

PANCHAYAT AGAIN? | DV TIME | LAMJUNG TO LEEDS | DEER AT PASHUPATI

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# nation

WEEKLY



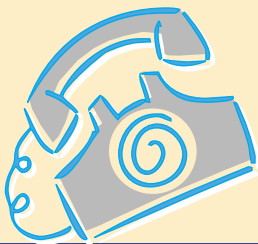
## ILLEGALLY ABROAD

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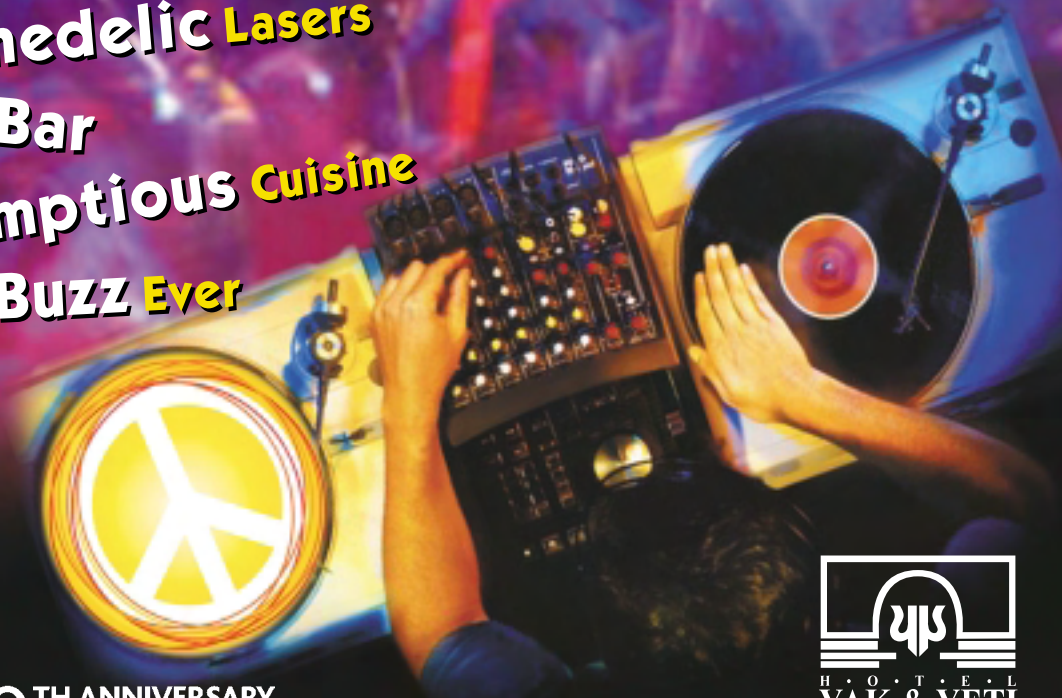
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By John Narayan Parajuli

A fortnight ago Minister Mohsin gave journalists a long, rambling briefing where he raised the specter of an autocratic regime. Last week he blamed the press for misquoting him or, perhaps, for quoting him too literally.

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Shiva Shankar's demise has brought to a close an important chapter in the history of Nepali music. But his life's work has opened

many more

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Nepal's mild climate allows golf to be played throughout the year, giving those planning a golf trip plenty of opportunities to tee off. We should give it a shot.



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# Letters



“ More the legitimacy of the government comes into question, happier the Maoists will be ”

PRABINDHAUDEL

## Ominous ramble

I am very much in agreement with Suman Pradhan when he says the he was troubled by Minister Mohammed Moshin’s remarks about an impending authoritarian rule (“Stop This Nonsense,” Meanwhile, November 21). Though the minister’s frustration over the political impasse is understandable, he should for once and all banish the destructive thought that dictatorship can ever be a solution. The more the legitimacy of the government comes into question, the happier the Maoists will be. They will make more inroads into the hearts and minds of the Nepalis. History proves that a militarist approach to resolving a rebellion is fraught with dangers—no matter how tempting the quick-fix model may appear to our rulers. I do not however mean that the Maoist militia should be given free rein to run down the state machinery.

PRABINDHAUDEL  
VIA EMAIL

## Jet, set, go

The arrival of jets in the domestic scene is a major breakthrough for Nepal’s aviation sector, but their sustainability is questionable (“Flying High,” by John Narayan Parajuli, November 14). Why can’t the government give more international sectors like Guangzhou in China, where scores of Nepalis fly to every week via Hong Kong and Bangkok, to the private sector? That would be a lot more convenient to travelers because they won’t have to go through the immigration in Hong Kong and Bangkok. It will also allow them to avoid our dreaded national flag carrier, the RNAC.

NAME WITHHELD  
VIA EMAIL

## Academic writing

I really enjoyed Mark Turin’s book review of “Riddum,” “the story of the beginning of the cosmos and the ethnogenesis of the indigenous peoples of the world” (“In Their Own Words,” Books, November 21). It was a welcome change from the typical English fiction that is the staple of your book page. With due respect to the reviewer, let me confess, however, that I will never read the book, which sounds like a scholarly work. I am an avid reader of fiction, but I do enjoy all good writings. I am pleasantly surprised to read Turin in Nation—I equally enjoyed his earlier piece on Dashain in Dolakha (“Cautiously Optimistic,” November 14), which he coauthored with Sara Shneiderman, another academic. That finally brings me to why I wrote this letter. I have noticed a fair number of writers, who would otherwise have little to do with journalism, writing for you—Swarnim Wagle, Pramod Mishra, Dipta Shah, Pratyoush



Onta and, recently, Arnico Panday. I have enjoyed their writings, though some of it has been a bit too “heavy” to handle. While the nuanced academic writings of social scientists are not always a fun read, especially in a news magazine, they do add a lot of value to understanding a society.

RAVI  
VIA EMAIL

## The last Shangrila

Kunal Lama’s “On Bended Knees” unnecessarily takes issue with the title of the world’s largest book “Bhutan: A Visual Odyssey Across the Last Himalayan Kingdom” (No Laughing Matter, November 21). While Bhutan may not be the last kingdom, it is certainly the “last Shangrila.” Nepal is only partly a kingdom—where multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy are trying to weaken each other. So the title of the book is still apt. I must say “Bhutan: A Visual Odyssey Across the Last Himalayan Shangrila” would have been a better title. Can you possibly call modern-day Tibet the last Shangrila with state-sponsored dilution of its culture? Or Nepal, for that matter, that adapts its culture to suit the palate of the tourist? One look at the Bagmati River, the ongoing civil war, influx of military assistance (despite the United States and India claiming that there can be no “military solution” to the conflict) and one can be sure that Nepal has lost its Shangrila-ness. It is a country increasingly ruled by insurgents in the hinterland, unscrupulous agents, the Royal Nepal Army and foreigners in cahoots with the powers that be elsewhere.

In contrast, Bhutan is undoubtedly the last Shangrila and the last Himalayan kingdom and very much in control. It strikes a reasonable balance between cultural preservation and modernity—through a cautious approach to development. What if they build a hotel to accommodate guests willing to fork out \$1,000 a day, as Lama sneered? I see nothing wrong with that. A month of good business is enough to sustain Bhutan’s tourism industry for a year. In contrast, any month there is a downturn in tourists in Nepal, the NTB raises an alarm and ups its promotional campaigns, all of which indicate that Nepal’s tourism is not as resilient or sustainable as

Bhutan’s. Nepal’s houses and cities are hideous—no harmony with the surroundings. But Bhutan is something else!

Moreover, Bhutan’s “visionary” king and prince actually went to war, at great risk to themselves, to flush out the Indian insurgents from the Bhutanese territory, for they actually believe that Bhutan is unique and, yes-oh-yes, the last Shangrila or the last Himalayan kingdom. His Royal Highness gave back democracy to the Bhutanese people on a platter—with elected people’s reps [chimis] now dominating the National Assembly. Has Nepal’s King—who claims to play a “constructive role”—led his army against the Maoist insurgents on the ground or devolved power? If Nepal were a Shangrila, it would have been worth fighting for. But smart ordinary Nepali people—whose sovereignty has been robbed one too many times—don’t care anymore. Only the foreign-funded civil society and the I/NGO-crazy (“dollar farmers”), brainwashed villagers in the Maoist camps and those seeking a way out of unemployment in the Army camp—including the undemocratic (read “hand-picked”) government—purport to be serving the country. But you know they all have ulterior motives. No one is doing it for the country anymore.

Once Bhutan’s ongoing hydropower projects come on line, not only will it continue to be a Shangrila and the last Himalayan kingdom but, by all estimates, will also double its per capita income, which is already way above Nepal’s. Lama, when are you going to stop comparing Nepal with Bhutan, even if obliquely?

MADHAV PARAJULI  
JHAPA

## Thanks

Nation Weekly provides a wide gamut of information with well-analyzed news items. Its Internet accessibility has further helped the readers. Keep going.

GANESH KHANIYA  
VIA EMAIL

## CORRECTION

Girish Khatiwada, not Sudhin Pokhrel, is the first Nepali rapper who released the single “Meaningless Rap” in 1994 at the age of 14 (“Rap Is Da’ Trend,” by Satish Jung Shahi, November 21).

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1. HOLY DIP: Devout worshippers observe Chhat in the Bagmati
2. FAREWELL: Actress Bhuvan Chand, who starred along Shiva Shankar in "Aama," the first Nepali home production, at the musician and singer's last rites
3. LEG-PULLING: An exhibition wrestling match on the occasion of Chhat
4. DELICACIES: Chat prasad
5. MISSING YOU: Those without siblings flock to Rani Pokhari during the Bhai Tika
6. PLAYGROUND: Kids make most of the banda as the Maoists order traffic off the roads in Dhading

## Picture of the Week



**THE LONE PIPER:** William Genkins, a former British commando, plays his bagpipe in Thamel on Remembrance Sunday in memory of the soldiers who died in the World Wars. Genkins, who has played at the graves of fallen soldiers the world over, was in Kathmandu last week.

nation weekly/Sagar Shrestha



# De-marginalizing Ourselves

Nepal will forever remain insignificant and marginal in the U.S. eyes if our leaders refrain from interacting with their U.S. counterparts

BY SUMAN PRADHAN

Each year during September-October, several parliamentarians and politicians are picked by the government to attend the U.N. General Assembly in New York. It's basically a junket on government and U.N. expenses.

These tours, which can last anywhere from a few weeks to a few months, can be extremely beneficial. Attending debates and discussions in the United Nations, sometimes even making speeches in its various committees and sub-committees, can be an educating experience. Many of our lawmakers return home with a broadened understanding of the world and its problems.

I recently met several Nepali politicians in New York who were there to attend this year's General Assembly. Over a can of Budweiser one evening, we talked about their experiences, what they had seen, heard and learned, what they expected to do after they got back home.

"Oh it was a great visit," one young and especially bubbly ex-parliamentarian said. "I got to make a presentation in a sub-committee meeting and liked the response I got." Another, an older and more world-weary ex-lawmaker with an expensive foreign education, just nodded. "We just met a few people here and there. It is nice to be back in the United States."

I then asked whether the politicians also planned to travel to Washington D.C. and meet some U.S. government officials and Congressmen or their staffers, given that U.S. policy is so vital for Nepal. "Oh, we just got back from D.C." Well, any interesting meetings there? "We met the Nepali community and had a great Dashain party. I was surprised by such a good Dashain party outside of Nepal." Any Congressmen or U.S. officials you met, Sir? "No, no. We didn't get the opportunity." Did you even try? "No." But why? "You see Nepal is such a small country, it is marginal in U.S. eyes. There's no oil, no al Qaeda. Why would they be interested in meeting us?"

Hmmm. Sounds deflating, of course, but the politician just gave us a reality check. Despite all this notion of our national importance and greatness—never colonized, geo-strategic location, second highest hydro potential, land of Buddha, land of Everest, land of Gurkhas, etc. etc.—Nepal indeed seems faraway and insignificant from over there. Sorry to our Maoist comrades, but not even they seem to have raised our profile.

The problem is, Nepal will forever remain insignificant and marginal in the U.S. eyes if our leaders and politicians refrain from interact-

ing with their U.S. counterparts. Without regular constructive exchange of opinions with U.S. government officials and lawmakers, we can forget about clawing out of this "insignificant-ness". In short, they must do in the United States what they often do in India.

But first, we must tackle our small-mindedness. It's become a cliché to define Nepal as a "small" country. Look at a map. See how big Nepal is? Our relative smallness comes from our two big neighbors. In reality, Nepal is a medium-sized country with a population larger than most developed European and Asian nations. In sheer population terms, we are bigger than Afghanistan and almost as big as Iraq. Those countries have risen up the U.S. priority list for all the wrong reasons, but that need not be the case with us.

To rise up the U.S. priority list, the first order of business should be to figure out how U.S. policy is shaped. Unlike the perceptions here, most U.S. policy is shaped in its parliament, the Congress, and its various committees. For us, the committees to watch are the defense, foreign relations and international development, trade and human rights committees. Our leaders and politicians therefore must try to build relations with U.S. lawmakers in those committees to have any real effect—that is, if they think U.S. policy on Nepal could be made better.

Lawmakers in such a powerful country have zillions of things to think about. Nepal, a faraway land with no real strategic significance, figures at the bottom of the list, if at all. But this can be changed, gradually. Countries today at the top of the list in America also started at the bottom at some point. We may not have oil or Islamic terrorists, but we have, alas, Asia's most violent conflict. There are plenty of U.S. lawmakers who do not know this.

The United States is often likened to a huge elephant, which even if it trudges slowly and carefully, is bound to shake up the earth around it. America can be maddeningly naïve and blind to local conditions, and its do-good tendencies can sometimes be both a boon and a bane. There are many in Nepal, especially in the political parties, who privately lament that U.S. policy on Nepal post-9/11 has helped to marginalize democratic forces.

To all such politicians: Don't waste your time while in America. Knock on

U.S. government doors, on Congressmen, and get your opinions across. You will be surprised to see how responsive they are. This does not mean you should stop interacting with U.S.-based Nepalis. Attend all the Dashain and Tihar parties, by all means. But also enlist their help in establishing contacts in the U.S. government and Congress. Set your sights a little higher every time you are on a junket to America. **N**



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**WELCOME:** State Foreign Minister Prakash Sharan Mahat (far left) welcomes Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Morshed Kahn

### American policy

The U. S. Embassy has lifted its “authorized departure” ruling that allowed families of embassy staff to leave Nepal. The decision follows back-channel assurances from the Maoists that the bombing of the American Center on September 10 was not Maoist central committee policy. American officials said that the safety of Americans in Nepal remained their top concern and that the travel warnings that advise American citizens to “defer non-essential travel” to Nepal would remain in effect “until conditions change.” They repeated the American government’s positions that the United States wants a peaceful, prosperous, democratic Nepal and that the Maoists should renounce violence and accept the Nepali government’s offer for peace talks.

### Compensation delay

The family of Jhok Bahadur Thapa, who was taken hostage and killed in Iraq by the militant outfit Ansar al-Sunna, is yet to receive compensation, reported Kantipur. The government had announced that it would compensate the families of the 12 Nepalis

murdered in Iraq in August. The compensation amount is Rs. 1 million. Although the district administration office has received the sum from the government, it has not yet handed over the sum to the relatives of Thapa. The district office said that the delay was caused as the name mentioned in the Home Ministry letter didn’t match with Thapa’s citizenship certificate.

### Rape case

More than six security personnel allegedly raped a 15-year-old girl in the Charkoshe Jhadi of Bharaul, in Sunsari. The victim reported that armed security men raped her when she had gone to the nearby forest. A day after the incident an ambulance of the Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN) in Biratnagar brought the girl to Dharan for medical treatment, reports said. Security forces say that an internal probe has been ordered into the incident.

### Maoist reaction

The Maoists said they would hold talks with the Deuba government only at the aegis of the United Nations or another international human

rights organizations. The Maoist supremo Prachanda alleged that the government was trying to use the peace talks as a weapon to fulfill its vested interests. He said any talks without U.N. involvement would have no positive results. Prachanda urged the international community to stop any kind of assistance to the government. The statement came five days after foreign diplomats and the U.N. resident mission in Kathmandu called on both the parties to resume the peace process.

### Forced recruitment

The Maoists have forced over 3,000 civilians from 72 VDCs in Achham to join their party. They had issued a notice on September 17, asking every family to send at least one member to join them. They said any family refusing to abide by their dictate would be put through labor camps, according to news reports.

### Police in detention

The Lalitpur District Court ordered the Nakkhu jail administration to investigate two police officers who had allegedly helped an Indian drug peddler escape. Police Sub-Inspector Shir Ram Thapa and Constable Madhav Kandel are in police detention for investigation. Ashok Kumar Gupta, 30, a resident of Motihari district in the Indian state of Bihar,

escaped while on his way to the hospital. Thapa and Kandel were escorting Gupta, who was serving a 10-year jail term for drug smuggling. He was arrested with 54 grams of heroin at Maharajgunj in January this year.

### Nepalis in US

The number of Nepali students studying in the United States has doubled in the last five years, said the Institute of International Education, a New York-based education agency. The increase was the highest in the academic year 2003-2004. Nepal is among the top 20 countries in terms of the increase in the percentage of students leaving for studies in the United States—most of them pursuing undergraduate studies. India is on top of the foreign student list followed by China.

### New RNA divisions

Two additional divisional headquarters and five brigades of the Royal Nepal Army have begun operations. The new divisional headquarters have been set up in Hetauda and Dipayal while new brigades have been added in Dadeldhura, Jumla, Baglung, Butwal and Ilam. The Army’s Directorate of Public Relations said that the new divisions and brigades have been established to meet the growing security requirements of the country.

## Extradition treaty

The Nepal-India joint secretary level meeting failed to reach to an agreement on extradition. Nepal rejected the Indian proposal to involve legal experts from both the countries to investigate into cases in which crimes are allegedly committed by citizens of one country in the other. Nepal stressed that the physical presence of experts is unnecessary in any investigation or court proceedings in criminal cases. An extradition treaty was first signed between Nepal and then British India on February 10, 1855. It was later amended in October 1953.

### Mountain films

The Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival takes place from December 9-12 at the Russian Culture Centre. This year's show is the third installment of the biennial, non-competitive film festival organized by the Himal Association. Some 50 films on mountains and lifestyles of the people living in mountainous regions from 21 countries are on show. The films are of a varied nature: They include anthropological films, alpine documentation, archival footage, adventure cinema, experimental shorts, light-hearted commentary and feature films. Filmmaker Kesnag Tseten's "On the Road with the Red God: Machhendranath," a documentary about the Rato Machhendranath Jatra, premieres at the festival.

### RNAC goes bulletproof

The Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation will install bulletproof doors on the cockpits of its two Boeings. The move follows new security regulations introduced in Japan. The two planes, a Boeing-9ACA and a Boeing-9ACB, will have their doors replaced by December. Each bulletproof door will cost the RNAC over \$60,000.

### Barred in Jhapa

The district administration in Jhapa barred Bhutanese human rights activist Teknath Rijal from entering the refugee camps. Rijal, however, did hold discussions with the refugees outside the camps. He shared his concerns about the delays in the verification process and repatriation. In his briefing, Rijal told the fellow refugees that he had been received very well by the Europeans in October who he said had assured him of their support for the refugees.

### Test case?

Shyam Shrestha, editor of Mulyankan monthly, has filed a petition at the Appellate Court in Lalitpur demanding compensation from the government for "illegally detaining" him during the state of emergency more than two years ago. Security personnel had arrested Shrestha, along with human rights activists Mahesh Maskey and Pramod Kafle, at the Tribhuvan International Airport when he was leaving for New Delhi to attend a conference. Shrestha claimed that his appeal would be a test case to see if the Constitution was still alive. Earlier, the District Court of Kathmandu quashed a similar petition by Shrestha.

### Everest status

Friends of the Earth, a London-based environmental group, has warned that lakes in the Himalayan region could be at bursting point, a potential risk to lives and property in the region. The reason: The glaciers in the region were melting due to global warming and causing the lakes to swell. The group delivered a petition to the U.N. World Heritage Committee in Paris asking that Everest be placed on its endangered sites list. The petition has the backing of such Everest legends as Reinhold Messner.

### Nepalis in custody

Chinese police have arrested 12 Nepalis for allegedly carrying arms at Ramite, Khasa near the Nepal-China border. They were arrested while heading back to Deudhunga in Dolkha. The identity of those arrested is still not known, reported Nepalnews. The Chinese police are said to be investigating the incident.

### Hindu appeal

Forty-eight Hindu organizations took out a rally to pro-

test the arrest of Shankaracharya Shree Jayendra Saraswathi in India. The Nepali government, meanwhile, said it was India's internal matter and Nepal would have nothing to do with it. Saraswathi was arrested for his alleged involvement in the murder of a former Kanchimuth employee. The 48 Hindu organizations have set up an umbrella outfit, the Hindu Jagaran Manch, Nepal, to intensify pressure for the priest's early release. Shiv Sena Nepal, Arya Samaj, Pranabananda Ashram, Vishwa Hindu Mahasangh are some of the leading organizations in the campaign. The Vishwa Hindu Mahasangh and Nepal Sant Samaj have already submitted a petition at the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu for an impartial investigation into the matter.

### Free visa

Bangladesh has decided to waive visa fees for Nepalis. The decision was announced by the visiting Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Morshed Khan. Nepalis were charged

\$30 for a tourist visa. The visa fees were slashed to facilitate movement of consumers along with commercial goods, reports quoted Khan as saying. In addition to this, Bangladesh has waived duties on Nepali fruits and vegetables.

### Nepalis in New York

The visiting CPN-UML General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal told a New York audience that Nepalis living abroad should join forces with political parties to consolidate the democratic gains made after 1990. Mohan Bahadur Basnet of the NC-D, also present at the program organized by the Nepal Democratic Youth Council USA, however blamed the political parties themselves for the current crisis. At the root of the problem is public disenchantment toward the parties, he said. Anand Bist, president of the youth council, suggested that presenting a united front on important political issues would be a first step towards redemption for the parties. He said that the Nepalis abroad were deeply troubled by the political stalemate in Nepal.



**BOMBED:** The bathroom of the Triyog Printing Press, adjacent to the Annapurna Post building, caved in after a blast in the early hours Saturday, November 20

# 70th Anniversary



*"Seventy years through peace and war  
Through delicate and troubled times,  
Seventy years and there'll be more  
Exchanging views and opening minds,  
English is the currency  
The people are the driving force,  
That's seventy years officially  
Of healthy cultural intercourse."*

Wrote poet-writer Benjamin Zephaniah recently to mark the British Council's anniversary. The British Council turned 70 this week. Established in 1934 as "The British Council for Relations with Other Countries," it came to be known as the British Council in 1936. Its first overseas office was set up in Cairo, Egypt in 1938. Today the council has over 100 branches all over the world and a staff of more than 7,000. The council operates independently from the British government, although the government provides grants to the council. Queen Elizabeth is the patron of the council.

The British Council was established with an objective of promoting a wider knowledge of Britain abroad and of the English language and developing closer cultural relations between the United Kingdom and other countries.

The British Council opened in Nepal in 1959. In Nepal, the council manages a library, conducts English language classes and holds various events aimed at promoting British culture. The annual British film festival was organized earlier in the year at the Gopi Krishna Hall.

The council has helped many prominent people worldwide in the beginning of their careers, including Nepal's own professor Surya Prasad Subedi. Others include British sculptor Henry Moore, Argentine scientist Cesar Millstein, British musician and artist Genesis P Orridge, and Australian film director Baz Luhrmann. The council also appears in many books: Malcolm Bradbury's "Rates of Exchange," Lawrence Durrell's "Bitter Lemons," John Fowles' "The Magus," Olivia Manning's "The Balkan Trilogy," among others.

## LUMBINI BANK ON NEPAL STOCK EXCHANGE

Nepal Stock Exchange, the Nepse, and Lumbini Bank have signed an agreement; Lumbini Bank will now be enlisted on the Nepse for share transactions. Mukunda Dhungel, general manager on behalf of Nepse, and Narayan Das Manandhar, chief executive officer on behalf of the bank, signed the agreement. According to the agreement, the bank will float 5,000,000 unit shares worth Rs. 5 million. With the addition of Lumbini bank, the total number of companies enlisted with the Nepse has reached 116.

## PRIZES BY RUMPUM

Asian Thai Foods, the makers of RumPum instant noodles, awarded Pushpa Lamsal of Butwal and Rajiv K.C. of Chabahil Rs. 100,000, under its "1, 2 ka 4 jhatka" scheme. The brand ambassador for RumPum noodles, actress Niruta Singh, awarded the prizewinners. Another 39



winner were also awarded with Rs. 10,000 at the same function. RumPum's new scheme follows its RumPum Most Wanted and RumPum Mahabharat schemes. These are a few among the many schemes brought out by the numerous instant noodle companies in Nepal.

## NEW ADB PRESIDENT

Haruhiko Kuroda has been elected president of the Asian Development Bank by its board of governors. Kuroda has been Japan's former vice minister of finance for international affairs. Kuroda, 60, is taking over duties as ADB president from February next year, succeeding Tadao Chino, who announced his resignation in August. Chino will have served as president for six years, having assumed office in January 1999.

## YEAR OF MICROCREDIT

The U.N. General Assembly has designated 2005 as the "International Year of Microcredit." It has asked governments, concerned non-gov-

ernmental organizations and others from civil society, the private sector and the media to join in raising the profile and building the capacity of the microcredit and microfinance sectors. The joint coordinators for the "year" are the United Nations Capital Development Fund and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The objectives of this initiative by United Nations have been described as such:

- Assess and promote the contribution of microfinance and microcredit to the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals
- Increase public awareness and understanding of microfinance and microcredit as vital parts of the development equation
- Promote inclusive financial systems
- Support sustainable access to financial services
- Encourage innovation and new partnerships by promoting and supporting strategic partnerships to build and expand the outreach and success of microcredit and microfinance

## MERCANTILE BROADBAND

Mercantile Communications has launched broadband Internet service for consumers in addition to the service already available to corporate clients. The service is targeted at individuals, home users and small offices. Mercantile aims to provide consumers more security, communications tools and programming in addition to fast, reliable Internet access. The medium chosen for Mercantile's "Consumer Internet Broadband" service is wireless technology. The company has highlighted the following as the main attractions of its new service: 24/7 Internet connectivity through wireless medium; high-speed, stable link, either 64 / 128 / 256 kbps; no telephone cost; free email; 24-hour customer support service through a call center. This service is offered in the Kathmandu Valley. It is available in three schemes: Volume, Infinity and Cybertrail. The schemes differ in terms of limits set on time and volume of data accessed.

## TOYOTA GOLDEN CARD

United Traders Syndicate, which is the sole distributor of Toyota vehicles in Nepal, has introduced the Toyota Golden Touch Card. The card is introduced with the aim of improving customer care and after-sales services. United Traders Syndicate falls under Vaidya's Organization of Industries and Trading House.

## BANDIPUR FAIR

The Bandipur festival is being held from November 27 to November 30. The fair is being



organized by the Bandipur Social Development Committee, Tanahun Industry and Commerce Association, and the Bandipur Society. The Nepal Tourism Board is promoting the event. The fair is being organized with the aim of promoting Bandipur's cultural and religious attractions.

### CONDEMNATION OF VIOLENCE

The Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Nepal Chamber of Commerce came out against the Maoist bombing of the Sanchayakosh building at Sundhara on November 9, two weeks ago. The blast at the building, which was under construction, left at least 38 injured and damaged nearly Rs. 30 million worth of property, including a newly installed escalator. The organizations have also asked the government to provide compensation to the builders.

### NOKIA IN NEPAL

Nokia, the Finnish mobile makers, have officially entered the Nepali market. Spare parts for Nokia mobile phones will now be available and phone owners will also be able to get their phones repaired. Nepal Overseas Marketing now represents Nokia in the Nepali market.

### PJ CLUB EXHIBITION

The National Forum of Photo Journalists is organizing a photo exhibition of two Japanese photographers, Kazuo Saita and Yoshikazu Hayashi. The exhibition has two separate sections titled "Life in Nature" and "Kingdom of Nepal" and is being held at the Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal. The exhibition opens on November 23.



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WEEKLY

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WEEKLY

THE MIRROR MEDIA PVT. LTD.

# BACK TO PANCHAYAT?

A fortnight ago, Minister Mohsin gave journalists a long, rambling briefing where he raised the specter of an autocratic regime. Last week he blamed the press for misquoting him or, perhaps, for quoting him too literally.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

**I**T WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A ROUTINE briefing on government policy for the media. It ended up being perhaps the most controversial one that this government has held to date; it has spawned heated debate about the future of the nation.

On November 10 Minister Mohammed Mohsin dropped a bombshell on senior journalists a day after the biggest Maoist bombing in Kathmandu, firmly asserting that the Maoists were back in action after a brief holiday lull. Major dailies reported Mohsin's remarks about an "autocratic regime." It is hard to put his comments in context as both the media he invited and Mohsin himself have taken opposing positions on his remarks.

"The alternative to this government will be one you people can't bear with," said Minister Mohsin that fateful day. Those who attended the minister's briefing say that he gave a long discourse on authoritarianism as if he saw it was just round the corner. When the papers went up in arms over this alleged intention, Mohsin played the usual blame game: It was now his turn to allege that the press got the semantics or the drift of his remarks wrong.

He said in a radio interview that all he meant was that the "government would have to implement existing laws more severely if murder and violence escalated in the country." He kept short of mentioning how the severity would play out in terms of civil rights, press freedom and the people's right to assemble for protest.

Did the press get the essence of Mohsin's statement wrong? What did he say and what was his intention? Perhaps he actually did want to spark a debate on the subject as a trial balloon on behalf of the Palace, whose bidding he allegedly does in the present government. Maybe he wanted to put pressure on the Maoists through the media by raising specter of dictatorship.

His clarification has hardly been able to quash accusations that he perhaps showed his true color without realizing that the country's democratic press was not about to treat him as the

Panchayat press would while he was a minister. "We wrote exactly what he said," says Prateek Pradhan, editor of The Kathmandu Post, who, along with Narayan Wagle, editor of Kantipur, four other editors and several publishers, attended Mohsin's briefing at the minister's office in Singha Durbar. In a roundabout way Mohsin conditionally linked the emergence of an "autocratic regime" with the doom of the Deuba government, attendees say. "We cross-checked with him thrice," says Pradhan. "But he didn't say he meant it otherwise."

The general belief among analysts is that the minister is now backtracking after he found himself beset by the storm that his remarks created. "I have no illusions about what Mohsin said," says Rajendra Dahal, editor of Himal Khabarpatrika. "He is merely trying to escape now that he finds himself in a soup."

Expectedly, a flurry of angry responses has followed.

Leaders of the Nepali Congress described his move as "part of the conspiracy to push the country further towards regression." The CPN-UML demanded that Minister Mohsin be sacked. Most scathing criticism has come from the media in whom he chose to confide his alleged "hypothesis."



**TROUBLED WATERS:** Many believe that the government's power has eroded

It's still unclear what led Minister Mohsin to make such remarks, but those who were present during the controversial press briefing acknowledge that he seemed deeply troubled by the failure of his government to get a handle over the Maoist problem and the fact that the

rebels were running amok. His reference to an "autocratic regime," which some have been calling his "vision" of a regime to come, has been equally troubling to his audience. Equally discomfiting was the conspicuous silence of the prime minister and senior Cabinet members.

For instance, they say that the government in October declined to offer a unilateral ceasefire, although UML ministers and the prime minister had come close to agreeing on the issue. The story is that after Mohsin rubbished the idea, the whole Cabinet toed his line. The lesson, say analysts: His hints should be taken seriously. Apart from being a senior Cabinet minister, he is also an important element of the political elite that longs to restore rightist autocracy.

Observers note that there is already an autocratic system of sorts in place following the imposition of emergency two years ago. That however doesn't mean that the public would tolerate a complete takeover of power by the military or the Palace in the name of containing the insurgency. If Mohsin's reference is to complete the usurpation of power, it certainly is disturbing.

Analysts say that authoritarianism is no solution to Nepal's cycle of violence because it stems not from the deep urge of eliminating a particular ethnic group, but from the extreme political dissent that has now reached beyond the power of any regime to contain.

Few analysts question the institution of democracy, though there are some arguments that it is unfit for poor countries with weak institutions, like Nepal. There are many criticisms directed against the democratically elected leaders; many of them ring true.

Minister Mohsin wittingly or unwittingly has started a debate about democracy versus autocracy. Democracy may not be the best form of governance for Nepal, but it is still, at least, perceived as a system that functions at the will of the majority.

Perhaps former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill summed up the argument best when he said: "No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government, except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

"Authoritarianism maybe a good subject for intellectual debate," says Himal's Dahal. "But it certainly becomes a matter of serious concern when it comes from a responsible government minister—especially at a time when the political parties have been marginalized." **N**

HAWKISH: Minister Mohsin



Despite repeated requests from Nation Weekly, the Prime Minister's Office declined to comment. There are allegations that the Cabinet endorsed Mohsin's statement the day before. Some analysts speculate that this might be a desperate attempt to pressure the Maoists to come to the table, but others think it is more than that. There are even speculations that Mohsin may be acting on his own, not necessarily at the behest of the Palace. "This could also be Mohsin's adventurism," says Himal's Dahal.

Even the extravagantly outspoken UML ministers have been reluctant to speak on the matter. "Who can dare to speak against Mohsin in the Cabinet?" a senior editor quotes a group of UML ministers as saying. Mohsin is seen as more than equal in the Cabinet. He is often referred to as "super or the de facto prime minister." It is not just coincidence, say observers, that his statements often prevail over the prime minister's.

# ILLEGALLY ABROAD



Desperate Nepalis are willing to pay any price and risk any danger for overseas employment. There is no shortage of unscrupulous agents willing to sell them down the river

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

**A**fter arriving at Tribhuvan International Airport on November 12, having survived a kidnapping ordeal in Iraq, Inus Kawaree had a certain glow on his face. It wasn't from the TV lights or the Laxmi Puja *battis*: It was the glow of freedom. Kawaree's father, Taslim, who had come all the way from Dhanusha to see his son return from war-ridden Iraq, still looked in shock as he hugged his son and shed tears of joy.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Prakash Sharan Mahat, one of the two ministers at the airport to receive Kawaree, put the situation aptly: "We cannot ensure the safety of those going to Iraq... We cannot rule out such incidents [kidnappings] in the future." The message was clear: The number of people like Kawaree is huge, and they are not only willing to defy the government ban on Iraq as a labor destination but are eager to go come what may, so desperate are they for overseas employment.

Unscrupulous agents are involved in virtually all movement of illegal workers. Human smuggling has become the fastest growing part of the illegal economy. Experts say it brings in nearly \$10 billion annually worldwide. The number of Nepalis working illegally is unknown but certainly large.

Take Malaysia, which last month offered amnesty from prosecution to foreigners working illegally in the country, if they voluntarily returned home. Nepali officials say that at least 15,000

## There's a Dirty Nexus

**P**resident of the Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies **Nirmal Gurung** spoke to Nation Weekly.

### Who is behind illegal migration?

There is a big nexus involved. Some of those involved threatened our life when we went to rescue the Nepalis in Mumbai in August. It's worse than you can imagine. It might have started from Nepal, but there are now even foreigners involved.

### Does it involve any of your association members?

We are here for the rights and benefit of the employment agencies as well as [to] organize this sector. In terms of statistics, very few of our members have been found guilty by the Department of Labour.

That is for the police and the government to investigate. But we are not here to do wrong things.

### Did the government react correctly during the kidnapping of Inus Kawaree?

The 12 Nepalis would not have died if the government had acted [then] as in the case of Kawaree. It was a major failure of our embassy in Qatar. An embassy is the highest representation of our country in a foreign land. It wasn't acting seriously then. Things don't work at ground level if officials lock themselves in an air-conditioned room and claim they are acting. Our association has

decided to mark every September 1 as a black day, and we will not be sending any laborers abroad on that day.

### The government had promised to reissue passports that were lost in the riots for free...

We haven't gotten any so far. There have been differences between the Foreign Ministry and the Finance Ministry over the cost. Forget free passports, we're having problems getting replacements of lost passports even when we are paying. We have written to the prime minister informing him of this.

### What do you suggest that the government do to manage foreign employment?

We have to make laws that are beneficial to foreign employment. Urgent steps need to be taken. We have to learn

to be more liberal. Most of all, politicians should not indulge in activities that fatten the bureaucracy.

### But your association was opposed to the lottery system brought by the present government...

I am not talking about any individual. But there is always a way of settling any kind of dispute through dialogue. The association will always abide by the decision of the honorable court. There may be differences over certain points of view. But we are not against any system that would make the process of sending of workers faster and easier. We support anything that would prevent corruption. We have to devise a way that would make it possible for anyone to fly out within two days of obtaining a visa. **N**



# There Are Push And Pull Factors

**D**epartment of Labour Director General **Pratap Kumar Pathak** spoke to Nation Weekly about illegal migration and steps that can be taken to prevent it.

## How many illegal Nepali migrants are there around the world?

It is extremely difficult to say, especially because we share an open border with India. Many [migrants] never undergo registration, so we don't have any documentation that they have left the country. We estimate there are around 500,000 Nepalis in India and another 1.5 million elsewhere. Agents can take them illegally to [any] country around the world.

## How can we control that?

We either have to stop Nepalis from flying out from India or start registering those who fly from there.

## How do the Nepalis enter other countries as illegal migrants?

In case of Malaysia, Lebanon and Cyprus, they use fake

documents or alternate travel routes. In case of Australia, Japan, the United States and Korea, Nepalis enter those countries on some pretext [visitor visa] and then start working, overstaying the visa. Many of them enter as students. It is not only our problem but also one for all South Asian countries. In case of Nepal there are both push and pull factors. Push factors like the ongoing conflict, poverty and unemployment, and pull factors like better opportunities.

## What other reasons do you see?

We have very weak surveillance and monitoring on our borders. We are politically as well as diplomatically weak. That is all a reality, but you also have to keep in mind that [illegal migration] is a natural phenomenon. According to the 1990 U.N. Convention on Migration, all migrants, legal or illegal, are entitled to basic human rights. Both the host and the source countries are equally responsible.

## What has been our weakness?

We consider five phases in the migration cycle: pre-departure, transit, employment placement, termination and reintegration. Our focus has been only on sending workers abroad. We have no records of those who have returned after working abroad. No country gives anyone an unlimited visa, and those who remain [overseas after their visas expire] turn into illegal migrants. Our embassies abroad haven't been able to give us any data. We have to strengthen our embassies and [focus on] the issue of repatriation. We estimate that very few people have returned after going for work abroad.

## There are reports that agents are involved in sending workers abroad illegally...

There are agents working illegally in India and here. They are part of a human trafficking network. But there is again also a push factor involved. In Bombay there are well-educated Nepalis including former army men who went there [deliberately] to adopt illegal means [to go overseas]. There are even former government employees.

## How serious is the illegal migration issue?

It is getting more serious. It is high time we act by strengthening the country's administrative procedures. We might think it is good that the youth are moving elsewhere for better opportunities. But how is the country going to run without the youth? We do not have a national-level migration policy or an employment policy. [Policies] would help direct migration and strengthen our capabilities [to act]. **N**

Nepalis are preparing to return. That's not many, considering that Malaysia officially recorded 45,760 Nepalis who had legally entered the country last year.

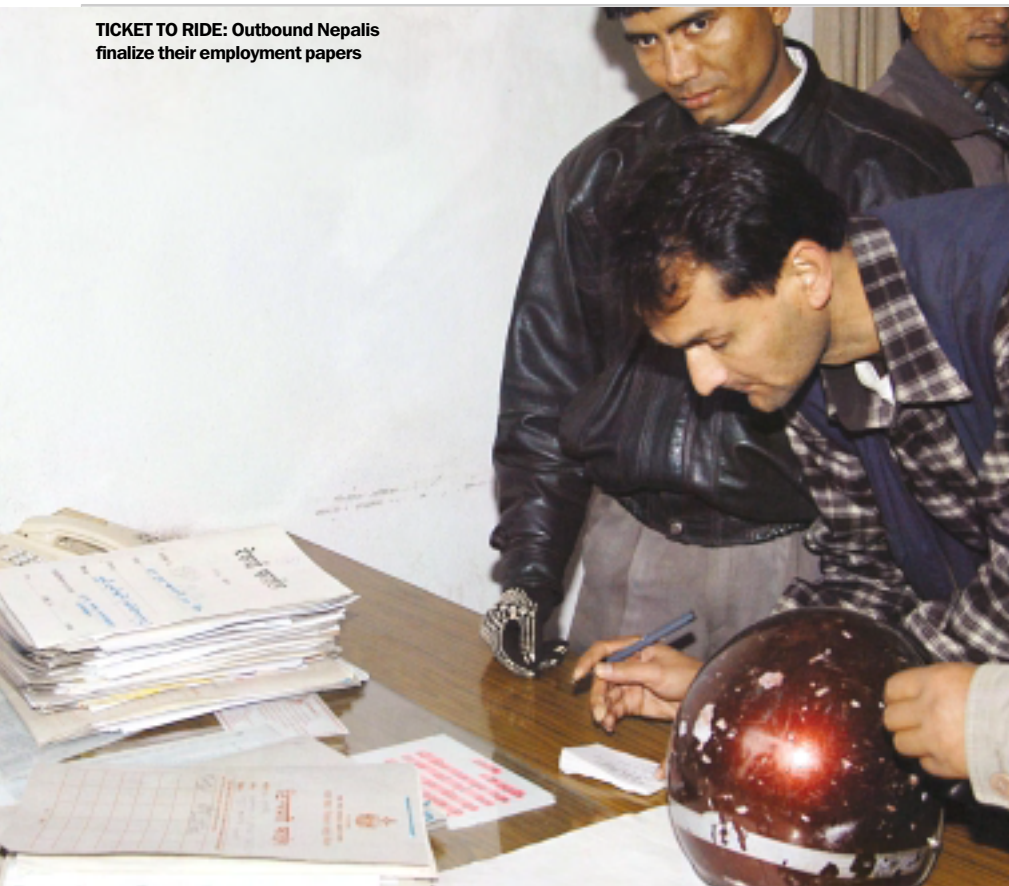
The illegal trade is a hard nut to crack. Labour agencies told Nation Weekly that a low-end job in Iraq pays a monthly salary of \$1,200, while a similar job in Saudi Arabia pays \$125. The attraction is clear.

Despite the killing of 12 Nepali hostages in Iraq on August 31 by Ansar al-Sunna, more and more Nepalis are headed for dangerous destinations. Many who left Nepal legally have chosen to overstay their visas, making their status illegal. Some have even been duped into making payments as high as Rs. 5,000,000 to manpower agencies and have then had to return after their contact agents abroad demanded more money. The high fees paid to Nepali agents are often not returned, as the agencies here claim they have done their part of the job.

But the manpower agencies are not the only ones to be blamed: There is both push and pull involved. The con-



**TICKET TO RIDE:** Outbound Nepalis finalize their employment papers



flict in Nepal has worsened poverty and unemployment; increasingly desperate Nepalis are willing to do almost anything, even if it's illegal.

"This can be dangerous," says Director General Pratap Kumar Pathak of the Department of Labour. "We have seen that even very educated people want to go abroad through any means." Pathak says the tendency has given rise to an active human smuggling network in the country.

Awareness campaigns have been targeted against those who are duping people in the name of work in foreign countries, but they have not stemmed the flow. The number of applicants seeking approval for overseas employment is increasing significantly, and complaints against individuals and manpower companies by those who have returned are up too. When Nation Weekly visited the Department of Labour on Thursday, November 18, 111 complaints against individuals and 526 against manpower companies had been filed.

"There has been a sharp increase in complaints in recent years," said Gopal Dahal, an officer at the department. "Out of them, around 30 percent are claims that they were not provided the salary they were promised before they were flown abroad." But salary discrepancies aren't the worst of it.

Padam Dahal of Jhapa was recently duped by an individual who, he claims, is a part of a racket that promised him a job in Cyprus. Upon reaching the island-state, he was taken into custody for holding a fake visa. The broker in Cyprus, who had taken an \$8000 payment from Dahal, denied having ever met him when questioned by the police. "I was suffering from typhoid, and the immigration officers let me go after they themselves got me a ticket back home," says Dahal. Since his return, he hasn't been to track down



**CAN I GO:** Line outside Department of Labour

the broker who is still in Cyprus.

A lawyer who asked for anonymity told us he has come across at least 400 people who have been duped by a similar racket. Some of those people claim that well-known Nepali film stars run the scam. Ever since the Iraq killings, the human-trafficking rackets are slowly unraveling: Dahal says that people have grown more vocal against fraud by individuals and agencies promising jobs abroad.

Nation Weekly came across one individual who had flown to Cuba via Moscow after he got a Russian visa based on bogus evidence that he would be attending a seminar. He was then offered entry into the U.S. state of Florida by boat for \$5,000. He refused, saying it was too dangerous.

In a similar way, India is used as a transit point for Nepalis going to unapproved destinations. "Some Indians are making about Rs. 60,000 from each Nepali sent to countries such as Iraq,"

says Nirmal Gurung, president of the Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies. Gurung led a 10-member team that went to India last August to assess the situation of about 10,000 Nepalis who were stranded in Mumbai and New Delhi while heading abroad for work. Their report revealed that one Nepali had died of jaundice and about two dozen had fallen ill due to miserable living conditions. The government later flew about 2,500 of the stranded Nepalis home from Mumbai.

According to Gurung, most illegal Nepali migrants fly abroad from India to avoid being stopped by Nepali authorities due to improper documents. Director General Pathak of the Labour Department admits that agencies have been using India to send Nepali workers to unsanctioned destinations.

"We either have to create a strong monitoring system to trace Nepalis who

have gone to India," he says, "or we have to use our diplomatic channels to prevent Nepalis from flying abroad from there." The government has tried to systemize the departure of Nepali migrant workers by making it mandatory to get a labor permit approved by the department, but it can't control movement from third countries.

Government records show that 105,055 people left for jobs to 42 different countries during the last fiscal year, but the government has no data about how many of them returned after the termination of their contracts. "We assume that most of them are still overseas, overstaying their visas," says Pathak. "It is almost impossible to halt illegal migrant workers in this age of globalization. The best we can do is to manage the problem through good national labor policies." **N**

**(WITH REPORTING JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI)**



**UNEMPLOYED MASS:**  
The Kathmandu Municipal Office received a record number of job applications





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# PASSING THE BUCK

Kathmandu has an image as a safe haven. Asylum seekers consider it good place to take refuge. The irony is that Nepal has neither refugee nor asylum laws.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

**W**HEN TADESSE KIDANE, AN Ethiopian asylum seeker, came to Nepal six months ago after several years of hiding in his own country and in India, he was hopeful that things would get better. It was not to be. The situation was as bad here as it was in India.

The UNHCR, the U.N. agency for refugees, rejected his application for official refugee status in Kathmandu as it had in New Delhi. "We can't provide you refugee status because Nepal is not a signatory to the Geneva Convention on Refugees," he quotes a UNHCR official as saying. "Why can't the UNHCR grant me the refugee status if I have well-founded fear of persecution because of my ethnicity and political affiliation back home in Ethiopia?" he asks. He also complains that no assistance was available to him while his application to the UNHCR was pending. In the meantime, his tourist visa for Nepal expired in March. Kidane is now in hiding. And he is not alone.

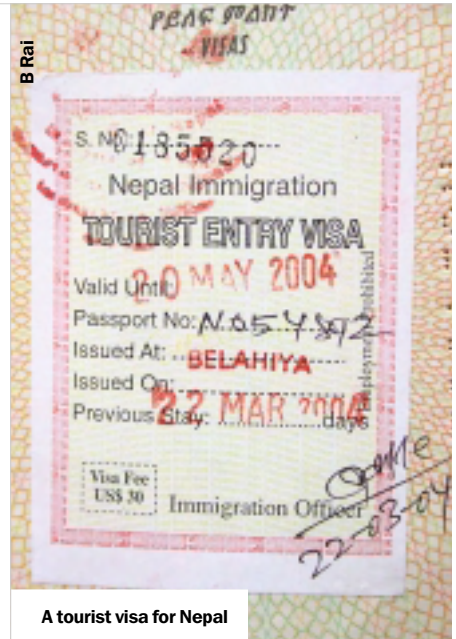
Another Ethiopian national, Solomon Alemu, has been in Kathmandu for seven months; the UNHCR hasn't even told him why his application, which he submitted in April, was rejected. Both he and Kidane are former cadres of the Oroma Liberation Front, an armed organization of the Oroma group, Ethiopia's largest ethnic community. The front was one of three partners in an interim coalition government after the fall of Mengistu Haile Mariam's 17-year dictatorship in 1991. But as elections drew closer, the rivalry between the coalition partners grew serious, and eventually the Oromo Liberation Front left the interim government, which resulted in a backlash against the front's cadres. Both Kidane and Alemu claim that they were jailed and tortured. They fear for

their lives as long as the present government is in power.

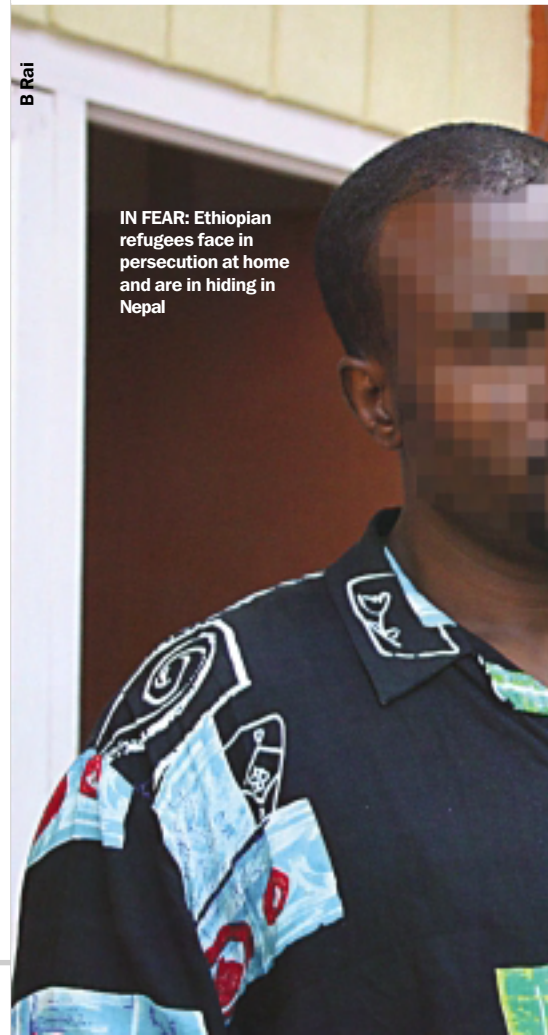
UNHCR officials here say that they have looked into the matter and there is little their office can do. Although they avoid directly commenting on individual cases, they make it clear that they consider the two men ineligible for refugee status. "Once such asylum seekers approach us, we determine their status under our mandate," says Abraham Abraham, UNHCR's resident representative in Nepal. "Our mandate, which is very elaborate and comprehensive, ensures that [asylum seekers] are genuine." UNHCR's mandate binds the agency to provide humanitarian relief and protection to those found eligible under its rule. UNHCR has closed most of the camps it set up for Ethiopian refugees in Sudan and neighboring countries and seems to believe that Ethiopia is safe now. Leading human rights organizations, however, think otherwise.

Amnesty International's 2004 country report on Ethiopia says it has received continuing reports of arrests of government opponents, arbitrary and indefinite detention without charge or trial, detentions of government opponents suspected of links with armed opposition movements and "disappearances" among detainees. Both Alemu and Kidane have some documentation of their status, which they say should be sufficient to prove their claims of mistreatment of dissidents in Ethiopia. They are not the only ones unable to persuade the UNHCR.

More than 40 asylum seekers of different nationalities, other than Bhutanese and Tibetans, are presently in Kathmandu, according to estimates. They include nine Iraqis, one Iranian, one Somali, Afghans, Bangladeshis, Burmese, Iranians, Turkmen, Indians and people from the tribal areas of Pakistan.



A tourist visa for Nepal



IN FEAR: Ethiopian refugees face in persecution at home and are in hiding in Nepal

UNHCR officials decline to give the exact number of applicants who have approached them for protection, but they say it is fewer than 100. The officials imply that most of those applicants are people who came to Nepal are merely economic migrants in search of a better life.

Human rights activists argue that humanitarian law must prevail and that Nepal should create infrastructure and, more importantly, a legal basis to provide shelter to genuine asylum seekers.

Nepal has ratified the U.N. Convention Against Torture that clearly states that no asylum seeker who faces prosecution back in his native country will be deported. And according to Article 9 of Nepal Treaty Act, treaty provision prevails over municipal laws.



They cite the European example where every asylum seeker receives basic support while his applications are being processed. The process can often be lengthy.

Although the Home Ministry says it has no precedent to grant shelter to anyone except Bhutanese and Tibetans, the National Human Rights Commission is said to have forwarded the Ethiopians' case to the government for consideration. "I found their claim very genuine," says Madhav Gautam of the National Human Rights Commission. The commission is now also looking into the cases of other asylum seekers on humanitarian grounds.

But Home Ministry officials have given no indication that they will break precedent and allow third-country nationals to take asylum. "It's up to the UNHCR to grant them refugee status," says Home Ministry Assis-



UNHCR Representative: Abraham Abraham

tant Secretary Kabi Raj Khanal, who oversees the refugee unit. "We have no policy to grant asylum." Without such a policy asylum seekers are not entitled to shelter or other support while their applications are processed. "It took eight years to finalize my asylum application," a human right activist quotes a Nepali refugee in Germany as saying.

And it's not just Nepal that falls short of its international duty. None of the seven SAARC countries have signed the 1951 Refugee Convention; the UNHCR functions on an ad hoc basis throughout the region. "Sadly we don't have any asylum or refugee laws in Nepal," says Gopal Siwakoti, widely known as Chintan, who specializes on humanitarian law and has been fighting for the service parity for the Gurkhas against the British government in London. "Even the Bhutanese and Tibetan [refugees'] issues have been guided by government discretion rather than by policy." Asylum seekers find the going tough even in countries that are generally supportive of refugees. The 1951 convention puts the onus on the asylum seeker to prove that he or she faces a real threat back in the native country.

Government officials come up with routine allegations that many applicants are not genuine and are merely trying to use Kathmandu as a transit point to Europe or other developed countries. But the Ethiopian and other refugees, who are in hiding for fear of being arrested for overstaying their visas, plead that they have a genuine fear of persecution in their home countries. Regardless, Nepali officials say they will be deported if found. "If they failed to get refugee status from the UNHCR, they will be treated as illegal foreigners," says the Home Ministry's Khanal.

As conflict intensifies across the globe, more and more people will come to Nepal—just as Nepalis have gone elsewhere for shelter or in search of better lives. Until the country ratifies the international refugee convention and establishes clear policy guidelines, Nepal's refugee problem will only grow. **N**



# DEAR OLD MRIGASTHALI

The temple of Pashupatinath has now added a deer park. This brings into being what was written on religious scriptures about the holy place.

BY SATISH JUNG SHAHI

**T**HE CAUSE IS NOT JUST THE media blitz during Shivaratri and Teej. The significance of the Pashupatinath has always transcended its physical boundaries. It means something special to Hindu devotees worldwide. For the conservationists, it is also one of the seven World Heritage Sites in the country.

On Friday, November 19, the Pashupati area added another feather in its holy cap. A newly refurbished deer park has been opened in 95 ropanis (nearly five hectares) of land to raise deer in their natural habitat.

The project, authorities say, brings to fruition what had been written in religious scriptures. It is believed that Lord Shiva disguised himself as a deer, while his wife Goddess Parvati, worried, roamed the jungle looking for him. No wonder, the place was named Mrigasthali, the abode of the deer, and the temple beside it Pashupati, lord of the animals. The area has in fact long been famous as the abode of the monkeys.

“The initiation has been launched marking the Nepali month of Mangshir when it is considered extremely holy for

puja at Pashupati,” says Shyam Shekhar Jha, spokesman of the Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT) that initiated the project along with the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC). The project plans to maintain a herd of 34 deer of four different species—the black buck, the spotted deer, the barking deer and the blue bull. Among those, the black buck is listed as an endangered species and found only in limited parts of Nepal and India.



For the first phase, the trust released six deer on Friday amid a formal ceremony chaired by the Pashupatinath's chief *pujari*, Rawal Srimahabaleshwore Bhatta. "We will be soon be releasing more in phases so as to make it easier for the animals to adapt to the new habitat," says Jha. "We have already signed an agreement with the KMTNC to relocate 20 black bucks, 10 spotted deer, two barking deer and two blue bulls from the Central Zoo."

When the first lot of deer were being released from the rectangular wooden boxes, the monkeys gathered above the tall fences and protested loudly to signal their unhappiness about the newcomers. The caretakers of the deer meanwhile chased the monkeys away snapping unloaded slingshots.

"It is obvious that the monkeys are wary of the new visitors in the area. But soon the deer will graze on the grounds while the monkeys will take to the tree-

tops," a guard from the PADT and now a deer caretaker assured the journalists gathered for the park's opening. "In many cases the monkeys will even pass leaves from treetops for the deer to feed on. It will be a living example of a harmonious ecosystem."

Locals told Nation Weekly that the jungle where the park is now located between the Pashupati and Guheshwori temples was earlier famous as a safe haven for drug users and amorous couples.



The Deer Park cost a little over Rs. 1 million, most of it going into fencing the park and the rest on building a store-room and premises to feed the deer. According to PADT's member secretary Basanta Chaudhary, the trust will spend an estimated Rs. 887,241 for feeding, vaccinations and the upkeep of the deer.

The trust so far has decided not to allow devotees to enter the fenced area of the park. Visitors can view the deer from outside without paying any fee.

Many say it will be interesting to see how the trust, that has many times come under fire for alleged mismanaged of temple earnings made from the devotees, will raise money to maintain the deer park. Only time will tell whether the deer will have a blissful life as told in the scriptures and if Pashupati will come anywhere close to living up to the legend of Mrigasthali. **N**

# RELIGION WITHOUT REASON

What is worrisome is that the impulses behind our religiosity seem to be of a particularly crude kind—similar to the impulses that prompt people to buy magic potions and powders from quacks to cure all manners of illnesses



BY ADITYA ADHIKARI

WITH THE SEASON OF FESTIVITIES, numerous rituals and visits to temples over, it may be the right time to take a look at the deficiencies of religious life in Nepal. Let's begin with a look at a standard temple, say, Bajrabarahi or Changunarayan, where we've regularly worshipped over the past month or so: Shoes are taken off to enter a dimly lit, cave-like enclosure where even the presence of a handful of people forms a serious crowd. There are idols on display: a large, central one surrounded by other lesser deities. These figures may have been crafted with finesse and love. They may be immensely beautiful to behold, but there is no way of knowing, for they are plastered with a paste of color and grain that has dried and formed a thick crust, obscuring the details to such a degree that it is difficult to even tell what deity the figure represents. We add our own offerings to the mess: fruits, perhaps, or money. The whole time we are standing on a thin, sticky film that covers the floor. The smell of the accumulation of filth around the temple area mingles with the smell of offerings inside to form an all-pervading rancidity.

Then we have the greatest of all temples: Pashupatinath. People throng outside the main temple on major festivals, pushing and shoving to get to the central enclosure. Once at one of the doors that allow a glimpse of the *linga* in the inner sanctum, offerings are hurled into the enclosure, quick prayers are said and a quicker *tika* received from the *pujari* in attendance before being shoved away by the heaving crowd. How similar to shopping in Ason this experience is. We might even say that there is no other culture where religion is so integral to people's lives that even worship is akin to the daily shopping in the hubbub of the marketplace.

The problem here is not that our beautifully crafted temples have become living pools of squalor and are thus displeasing to the senses. That can be forgiven. What has to be questioned, however, is the religious character of a people who have learned to equate sanctity with foul smells and dark interiors, who shove others aside to gain a sight of the *linga* at Pashupatinath, only to make their quick offerings and hurry home. What is worrisome is that the impulses behind this religiosity seem to be of a particularly crude

kind—similar to the impulses that prompt people to buy magic potions and powders from quacks to cure all manners of illnesses. The middle-aged woman who offers a quick prayer and some fruit at Pashupatinath, we suspect, wants nothing more than the wealth of her family to increase. The young woman perhaps prays that the groom her parents have chosen for her is good looking. Even more disturbing is the worship of the more fearsome deities, say, the various Bhairabs around Ason and Indrachowk. Here worship is to ward off the wrath of these deities, to ward off inner fears. By stuffing the mouth of the Akash Bhairab with sweetmeats, by lighting incense before the Kal Bhairab, the hope is to appease them, to pull them over to your side so they stand with instead of against you.

So we have a series of malevolent or benevolent deities that have to be appeased or cajoled. The religious spirit in our culture seems to go no further than that. In our temples and modes of worship—the true values of religion, the values that add substance to life—are almost non-existent. There is no contemplation on the self's place in the world, no awareness that beyond the self there exists a world which forms a whole, of which the individual self is only a part. Our temples offer no repose that rejuvenates the self and, to use a classical Hindu expression, stills the waves of the heart and mind. The hurried, anxious offerings of vermilion powder and bananas only signify a pettiness of spirit incapable of true thought or feeling.

This pettiness is partially caused by the layout and architecture of the temples themselves. Where is the time and space required for religious yearning to express itself? All energy is spent getting in and out of a cave-like enclosure around which throngs are gathered. There is no stillness, no solitude.

Here we can learn much from India where the tremendous social and religious reforms of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries helped shape a religion that accorded with the needs of the present age. These reformists left their mark on many aspects of life, including on the construction of temples and manners of worship.

The first thing the Nepali visitor notices is the cleanliness of Indian temples. It astonishes him, appears like a revelation: It has never occurred to him that cleanliness could or even should be important at places of worship. Then he notices how the inner chamber has been constructed to minimize waste: The idols are separated from the public, so one cannot simply dump offerings on the deity; money offerings are to be placed in a locked donation box, so accumulated funds can go towards the maintenance of the temple before being pilfered by the priests.

Most importantly, instead of the tiny, dark inner sanctum of our temples, they have a large, quiet carpeted hall where a host of people can easily assemble in peace without pushing or shoving. The importance of this innovation must not be underestimated: It allows, even en-



courages, the prayer and reflection that stem from the deepest religious yearning. The expansion of the temple's inner chamber leads to the expansion of the human spirit itself.

The orthodox will of course argue that these temples were built according to laws, which if broken will be an assault on their sanctity. They will argue that our temples are built in the image of a divinely infused human body and that the inner sanctum—damp, dark, cave-like—is meant to be symbolic of the womb, from where all life emerges. But, as AK Ramanujan has pointed out in his study of South Indian Virasaivism: "In history the human metaphor fades. The model, the meaning is submerged. The temple becomes a static standing thing that has forgotten its originals." Pashupatinath, thus, as we have seen, constricts rather than allows for the expression of true religious yearning. No amount of applied symbolism can reverse the need for con-

ditions of worship where a genuine religious spirit can emerge.

Besides, the use of symbolism in our culture often amounts to little more than deliberate blindness on the part of defenders of the traditional faith, who go into contortions to show the absolute validity of traditional customs and precepts. So we have a writer who has taken as his task the justification of the animal sacrifice that takes place during Dashain: "Strong feeling for sacrifice is [sic] accepted as the most effective means to reach the higher stage of Mokshya (Liberation)," he writes. "[The five animals that are sacrificed:] water-buffalos, goats, chickens, ducks and sheep symbolize anger, lust, timidity, apathy and stupidity respectively. One can reach the perfect stage of self-realization only when one has full control over all kinds of human vices and demerits."

If only we could gain freedom from anger and lust by systematically beheading scores of helpless animals! It would be more commonsensical to say instead that such sacrifice does the opposite of what the writer claims: That it desensitizes us to bloodshed and instills in us the appetite for such cruelty, thus increasing anger and lust rather than eliminating it. Such blindness that is cultivated in the name of "traditional culture" can only erode whatever powers of rationality we possess.

The list of areas where blindness is cultivated could go on and on. One last example: Every old temple has a sign outside that reads: "Only Hindus allowed inside." In reality that means you can only enter if you look subcontinental. By now Nepalis allow foreigners into their own homes, even eat with them. But if we consider the temples, it seems that the fear of the *mleccha* remains. Those signs seem to say: "At least in the matter of religion we are not yet corrupted." But little is it realized that keeping such restrictions on entry only means the perpetuation of the idea that our Hinduism is a tribal religion, small in scope, relevant only to the people born and brought up in this culture. This surely isn't worthy of a religion that prides itself on tolerance and assimilation.

Our religion hasn't grown with the times. By refusing to change, closing ourselves off, we are only condemning ourselves to irrelevancy and ignorance. **N**



(1)

AFTER SHOCKS: Krishnabhir, Dhading, last Tuesday saw a fierce battle between the Maoists and the security forces. Here the rebels are seen making a hasty retreat after they had killed five security personnel.

(1) One of their own died in the encounter



From	To	Flight No.	Days of Operation	Dep. Time	Arr. Time	Rupee Tariff One way	Dollar Tariff One way	Remarks
Kathmandu	Lukla	YA 111	Daily	0700	0735	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	Lukla	YA 101	Daily	0705	0740	1665	91	DHC-6/300
	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	SAAB 340B
	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	SAAB 340B
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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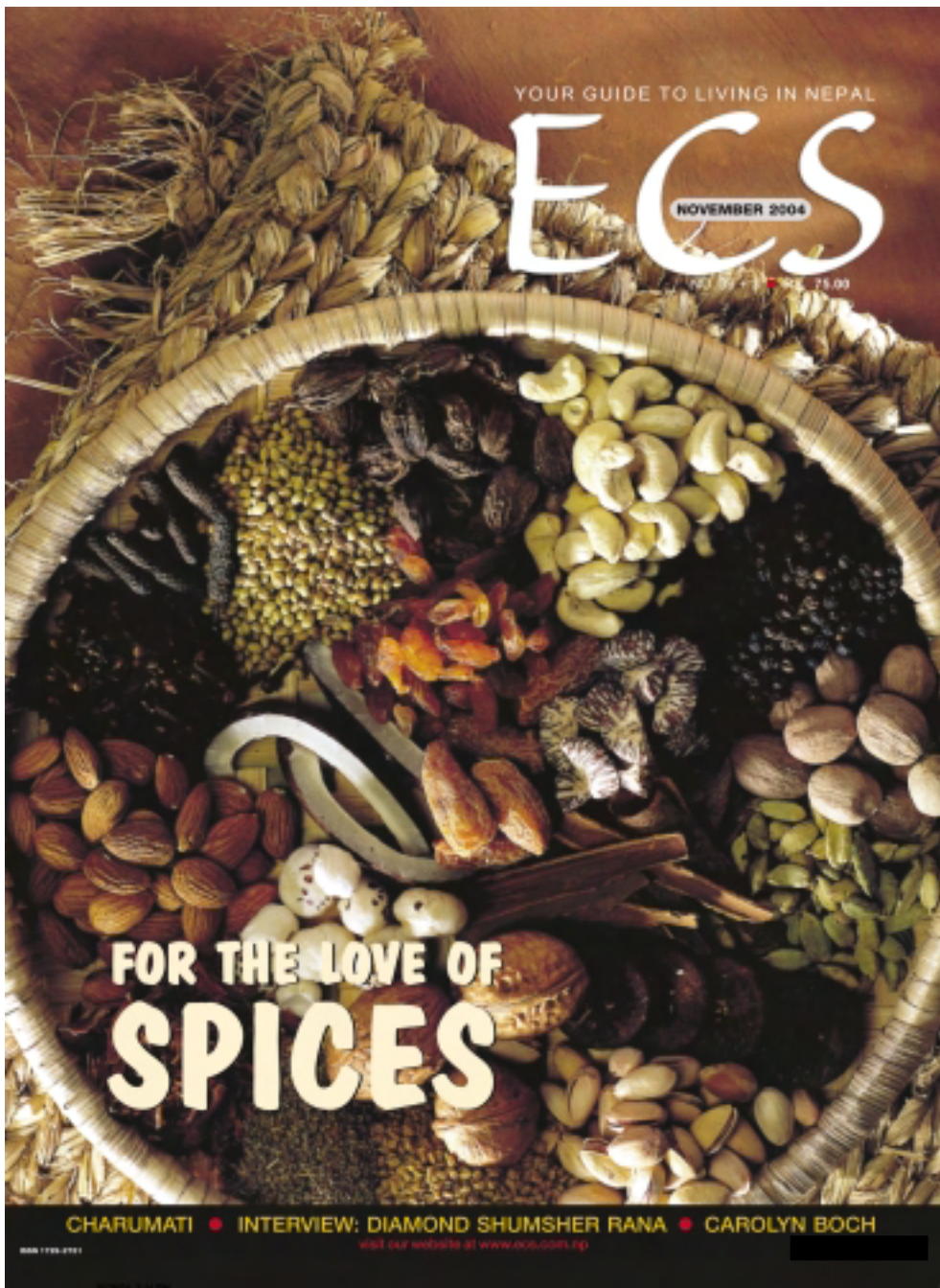
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# HELLO AMERICA

The annual ritual of the U.S. Diversity Visa applications has now started

BY JOHN CHILD

AMERICA IS A LAND OF IMMIGRANTS: Ninety-nine percent of Americans are immigrants or have descended from immigrants. Americans understand that immigration is the bedrock of the country's greatness. A current American television series on immigrants, "They Made America," is timed to coincide with the annual Diversity Visa program, a lottery that awards 50,000 "green cards" each year. Winners of the lottery who meet the qualifications receive an immigrant visa for themselves and their immediate family and permission to live and work in the United States permanently.

Last year 2,698 Nepalis won the Diversity Visa lottery, and more than 2,000 of them were issued U.S. immigrant visas and green cards. Of the 196 countries whose residents are eligible for the lottery—residents of countries such as India that send more than 50,000 immigrants to the United States annually are not eligible—only 11 countries had more winners. Nepalis received more than four percent of the available green cards even though they represent less than one-half of one percent of the world population.

Bob Farquhar, chief of the consular section at the U.S. Embassy, says that he loves approving visas for lottery winners, shaking their hands and welcoming them to the United States. But, he says, "One of the worst things my staff and I have to do is to disqualify a lottery winner because he or she is not eligible." The eligibility requirement clearly stated in the Diversity Visa lottery information is for 12 years of education or

two years of work experience in a qualifying job (see box). Unstated but equally important is that the winners must also be able to pay for plane tickets to the United States for themselves and their family and support themselves until they can find work there.

Embassy officials say there is no fixed amount of money necessary to meet this requirement. The amount, they say, varies depending on family size and individual circumstances. But the cost is significant: Airplane tickets cost \$1,000 per person or more, and life in the United States is expensive. A family of four earning \$1,500 per month in America is considered to be in poverty; officials are likely to expect Diversity Visa winners to have enough money to support themselves and, if applicable, their families



for several months, unless they have a job waiting for them on arrival. An American citizen willing to act as a sponsor is not a requirement, but consular officials say that it helps: If someone is willing to support you until you find work, that will substantially reduce the amount of money necessary to qualify.

Since last year Diversity Visa applications may only be filed online. Cyber cafés, copy shops and even the Post Office are offering assistance for a fee to

## How to apply

[http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants\\_types\\_diversity.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants_types_diversity.html)

## Apply for the DV lottery

<http://www.dvlottery.state.gov>

## Jobs that qualify

[http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants\\_types\\_diversity4.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants_types_diversity4.html)

## Last year's results

[http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants\\_types\\_diversity2.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants_types_diversity2.html)

would-be applicants without a computer at home. The U.S. government does not endorse or support any of these service providers. Using one of them will not increase the chances of winning, but a good service provider should be able to help by explaining the rules and the information required, by converting B.S. dates to western dates and by scanning photos or taking new digital photos.

Along with legitimate service providers, there are also frauds and cheats. Anyone who says they can guarantee winning the lottery or claiming a better chance of winning is lying. Beware of online sites that masquerade as the official application site, sites that charge fees

and ones that offer too-good-to-be-true deals, such as free airplane tickets for lottery winners. Winners are notified by post with an official letter from the U.S. State Department. Email messages saying that you have won the Diversity Visa lottery or offering a green card are all fraudulent. Any solicitation purporting to represent or to be endorsed by the U.S. government is a scam.

Timing is important.

Applications for the lottery will only be accepted until January 7, 2005. Last year there was very heavy demand during the final week, and many people were unable to access the site or complete their applications. It is a lottery; there's no guarantee. Last year there were more than six million applicants worldwide for the 50,000 green cards. But more than 2,000 Nepalis received green cards last year. This year it could be your turn. **N**



# Post-Election Blues

For those utterly demoralized and humiliated by President Bush's reelection, there are small consolation prizes

BY SAMRAT UPADHYAY

**A**fter George W. Bush's reelection, along with many others I thought about leaving America. Canada seemed the most obvious choice—a killer healthcare system, multicultural to boot and a more welcoming border. No wonder Americans seeking information on Canada's immigration website increased six-fold after November 3. For me, though, the cold was a serious off-putter. After spending years in the cold of northeast Ohio, I was reluctant to hear "windchill factor" again. More importantly, I didn't want to be accused of having "cut and run," a charge Bush frequently hurled against Kerry for what the senator allegedly wanted to do with Iraq. I wanted to "stay the course," to be "resolute" like our mandate-gathering President. So here I am, resolutely bitching and moaning.

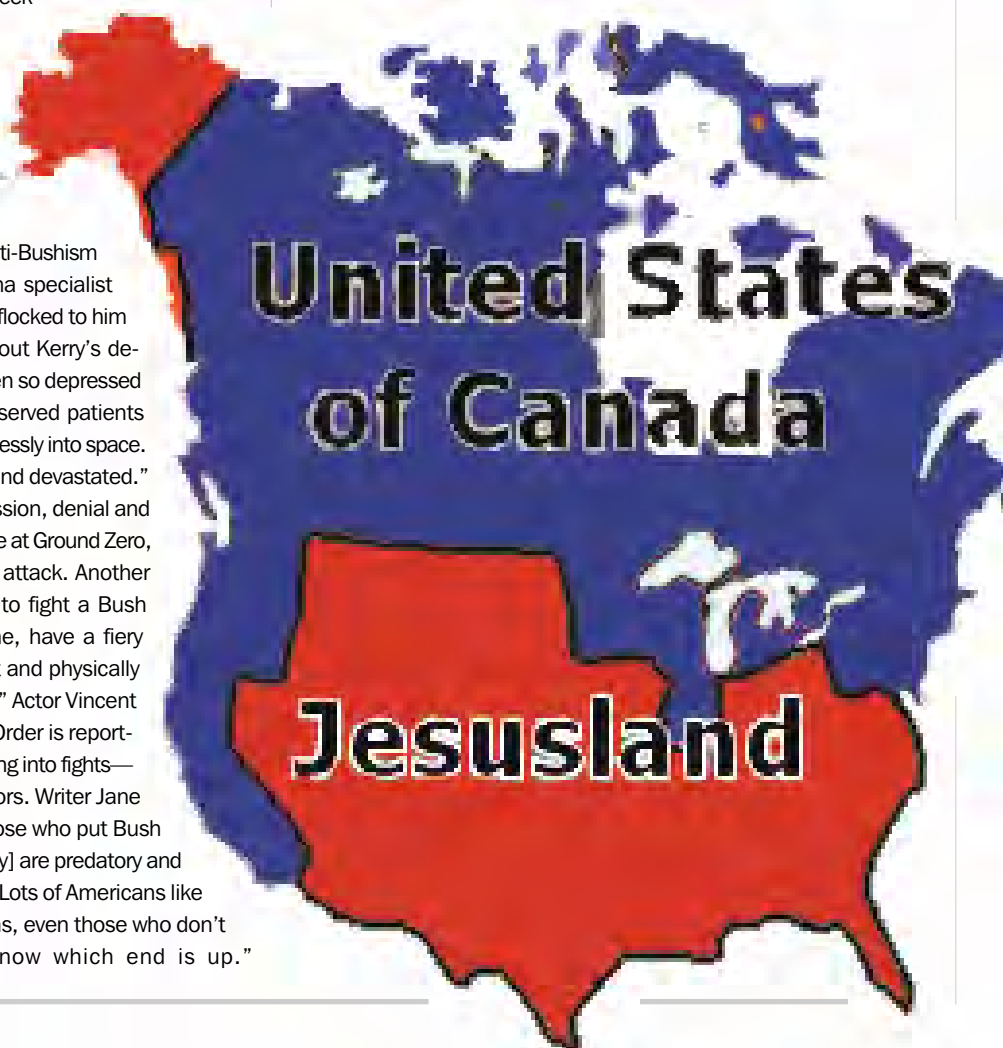
That I'm not alone—or crazy, as one is apt to think in Bushworld—has brought some consolation. The day after the results, a colleague on my floor wore black in mourning. Another colleague grimly said, "This is the rise of the American Taliban." Another said that it would take him the next four years to recover from the hurt. A friend in Florida has m e worried. In our last email communication a week before elections she'd wearily confessed to neglecting her duty as department chair in order to chauffeur Kerry voters to polling booths. Now I'm afraid she's barricaded herself in her room and is eating rice crispies for breakfast, lunch and dinner. While these folks, myself included, can be chalked away as whiny academics, whose anti-Bushism is a given, have some sympathy for trauma specialist Douglas Schooler's patients in Florida, who flocked to him for intense hypnotherapy upon hearing about Kerry's defeat. "I had one friend tell me he's never been so depressed and angry in his life," Schooler said. "I observed patients threatening to leave the country or staring listlessly into space. They were emotionally paralyzed, shocked and devastated."

The news is awash with stories of depression, denial and anger. A man from Georgia committed suicide at Ground Zero, the site of the World Trade Center terrorist attack. Another advertised for a street duel: "I would like to fight a Bush supporter to vent my anger. If you are one, have a fiery streak, please contact me so we can meet and physically fight. I would like to beat the shit out of you." Actor Vincent D'Onofrio of the popular TV show *Law and Order* is reportedly "losing it"—passing out on the set, getting into fights—and becoming a royal pain to his fellow actors. Writer Jane Smiley is clear about what she thinks of those who put Bush back in the White House: "[Bush and Cheney] are predatory and resentful, amoral, avaricious and arrogant. Lots of Americans like and admire them because lots of Americans, even those who don't share those same qualities, don't know which end is up."

Trappedminds.org has this advice: "If you checked John Kerry's name on the ballot Tuesday, you may be feeling a little blue right now. Doctors say that's normal." Tell that to the creator of &#@#thesouth.com. A page-long tirade against the southern states that voted for Bush, it contains 42 instances (yes, I counted) of the F-word, and it tells Bush supporters into which orifice they can shove their votes.

For those of us utterly demoralized and humiliated by Bush's victory, there are small consolation prizes. We'll have four more years of Bush jokes. They've already started: When Bush claims he has a *man-date*, we get to wonder if he's courting the gay population. Second-term presidencies are usually wracked by scandals—Iran contra affair for Reagan, Monica Lewinsky for Clinton—so perhaps worse is yet to come? Although if the lack of WMDs and Abu Ghraib didn't do Bush in, what will? Certainly not the recent discovery that Cheney has a monstrous package between his legs, as one photo during a campaign stop in Milwaukee apparently reveals (no, Cheney is not naked—just sitting on a ledge with a bulge). If anything, Cheney's largesse has led a Bush supporter to declare, "All Republican guys are built like that."

Talk about making the Democrats feel small. **N**



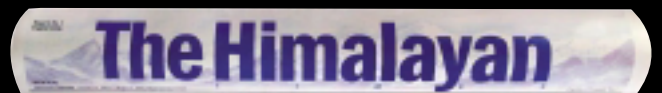


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A GREAT NEWSPAPER



# Recycled News

A three-year-old stack of newspapers shows how true it is that there's nothing new under the sun

BY JOHN CHILD

**S**ince nothing happens during festival time," said my journalist friend, "why bother printing the newspaper?" He's right, of course: Can you think of anything the government has accomplished in the last month? For that matter, how about the last six months?

But going without the morning newspapers during Dashain and Tihar is hard on me. This year while rooting around in my cupboard for something to read in the mornings, I found a weeks' worth of newspapers from November 2001. I figured I'd give one a try and checked my horoscope: "Pressure builds on all fronts. You could lose your patience when dealing with others." Wow, that's pretty good; at least as applicable today as three years ago. I kept reading.

To my pleasure, the old news was just as satisfying as current news. In fact, it was identical. The French are right, at least this once. The more things change the more they are the same. Given that, it hardly seems necessary to pay reporters, layout departments and editors at all. In the spirit of the ecology movement and conservation, I suggest we simply recycle the news and save everyone a lot of time and effort. Here's what I'd print in tomorrow's recycled newspaper:

**Front page: "Melamchi water project delayed"** A tussle between donors, the World Bank and private contractors concerned about security has delayed again the progress on the project to bring an adequate supply of drinking water into the Kathmandu Valley. Officials now hope the project can be completed by 2003. (Hmm... have to change that last item. 2006? 2012? The end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?)

**"Deuba criticizes Maoist remarks"** PM Deuba says Prachanda's latest public comments are a pretext to scuttle efforts to resolve the insurgency. The government plans tough action against the rebels, he says. The home and defense ministries issue separate statements to assert they will go all-out to contain the Maoists. The prime minister's meeting with the King is followed by a Cabinet meeting, which adjourns without reaching any decision. Girija Prasad Koirala is said to be in favor of crushing the Maoists. (Or is that "in favor of crushing the prime minister"?)

**"Maoists attack police posts"** The Maoist rebels launched fresh attacks on police posts and set fire to a government office in Makwanpur. A bomb damaged the district administration office in Hetauda. A standoff continues over the Maoists' demand for a constituent assembly and the prime minister's refusal to consider the proposal.

**Business: "Transport safety act needed"** The minister of labor inaugurated a four-day interaction of

safety and health experts with a call to introduce a transport safety act to reduce road accidents that kill and injure thousands annually. He called for cooperation from the industry and asked the meeting participants for creative and concrete suggestions. He said that the Cabinet is considering forming a high-level commission to study the issue. (A big step forward!)

**"Government asks media to refrain from criticism"** The government has asked the media not to publish any report that demeans the security forces or reports on terrorist activity. The information and communications minister reminded the media that the newly promulgated Terrorism and Disruptive Activities Ordinance requires that expressions of views must take place without infringing on security. 'This will in no way curtail people's right to information,' the minister said.

**International: "Bhutanese refugees close to repatriation"** The Nepal-Bhutan joint refugee verification office has verified 10,765 persons from the Khudunabari refugee camp in Jhapa. The verification process will be completed within 16 days, says the chairman of the joint verification team. With verification complete, repatriation can begin soon, he says. (Right...)

**"Indian PM offers assistance to fight rebels"** India has offered Nepal 'whatever assistance is required' in its fight against the Maoist rebels, the ministry of external affairs said on Wednesday. The offer was made by the Indian prime minister during a phone call to King Gyanendra. The Royal Nepal Army has apparently requested its Indian counterpart to expedite supply of military equipment including attack helicopters, ammunition, armored vehicles and other military hardware. (Again...)

**Editorial: "A new approach"** The ceasefire is over, but Maoist supremo Prachanda has left the door open for talks, putting the ball in the government's court. The government will now come under tremendous pressure. This could cast a shadow on the future of the Deuba government.

What is required is a consensus between the Palace, the government and opposition forces to ensure the fundamental freedoms of the people and enduring peace in the country. This calls for a new, bold approach, free from past inhibitions.

**Sports: "Super sixes tournament"** Sixteen teams will contest the Soaltee Crowne Plaza Super Six cricket tournament. The tournament has attracted top corporate teams for three days of 'No work and all play.'

What a wonderful slogan! With this wealth of perfectly good second-hand news lying around, why should anyone work? Let's go green and recycle! **N**







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Shiva Shankar's demise has brought to a close an important chapter in the history of Nepali music. But his life's work has opened many more.

BY INDRA ADHIKARI

**S**hiva Shankar Manandhar, who has influenced virtually every aspect of Nepali music for 50 years, died of lung cancer last week. He was 72. During the past four decades, his name has probably been mentioned more often in books, journals, lectures and conversations about Nepali music than any other musician. His music was both patriotic and sentimental—among the most touching songs of his generation—and spoke to people of all ages. If he is remembered by posterity it will be for his contribution to the development of Nepali music while preserving its heritage and originality.

Shiv Shankar's co-workers describe him as a man of destiny and remarkable generosity, someone who was down-to-earth and deeply committed to his work. Premdhaj Pradhan recalls the days when Shiv Shankar would work for a week to give a song one final touch. He was even stubborn and demanding with words, forcing them to do as he willed. He worked odd hours; he worked without food. He would refuse to meet visitors without an appointment.



Those who have associated with him closely say he was a man with an impeccable sense of timing, in his music and his work. His habit of sticking firmly to a schedule helped him build Radio Nepal, which had just been formed when he joined it in 2007 B.S. There was fierce competition for positions there, as it was the only medium at the time that reached the general public. Radio Nepal attracted great talent but also needed an able person to coordinate and manage it. Shiv Shankar proved to be the right person for the position.

Commercial music in Nepal was in its infancy when Shiv Shankar started his career. Except for a few performances on public stages, there was little opportunity for music to grow. Indian music enjoyed a dominant position. Promoting Nepali music to new heights was the goal; Radio Nepal became the

# The End Of An Era



medium, and Shiv Shankar became the model. He was an impresario, producer, composer and arranger who did much to expand the popularity of Nepali music.

According to Pradhan, Shiv Shankar was the father of the *adhunik geet*, the modern Nepali song. The trend he started led to the revolution in the music industry and eventually to the rise of pop music that has won the hearts of youngsters. In his four decades of service to Radio Nepal, Nepali music grew into full flower. In the beginning, when there were only *lok geet*, folk songs. The introduction of modern styles drew criticism, but Shiv Shankar eventually won listeners over. His fans, music lovers and aspiring musicians sent him letters: He replied to all with handwritten responses that were invariably positive and encouraging.

Shiv Shankar always favored change. He encouraged emerging artists and promoted music, even pop songs, always stressing originality and musical roots. He was fond of using the newest technologies available to make the work easier and the music better. He taught his protégés fairness and loyalty, concentration and dedication to their work.

Shiv Shankar's career began in his late teens; he joined Radio Nepal at 19, along with Koili Devi, Natikaji, Pannakaji, Hari Prasad Rimal and Bhairab Bahadur Thapa. His first song, "Yo Kholako Pani, Euta Rumal Dhundaima Din Jane," was recorded in 2015 B.S. in Mumbai. In 2021 B.S. Shiv Shankar played the lead role in "Aama," the first film made in Nepal. Although he did not act in any other film, the exposure advanced his career, and he, in turn, worked to advance the Nepali film industry. Shiv Shankar wrote the music for more than 1,200 songs, sang more than 300 of those and composed

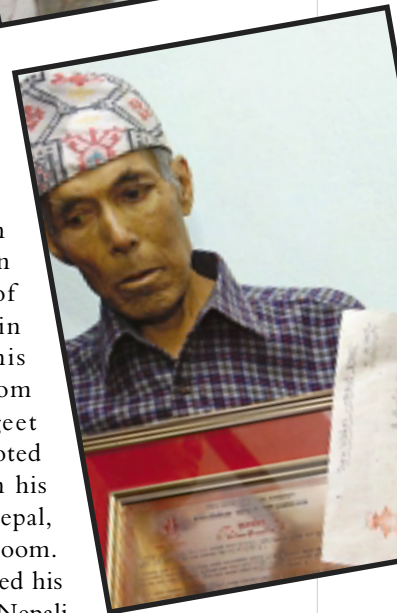
music for more than a dozen films. For his contribution he was showered with many laurels, the most recent of those was the Natikaji Memorial award, which was presented to him just days before his death.

Shiv Shankar was not motivated by personal success and cared little for money. He was simple, quiet and shy. He liked to dress in simple clothes; his favorite dress was a brown safari suit. He was known to enjoy a drink and was a heavy smoker. The lung cancer that killed him was probably a result of smoking, even though he quit the habit three years ago at the request of his friends.

He was very devout, passing most mornings in his prayer room. Until recent years a walk in the mornings was a part of his daily schedule, and he was active in his neighborhood in Kalimati.

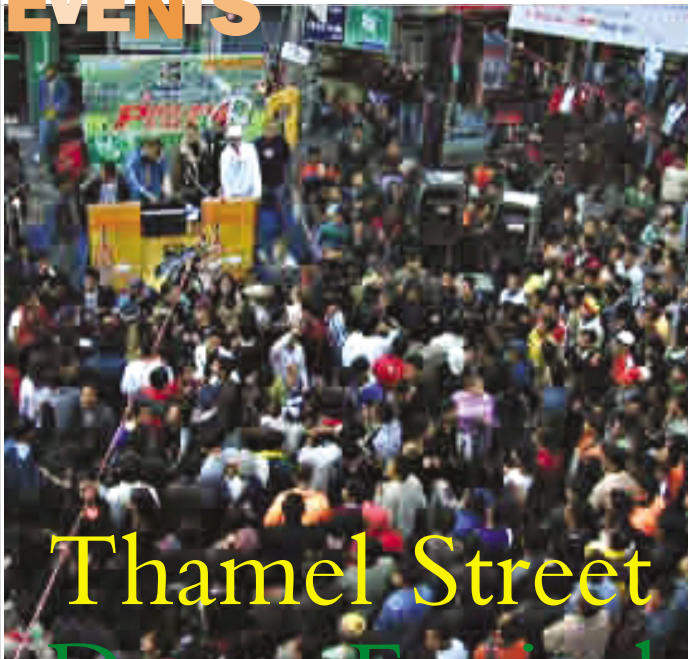
Shiv Shankar was born to Man Bahadur and Ram Maya on Falgun 12, 1989 B.S. on the day of Shivaratri, at New Road in Kathmandu. He attained his bachelor's degree in music from Kalanidhi Indira Sangeet Mahavidhyalaya and then devoted himself to his chosen career. In his 41 years of service at Radio Nepal, Nepali music grew into full bloom. Hundreds of his students followed his lead: The strength and variety of Nepali music today will give peace to his departed soul.

On the last day of Tihar, at around six in the evening, Shiv Shankar passed away at the Bhaktapur Cancer Hospital. His three sons, Gauri, Ravi and Shashi, performed his last rites at Aryaghat on Monday evening, the day following his death. Shiv Shankar's demise has brought to a close an important chapter in the history of Nepali music. But his life's work has opened many more. **N**



# CITY ThisWeek

## EVENTS



## Thamel Street Dance Festival

On November 29, 2003, Nepal experienced an unprecedented musical event: Peace Project - A Thamel Street Dance Music Festival. Party Nepal and Funky Buddha Bar and Café organized Nepal's first open air dance event and the messages were simple: peace, harmony and a good time. A 20,000-plus crowd danced all afternoon without missing a beat. Thamel had been divided into Zone 1 and Zone 2. Zone 1 pumped out hip

hop, R & B, pop and house, while drum & bass and psy trance poured out of Zone 1.

This year the party is going to get bigger and better. Along with Nepal's DJs, DJ Nissan, DJ Zion, DJ Sick Freak, DJ Ankit, DJ Bhatte, DJ Mahesh, DJ Jital and Salil on Didge, and British DJs Bee and Chloe's Husband will also be performing. At the open streets of Thamel. Date: November 27. Time: 2 p.m. onwards.

## November Medley

## ART EXHIBITIONS

This exhibition features a rare collection of paintings and sculptures by some of Nepal's most senior artists and eminent painters. It also includes drawings, tapestries and textile wall hangings by resident foreign artists. Artists: Dil Bahadur Chitrakar, Durga Baral, Govinda Dongol, Jagdish Chitrakar, Karna Narsingh Rana, Kiran Manandhar, Lain Singh Bangdel, Lorraine Lamothe, Meredith Lama, Prakaash Chandwadkar, Ragini Upadhyaya, Seema Shah, Shashikala Tiwari, Sharada Chitrakar, Thakur Prasad Mainali, Uma Shankar Shah, Yuki Shirai. Date: November 10 to December 1. Venue: Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited. For information: 4218048.

### Photo Session

Photo Concern announces it offer for the festive season. Take along the Photo Concern Free Photo Shoot advertisement cutting available in the daily newspapers and get a free photo shoot during Dashain and Tihar.



Valid up to November 30. For information: 4223275.

### Novem Bowl

Hotel Shahanshah presents "Novem Bowl." Bowl and win prizes worth Rs. 5000 and more. The package includes one game free for every two games paid, two games free for every one hour game paid, one bottle of wine for six continuous strikes, Rs. 5000 worth of carpet for scores above 280 and finally the top scorer of the month gets lunch for two at the

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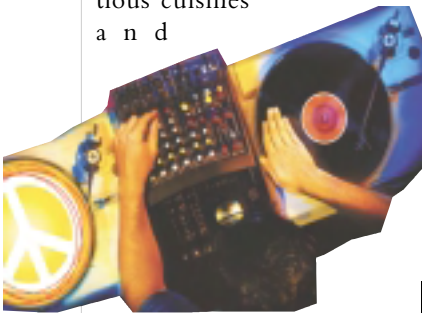
Revolving Restaurant and three months of free subscription from Nation weekly magazine. Till November 30.

**Cine Club**

Movie: Simple Mortel. Director: Pierre Jolivet. Starring: Philippe Volter. At the Alliance Francaise, Tripureshwore. Date: December 5. Time: 2 p.m. For information: 4241163.

**Hey DJ!!**

British Council and Hotel Yak and Yeti present Hey DJ, featuring DJ Bee and DJ Chloe's Husband. Witness the latest club beats and enjoy a range of scrumptious cuisines and



the biggest buzz ever. At the Hotel Yak and Yeti. Date: November 26. Time: 8 p.m. onwards. Tickets: Rs.1199 (inclusive of dinner and unlimited drinks.) For information: 4148999.

**Beatles Mania**

At St. Xavier's Godavari School. Date: November 27. Time: 1 p.m. Ticket: Rs.100. For information: 4414785

**ONGOING**

**All That Jazz**

Presenting "Abhaya and the Steam Injuns" and the best of jazz in Nepal at the Fusion Bar, Dwarika's Hotel, 7 p.m. onwards, every Friday. Entry fee: Rs. 555, including BBQ dinner, and a can of beer/soft drinks. For information: 4479488.



**Cadenza Live**

The only happening live Jazz in town. Enjoy every Wednesday and Saturday at the Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpat. Time: 7:45 p.m. onwards.

**Charcoalz**

This festive season Yak and Yeti brings to you "Charcoalz" at the

poolside. The piping hot grills are guaranteed to drive away your autumn chills with an array of Indian, western and Mongolian barbequed delights to tempt your appetites. Time: 6-10 p.m. For information: 4248999.

**Rock@Belle Momo**

Enjoy combo meals at Belle Momo every Fridays 6:30 p.m. onwards as the rock 'n roll band Steel Wheels performs live. For information: 4230890.

**Fusion Night**

The Rox Bar welcomes everyone to be a part of the Fusion Night. The rhythmic and harmonic beats of the eastern and the western instruments—a treat for the senses. Enjoy the sarangi played by Bharat Nepali with a well-blended mix of western tunes played by The Cloud Walkers. Every Wednesday. Time: 6 p.m. onwards. For information: 4491234.

**Nepali Platter & Unlimited Drinks In Splash**

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cial moment in the festive season. The scheme applies to Royal Stag, Ultimate Gin & Ruslan Vodka. Time: 6-8 p.m. For information: 4411818.

**Tickling Taste buds**

Barbeque every Friday Evening. At The Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-la Hotel. Time: 7 p.m. onwards. For information: 4412999.

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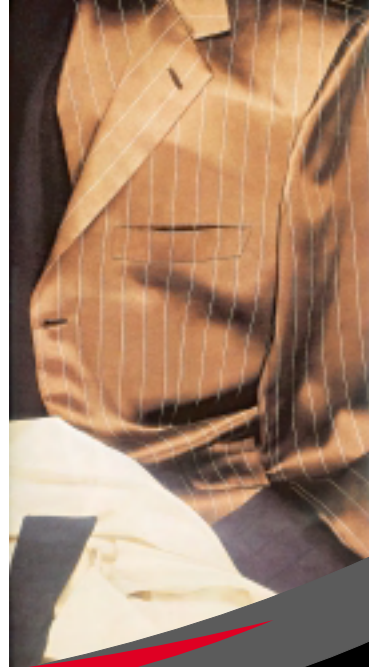
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# Reborn YOGIS

The urban population is rediscovering yoga, which has been part and parcel of Hindu culture for thousands of years. Pity it took television to show us the magic.

BY YASHAS VAIDYA

For Pranab Lal Shrestha, television had always been the “idiot box,” a wasteful indulgence. From the time cable television hit Kathmandu big time, in the mid-1990s, he had gone against the wishes of his family: He did not want cable in his home. A few

months ago, Shrestha had a change of heart. The cause? He watched “Divya Yoga” that was aired by Aastha channel.

Shrestha, 54, had been suffering from numbness in his limbs, chest pains and generally had a feeling of “un-wellness.” He had shopped around for medical treatment and spent tens and thousands of rupees on doctors and pills that made

him “positively drowsy.” His condition went from bad to worse.

Two months ago, he decided to try something different. A few relatives introduced him to Swami Ramdev’s program on Aastha. Swami Ramdev is a well-known figure in India and now increasingly in Nepal thanks to Aastha. He has made yoga both accessible and visible. Tens of thousands watch his early-morning TV program that starts at 5:45 and thousands more flock to the weeklong camps that he holds in different parts of India.

Shrestha, too, decided to join the ranks of Ramdev’s television disciples. “Unlike before, when I used to go to sites, I stay at office most of the day,” says Shrestha, an engineer and administrator, “and after I return home there’s always something to do on the computer.” That had been gone on for a number of years and was beginning to take its toll. With Ramdev and yoga, Shrestha began to feel good.

More and more people, most of them middle-aged urbanites who have found their lifestyle troubling are turning to

## Meeting point.



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yoga with renewed vigor. Yoga, meaning union in Sanskrit, has roots that trace back thousands of years—to the Vedas and the Upanishads, some say. The Katha Upanishad says that yoga is the control of the senses. What most people today associate with the word “yoga” is in fact a sub-class—*hatha* yoga, which attempts to balance mind and body through *asanas*, physical exercises through postures; *pranayam*, controlled breathing; and the calming of the mind through meditation and relaxation. This is the form that has gained immense popularity in the west in recent years and now in our part of the world too.

Many like Shrestha are beginning their day early to practice yoga, as espoused by Swami Ramdev in his program every morning. Instructional video CDs are also popular. Some practice *pranayam*, controlled breathing. Breathing exercises like *analam bilom* and *kapal bhati*, many have found, lessen the effect of diabetes, correct blood pressure imbalances and help them lose weight. These are equally appealing to those who want a quick fix. From simple headaches to migraines, yoga, say practitioners, has a cure for every ailment—arthritis, asthma, depression, diabetes. The list is long.

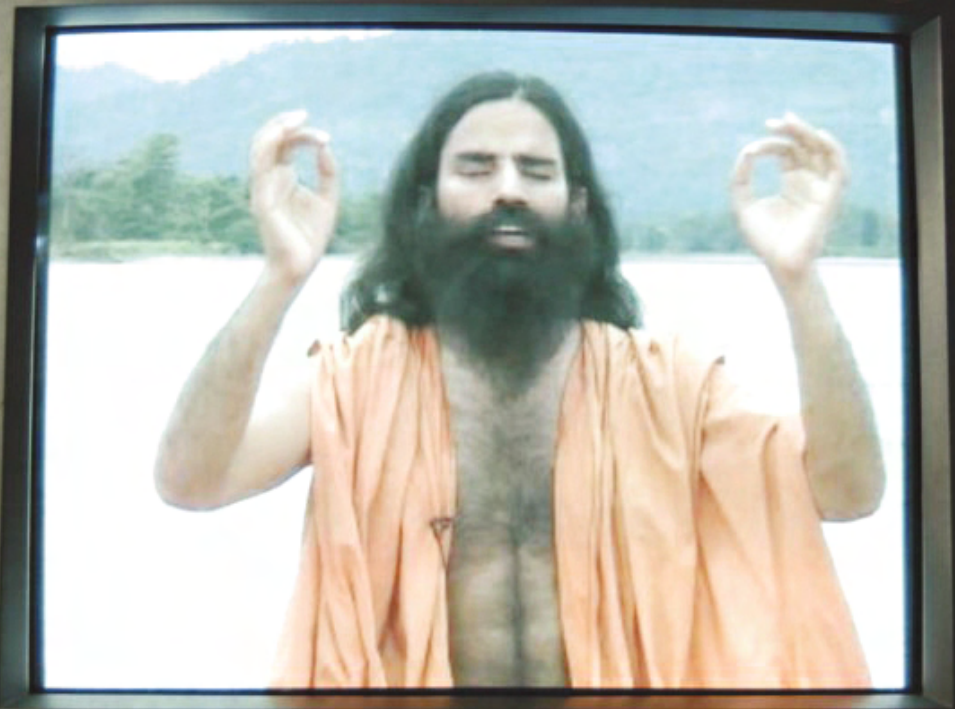
With all the miraculous healing powers attrib-

uted to yoga, the reason behind its therapeutic value might not be so complicated after all. Some say it is simply the control of mind over the body and that with yoga that ability to control one’s bodily functions increases. Researchers have found that regular exercise, and the subsequent increase in physical fitness that results, alters serotonin levels in the brain and leads to improved mood and feelings of well-being. Serotonin modulates mood, emotion, sleep and appetite. A study at the Duke University Medical Centre compared the effects of exercise and drug therapy in treating depression in the elderly. The study

found that medication when combined with exercise was the most effective.

But the effect of yoga on the unfit urban population might have as much to do with the psychological as much as the physical. Ask people like Shrestha and they’ll tell you they feel a lot better “having done something for your health.” Yoga promotes that sense of well-being.

Take Padma Baral, 46, who is definitely feeling better after a little over three months on the yoga regimen. It balanced her blood pressure (from 90/60 to 110/80), even while she lost six kilograms. A half an







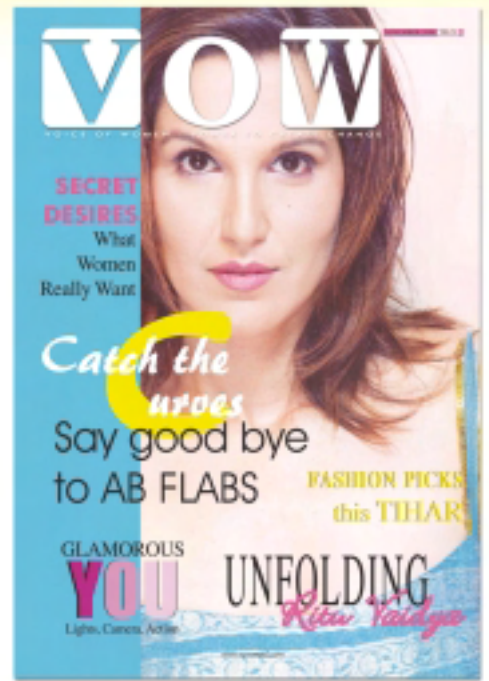
of yoga everyday made the Gaushala resident feel a lot better about herself and also helped cure gynecological and arthritic problems that had been plaguing her for years. She recently brought a number of books on yoga, which she eagerly shares with visitors to her house. Yoga has become a part of her lifestyle, a lifestyle more and more people are choosing. Late last month, she and her

husband, another yoga practitioner, made the 15-hour trip from Gorakhpur to Haridwar, the ashram of Swami Ramdev. On the train they were traveling, they found nearly 40 other

Nepalis headed in the same direction.

Television has played a major role in the yoga's newfound popularity. The Aastha channel is a regular fixture on television sets on early mornings in a number of Kathmandu households. There is a huge market for such programs, say the cable operators. "It would be impossible to switch off the channel for even a day," says Sudhir Parajuli, the chief executive officer of SUBISU network, testifying to Aastha's popularity in Kathmandu.

You can say that yoga has finally returned home to the Orient where it started. The irony is that it took a decidedly western medium, the television, to do that. **N**



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# Paying Golf

Nepal's mild climate allows golf to be played throughout the year, giving those planning a golf trip plenty of opportunities to tee off. We should give it a shot.

## BY SUDESH SHRESTHA

Golf is not the first sport that springs to mind when you think about a sport with fan following in Nepal. But visit the clubhouse of the Royal Nepal Golf Club, the sport's oldest club in the country which sits next to Kathmandu airport, on a weekend and you will see the course abuzz with Nepalis.

Says Prachanda Bahadur Shrestha, honorary treasurer at the club, "Once seen as the domain of the Rana families and expatriates, golf is increasingly having a more general appeal."

The game, one of the more expensive forms of recreation, is still dominated by players from a higher socio-economic bracket. And it is unlikely to match other mass sports like football or cricket anytime soon, perhaps never. But Shrestha believes golf promises a lot, in terms of tourism, that no other sports can even come close to.

Indeed, the international growth of golf suggests the world's oldest organized sport has become one of the most popular recreational sports. According to KPMG Consulting, an international firm, the golf travel industry, worth an estimated \$10 billion per annum, is by far the largest sports-related tourism industry. In the past its growth has outstripped that of general tourism, and the industry is estimated to grow at a rate higher than the GNP of major economies.

The attraction of a golfing holiday is obvious, which according to travelers also offers them an added bonus; it is cost efficient. For instance, in the case of golfers from Japan or Hong Kong, it can be cheaper to fly to Thailand or Viet-

nam to play on a championship golf course than to play at home.

No wonder, then, that countries in South East Asia are placing more im-

portance on strategic and financial planning in an effort to emphasize the business side of golf courses, typically located at resort locations. They have developed strategies to attract golf groups, offering packages including three to four days of golf at a variety of courses.

Nepal's mild climate allows golf to be played throughout the year, giving those planning a golf trip plenty of opportunity to tee off on a highly rated golf course. If you are lucky enough you can even savor the beauty of the Himalaya as your trudge up and down the scenic slopes.

The Gokarna Forest Golf Resort has already initiated such packages since 1999. It receives around 300 guests each year.



Courtesy: Gokarna Forest Golf Resort

While most of the golf travelers come from neighboring India, there are also Malaysians, Koreans, Europeans and Japanese—who never seem to get enough of it. Their average daily expense amounts to \$200.

However, for the resort rated as the best golf course in the region by *Golf Digest*, a popular golf magazine in its November 2003 edition, that number falls far short of its daily catering capacity of 150. The resort boasts Nepal's first and only 18-hole championship golf course designed by Gleneagles Golf Developments of Scotland and also a 100-room Le Meridien five-star boutique hotel under management agreement with Le Meridien Hotels and Resorts.

As with anything else now in Nepal, the unstable political situation remains the number one deterrent to the country's golfing success. The club's professional golfer Deepak Acharya also points to other factors that force a prospective golf traveler to divert his attention away from Nepal.

"Most avid golf travelers prefer to play on a variety of courses," Acharya explains. "As there aren't many of those around, many of them turn to other destinations like Thailand, India, Sri Lanka." Fulbari Resort Golf Course, Himalayan Golf Club and Nirvana Country Club are other courses in the country that admit visitors for play.

Some in the travel business lament that this potential lies largely untapped due to

inability of concerned authorities to formulate appropriate marketing strategies. Others suggest that the organizations that are responsible in managing big-time international professional golf tournaments should be mobilized in promoting Nepal as a golf destination.

As the thriving Asian Tour spreads its wings across the far reaches of the continent, countries like Malaysia and Vietnam are banking on exciting tournaments with rich cash prizes. Earlier this month Vietnam successfully organized the Carlsberg Masters with prize money of \$200,000, attracting some of the best professionals from the Asian Tour.

Closer home, India invited some of the hotshots of golf world, including the world's number one professional golfer Vijay Singh at the BILT Skins Trophy last week. Young emerging English golf prodigy Justin Rose won the trophy and \$42,000. Over 100,000 people, including foreigners, paid IRs. 600 to catch a glimpse of the world-class players at the DLF Gold and Country Club on the outskirts of New Delhi.

Although, Nepal's annual golfing calendar now features more than 20 tournaments, only the Surya Nepal Masters invites professional players from outside.

The Nepal Tourism Board laments that tourism is too diverse to focus on one particular program. "But our tourism promotional campaign is perpetual," insists Aditya Baral, chief of Public Relations at the board.

Baral, who together with representatives of the Nepal Association of Tour Operators attended the Arabian Travel Mart in Dubai last May, acknowledges Nepal's potential to be a golfing destination. "We received a good response there," he says, calling for concerted efforts from the private sector rather than banking on their own "cacophonous" ways. "We've got to develop something like a basket plan," he adds. "Then it would be easier for us formulate tailor-made plans and programs."

Surely, a concerted effort is what it will take if we are to put Nepal on the international golfing map. For now, we should agree that it is better to bring in more high-end tourists who spend \$200 a day than making up mere numbers with backpackers. But of course backpackers are most welcome too. **N**

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## YOUNG CAPTAIN

**PARESH LOHANI** has been a huge asset to Nepali cricket. The opening batsman, who made his national debut in 2000 at the age of 20, is the only player to score back-to-back centuries in the domestic league. The thin icing on the young Lohani's career came recently when the selectors gave him the nod to lead the national team for the Fast Track Countries' Tournament in Hong Kong. Lohani however would like to forget his Hong Kong experience. After playing reasonably well for the first two days, Nepal gave away the initiative to Hong Kong on the final day. Lohani is not one to be fazed, though. Already, he is looking forward to the ICC Qualifier Tournament slated for February 2005. "I think we had a fairly satisfactory



outing in Hong Kong," says Lohani. "We now need to work on the team's weaknesses." The top five teams from the ICC Qualifier Tournament will fight for a place in the 2007 World Cup.

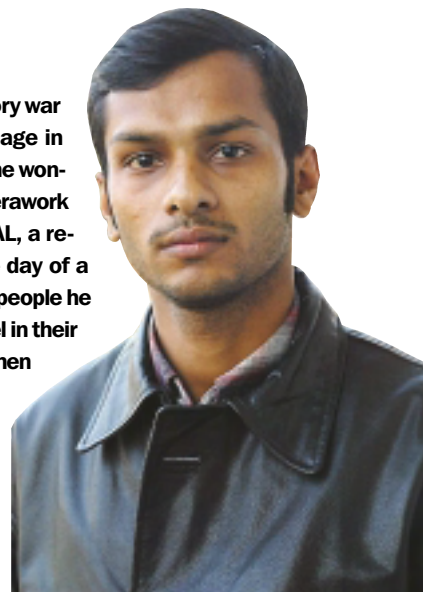


## CHINESE EXAMPLE

**LIQUN JIN**, a senior Asian Development Bank official, was in town last week. He had his task cut out, though: Explain to Nepal, mired in a deepening conflict, the value of peace. Jin, a former Chinese minister did a pretty good job in the end. He related Nepal's current situation with that of the 1960 China when the Cultural Revolution left a whole generation of Chinese without basic education.

## Daredevil

Last week, those watching Nepal 1 saw some gory war footage. Hundreds of Maoists were on a rampage in Krishnabhir, bang on the Prithvi Highway. Everyone wondered who the person behind the daredevil camerawork was. It turned out to be **PHANINDRA RAJ SILWAL**, a reporter with the TV channel. On his bike, on the day of a banda, he had in fact assumed that the 200-odd people he encountered on the highway were Army personnel in their combat fatigue. That is, until he talked to them. When he explained to the Maoist commander, Pratichya, that he was a reporter and would air the footage, the commander duly obliged. Well, not everyone was pleased with his heroics. Space Time yanked Nepal 1 out of its cable network, saying that the footage had glorified the Maoists.





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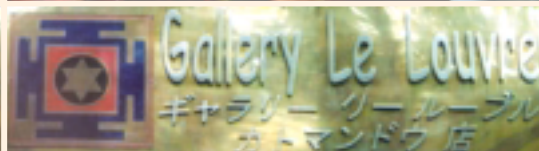
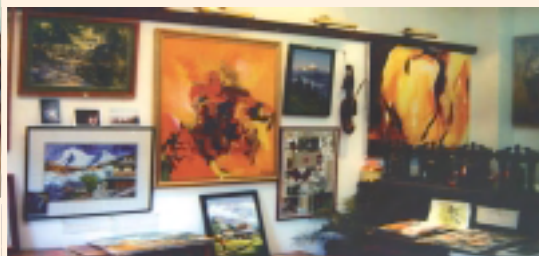
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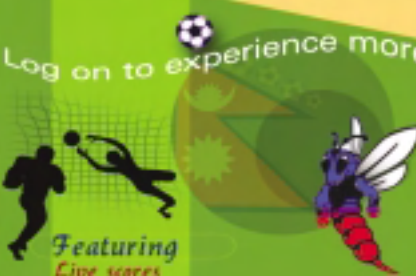
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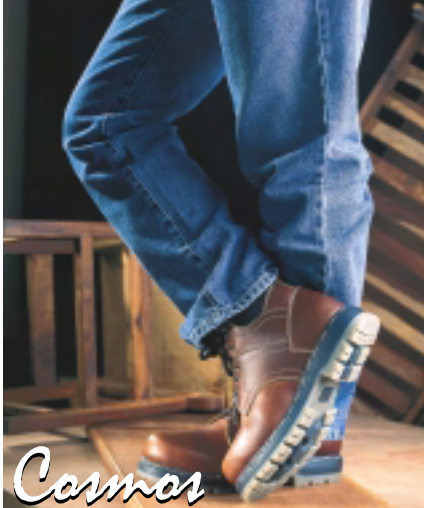
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# Lamjung to Leeds

**F**rom Lamjung to Leeds, **Surya Prasad Subedi** has had an incredible journey. Born in the village of Khudi, where he in fact also completed his high school, Subedi moved west only in the 1980s, finally completing his doctorate in international law from the University of Oxford in 1993. A recent recipient of the Order of the British Empire, Subedi is now professor at the School of Law, University of Leeds. A member of



B Rai

various legal professional bodies in Britain, Subedi was in town recently. He spoke with John Narayan Parajuli about his impressive career and the growing number of Nepalis in Britain.

**Why were you given the Order of the British Empire?**

For my contribution to international law, according to the speech by British Foreign Minister Jack Straw. I believe this credit was given to me in due recognition of my work. This is also indicative of the fact that wherever you are if you work with devotion, recognition will come. This might be inspiring to others as well.

**You have an impressive career-graph. From Lamjung High School to Leeds. How do you look back at your journey?**

It has been a difficult journey. I had to work my way up the hard way. When I was in Lamjung, I had never thought that one day I would get this far. But I have always believed in hard work. My hard work has paid off. It's not that I haven't tasted failure. But when I look back, I am glad that I have come this far. But I also feel that I have a lot more to achieve. I have ambitions to make both the national and international communities better. I am an academic and my contribution would be to explore ideas, disseminating and imparting knowledge.

**What has been your single most important asset?**

My ruthless determination and single-minded devotion to achieve my goals. And also the support I have received

from my family, both my parents and my wife. In the beginning, I was not as focused a person as I am now. It took me some time to concentrate my energies on my goals. I would spend a lot of my time pursuing diverse interests. Being able to focus on things means so much in life, especially in this era of specialization.

**You've been living in Britain. There is relatively a large Nepali community there but it hasn't been able to make its presence felt. Why is that?**

The Nepali community is still small. An informal estimate puts it at 30,000. The Nepali community has earned some name in the catering business. There are a number of good and reputed doctors. But in terms of huge economic prosperity, Britain is a well-regulated and established society, and you can't make your mark quickly there. People who

**The easiest way out would be to amend the Constitution**

have done well elsewhere in countries like the United States have benefited from the huge political and economic potential of these countries.

**A lot of Nepali students go to Britain for studies too...**

Yes they do. And the figure I have attributed also includes these students. By the way, I am the chairman of the British Nepal Academic Council, which helps

researchers from both Nepal and Britain. We also have established an interactive London Discussion Group to encourage Nepali students to come together to discuss various issues.

**Talking of various issues, you have been a legal and constitutional expert, what do you think would be the right approach to resolve Nepal's political crisis?**

The quickest and easiest way out would be to amend the Constitution and hold elections as soon as possible. Article 116 must be amended to accommodate the Maoist demands within the framework of the present Constitution. I believe this would be the more pragmatic approach. Of course it is going to be difficult. The challenge is how to persuade the people. Reinstatement of the House of Representatives as demanded by some doesn't seem legally viable to me. But then again it would be more of a political decision if it were to be reinstated.

**Do you think the framers of the Constitution failed to foresee the potential problems ahead, and thus we in a mess 14 years later?**

Not necessarily. They did their best at the time. Law is always evolving. The present Constitution addressed the reality of that time. Implementation and interpretation hasn't been in the true spirit of the document. The political leadership failed to understand it properly. Even the Supreme Court failed to provide effective leadership. It failed to be consistent. **N**



# Guru Of History

An outspoken critic of namesake historians, Pant asserted our history was inaccurate

BY BISWAS BARAL

Until the rise of Nayaraj Pant, “Itihas Siromani” Baburam Acharya was arguably the most acclaimed Nepali historian. When Pant hit the scene in the mid-90s, he revolutionized the way Nepali history was read and understood. Even Acharya stood corrected time and again through Pant’s meticulous analyses and astute arguments.

In his latest book “Nayaraj Pant: Smriti Ra Spandan,” a collection of memoirs and other articles, the editor Shesh Raj Shiwakoti, a law graduate and a student of literature, puts together the views of people from different backgrounds on the life and works of Pant. This is Shiwakoti’s fourth book on the noted historian.

An outspoken critic of the namesake historians, who have “hijacked” Nepali history by making unscrupulous assumptions, Pant asserted our history, as narrated by the likes of Keshar Badhur K.C., Surya Bikram Gyawali, Bal Chandra Shrama and Bhairab Badhur Pradhan, was inaccurate.

Pant also, through his methodical analysis of countless archives, proved many foreign historians on Nepal wrong. Nepal’s history, Pant established, had been manhandled by foreign writers, who interpreted history to grind their own axes. The British, for example, lauded escapees and defeated generals like Amar Singh Thapa and Balabhadra Kunwar in the western regions of Killa and Kangara, while ignoring our more courageous and victorious generals in the east. Our own historians failed to see the subtle diplomacy of the British in play, writes Gauri Bahadur Karki, one of the contributors to Shiwakoti’s book.

Purging our history of inaccuracies and inconsistencies may hence be Pant’s biggest contribution to our society. He was not just a distinguished historian, though, but also a famous astrologer, a mathematician, a teacher, a Sanskrit

scholar, a poet and a researcher. The Ithihas Samsodhan Mandal, the History Amendment Committee, was also his brainchild. The committee, with the help of evidence drawn from careful deductions from archives, refuted the claims of many bogus historians and put forward the corrected versions of history through their various publications. Jagadish Chandra Regmi, one of Pant’s biggest critics, looks at all this a bit differently. He deems Pant a rabble-rouser of the often-incendiary amendment committee, the members of which frequently took to the streets of Ason and Indrachowk to disavow the claims of other historians. But such criticisms are exceptions rather than the rule.

The common sentiment is that the state and most Nepalis are yet to realize the true worth of Pant’s works, and nothing important has been done to keep alive his legacy of approaching critically what has been handed down to us in the name of history. Author Guanath Paudel, in his recently published book “Aushi Ko Raat,” laments the treatment Pant received upon his death: Not a single high-ranking government official was present during his last rites in Aryaghat. And only a handful came to pay their tributes. Pant died on November 4, 2002 (Kartik 18, 2059).

Pant was blunt and always spoke his mind. Maybe, he made more enemies than friends due to his unswerving penchant for truth. When two students he’d failed in astrology passed in first division from the Tribhuvan University, he lambasted the university authorities rather than hush things up as urged. And

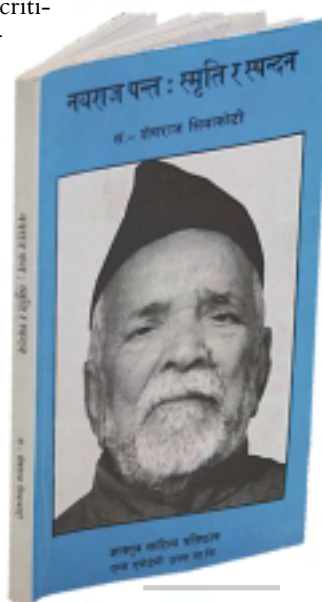
fed up of the bureaucracy at play in the most hallowed of our institutions, he later resigned from the university examination board.

Some moot questions about Pant’s convictions, often verging on dogmatism, are also raised in the book. Pant had categorically refused to teach a female student in a Sanskrit school (now Balmiki Campus). Pant, a widower, reasoned that he had sworn to never come close to another woman. He was a fervent supporter of rote learning and held that true education is not possible without memorizing old *sastras* by heart. He denounced every form of “foreign education.”

Pant had little belief in formal education. He himself was largely self-educated. He supported the *gurukul* system of learning. Amazingly, his disciples, who were educated in the *gurukul* in his house and are without degrees, teach the doctorate level students at universities—only because they were once under the auspices of Nayaraj Pant. He was awarded an honorary doctorate (D. Lit.) by Tribhuvan University in 2057 B.S.

Most of the 42 chapters in the book make for an interesting read. The tiring ones are the interviews of the members of the Pant household—all routine and dull. Some chapters are so obfuscating that unless you have a hands-on knowledge of Sanskrit, you cannot make head from tail. And, the letters to Pant, by some famous personalities, serve no particular purpose.

But Pant’s contribution is universally recognized. In his memoir in “Nayaraj Pant: Smriti ra Spandan,” Surendra K.C. about sums up the pervasive feeling throughout the book: “If the retrieval of various archives and the amendments made by the amendment committee [under Nayaraj Pant] are removed from the annals of Nepali history, nothing remains.”



**Nayaraj Pant: Smriti Ra Spandan**

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# That's Not Good Enough

It's not always easy to verify claims made by opposing parties. More so, in times of war. The stakes are so high in making the public believe your version of the story that governments (and rebel forces in case of an internal conflict) go to great lengths to court (or confuse) the media.

For their part, the media, especially the breaking news variant who have little time to sort out the conflicting claims, stick to the tried-and-trusted rule of thumb: attribution. Claims made by both sides to a conflict are duly attributed, and independent sources, whenever they are available, are brought into the fold to put claims and counter-claims into perspective. When claims made by the opposing sides are markedly different and verifying them impossible, another tried-and-trusted appendage is cleverly tucked in the news: "The claims could not be independently verified."

Although most seasoned reporters covering hard news—deaths, accidents, fires, floods, combats, encounters, etc.—develop news along these conventional lines to avoid controversies (and costly lawsuits), their behind-the-scenes quest for facts which shed light on often-murky turns of events seldom ends. And so much the better. The public deserves a fool-proof picture.

In Nepal, countless encounters between the security forces and the Maoists take place outside the media purview. But journalists are not always able to present a clear picture even when events unfold right under their own nose. Several factors are responsible. First, due to the resource constraints news organizations don't have reporters

ready on the ground; second, even when they are present, the reporters become victims of obfuscation, at best, or outright intimidation, at worst. A number of journalists have been killed by the security forces and the Maoists in recent years while scores of others regularly receive various forms of threats.

But intimidation and obfuscation alone don't explain the incomplete stories and lack of follow-ups in our papers, leaving the public groping for answers. It points at our lack of expertise to report events accurately and, equally disturbing, our inability to see the larger picture. We have said it here before, and we are saying it again: The media in part is responsible for the rotten state of affairs we now find ourselves in.

Two incidents last week once again highlighted what ails our media. On Tuesday, there was a major encounter between the security forces and the Maoists on the Agaiya-Shamshergunj section of the East-West Highway in Banke. When it was all over the toll was variously given as one to 35. The state-owned Radio Nepal went so far as to claim that hundreds of Maoists had possibly perished in the encounter.

Yet a few days later it was all business as usual. The media attention quickly shifted to the routine rhetoric that has come to surround the elusive peace. The war toll and battlefield facts most certainly deserved more space. That the claims could not be independently verified is simply not good enough.

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor



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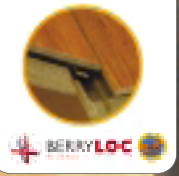
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