of their beliefs, as both the state and the Maoists have been doing. **N**



## Life's Lessons in Literature

Azar Nafisi taught literature in Iran's top universities until she was driven underground by the Islamic republic. She kept on teaching in her home, using books to teach her students about their own world.

BY KARUNA CHETTRI

**R**eading *Lolita In Tehran* by Azar Nafisi is a powerful, passionate and compassionate memoir that depicts the insatiable desire for intellectual freedom in revolutionary Iran. The period was rife with anti-American, anti-western sentiments and movements against western books, movies, television shows and clothes. Nafisi, who taught literature at the University of Tehran, the Free Islamic University and the University of Allameh Tabatabai in Iran, was expelled from the University of Tehran for refusing to wear a veil. The book shows her love for literature, which shone through in her determination to continue teaching in the privacy of her home and away from the intrusive and condemning eyes of the Islamic republic.

Nafisi reads heartrending excerpts from the controversial novel *"Lolita"* by the brilliant writer Vladimir Nabokov to her class of seven female students. They meet clandestinely in her home to discuss works from western literature, works banned and illegalized by the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini. "Please remember ladies and gentlemen of the jury that this child [12 years old], had she lived in the Islamic Republic [of Iran], would have been long ripe for marriage to men older than Humbert," explains Nafisi, as she reads: "I am going to tell you something very strange: it was she who seduced me...not a trace of modesty..."

Nafisi deliberately selects *"Lolita,"* which tells the story of a defenseless, hurt and lonely 12-year-old girl who is raped by Humbert, her guardian. Nafisi sees a strong analogy to the rape and torture of Iran and Iranians by the Islamic republic. "We are not against cinema, we are

against prostitution," Khomeini had proclaimed as his henchmen set fire to the movie houses. The parallel drawn between the regime and the evil, lecherous protagonist of *"Lolita"* is that both defend their acts of destruction with rhetoric meant to appeal to the higher sense of morality. Hence, with determination, Nafisi applies literature to real life in Iran to expose the vilification of the innocent in the name of an obscure

for the loss of innocence and life; F. Scott Fitzgerald's *"The Great Gatsby"* stands for loss of lives in pursuit of a fantasy; Henry James' *"Daisy Miller"* is an analogy for the quiet courage, strength and rebellion against the oppression of her students; and Jane Austen's *"Pride and Prejudice"* helps create a parallel fantasy for Nafisi's students, who are helplessly trapped in a culture of frenzied frustration resulting from a totalitarian government.

Azar Nafisi has the magical ability to wield words into powerful images to coax the reader down the humiliating path of a woman's life and identity in a repressed society. Iran is wracked with confusing Islamic slogans and riddled with suppressed sexual energy; both of these point accusatory fingers at the "immoral," "makeup-wearing," "hair-showing" western influenced provocation of the "sexually corrupt" and "morally bankrupt" unveiled woman. Although her pontification is devoid of drama, the realities of a revolutionary Iran under Khomeini and during the Iraq-Iran war unfold like a woman's worst nightmares: She could be jailed, whipped or expelled from university just for the way she ate a peach in public! However, Nafisi allows her readers a small hope, a tiny flickering light in the ink-black darkness of despair. It is the light of intellectual and verbal freedom exercised by her young students ("her girls" as she calls them) during the analytical discussions in the secrecy of her home.

In 1997 Nafisi and her family were finally allowed to leave Tehran. They settled in Washington D.C. Nafisi is currently a professor at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Like anyone forced by circumstances and in search of a better future, she left Iran with mixed feelings of guilt and a sense of relief. However, in doing so Nafisi left a piece of herself in each one of her students, a hope of a better tomorrow and her perpetual love of literature. As Geraldine Brooks, author of *"Nine Parts of Desire and Year of Wonders,"* said, "The ayatollahs don't know it, but Nafisi is one of the heroes of the Islamic Republic." Indeed, she is! **N**



**READING LOLITA IN TEHRAN**  
A Memoir in Books by Azar Nafisi  
(First published in the U.S. by Random House)  
Pages: 384

greater  
good for society.

Nafisi has loosely divided *"Reading Lolita in Tehran"* into four sections; each for a novel she has picked out for her literature class: *"Lolita"* is an analogy



# Press in Peril

In the conflict that has gripped Nepal since 1996,” says the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, “both state security forces and Maoist rebels have carried out attacks on journalists. Incidents have increased since the breakdown of the ceasefire in August 2003.”

The statement by CPJ, which advocates for press freedom worldwide, came on August 18, two days after journalist Dekendra Thapa’s death at the hands of the Maoists.

Indeed, the press has been a major casualty since the ceasefire collapsed a year ago. Two journalists have been killed—both by the Maoists and both over unfounded charges of spying for the government. Gyanendra Khadka, the Sindhupalchowk reporter for the news agency RSS, was brutally murdered last September in his village: The rebels tied his hands to a volleyball pole and slit his throat.

Last month, the wife of the Dailekh-based reporter of Radio Nepal Dekendra Thapa found that her repeated pleas to the Maoists to release her 34-year-old husband from their custody had fallen on deaf years.

In total, 13 journalists have been killed since the “people’s war” began in 1996. Ten of them were killed by the security forces, according to the FNJ, the largest press union in the country. Currently, two journalists remain in Maoist custody and three others in government custody.

Many Nepalis have correctly asked why the press is making such a big noise about its own safety when just about everybody has been indiscriminately targeted by both parties to the conflict. We do not believe that the press as a group should enjoy any more privilege than other Nepali citizens as far as their personal safety is concerned. In fact as a claimant to be the custodian of the society, it is the responsibility of the press to advocate for the safety of every single citizen, including all professional groups.

Still, the safety of journalists is right at the heart of what a democracy stands for. Indeed, it is indispensable, if a society is to remain functional. Journalists travel to troubled spots to keep the citizenry informed, and it is important that they get to see and hear firsthand what has transpired on the ground, without fearing for their lives or safety. Their writings help others make up their minds about, for example, the casualty figures, how the Army bungled its much publicized attempt to win the local population’s hearts and minds and the threat to VDC officials from the Maoists.

A number of reporters, especially those based in troubled spots outside Kathmandu, tell us they work under constant threats from both the security forces and the Maoists. There is intense pressure on them to “balance” their stories, lest one side assume that they belong to the enemy camp. Some journalists even acknowledge that they have

on odd occasions filed stories, or given their stories slants, just to keep their tormentors at bay. Two journalists—from Gorkhapatra and Rajdhani—recently fled their villages in Dailekh because the rebels were not too pleased with what they wrote: The Maoist extortion rings were demanding steep levies.

Violence and threats from the Maoists and the security forces will continue to have a chilling effect on press freedom. And this plague, already at an alarming level outside Kathmandu, is all set to invade the capital. What we demand from both the security forces and the Maoists is more than token statements on their commitments to press freedom. A free press is vital, for it brings in moderation. And without moderation, the polarization between the warring parties will only deepen.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor



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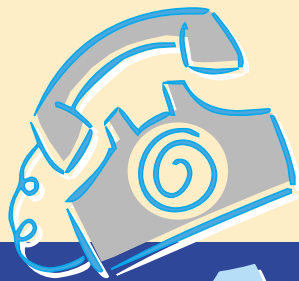
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