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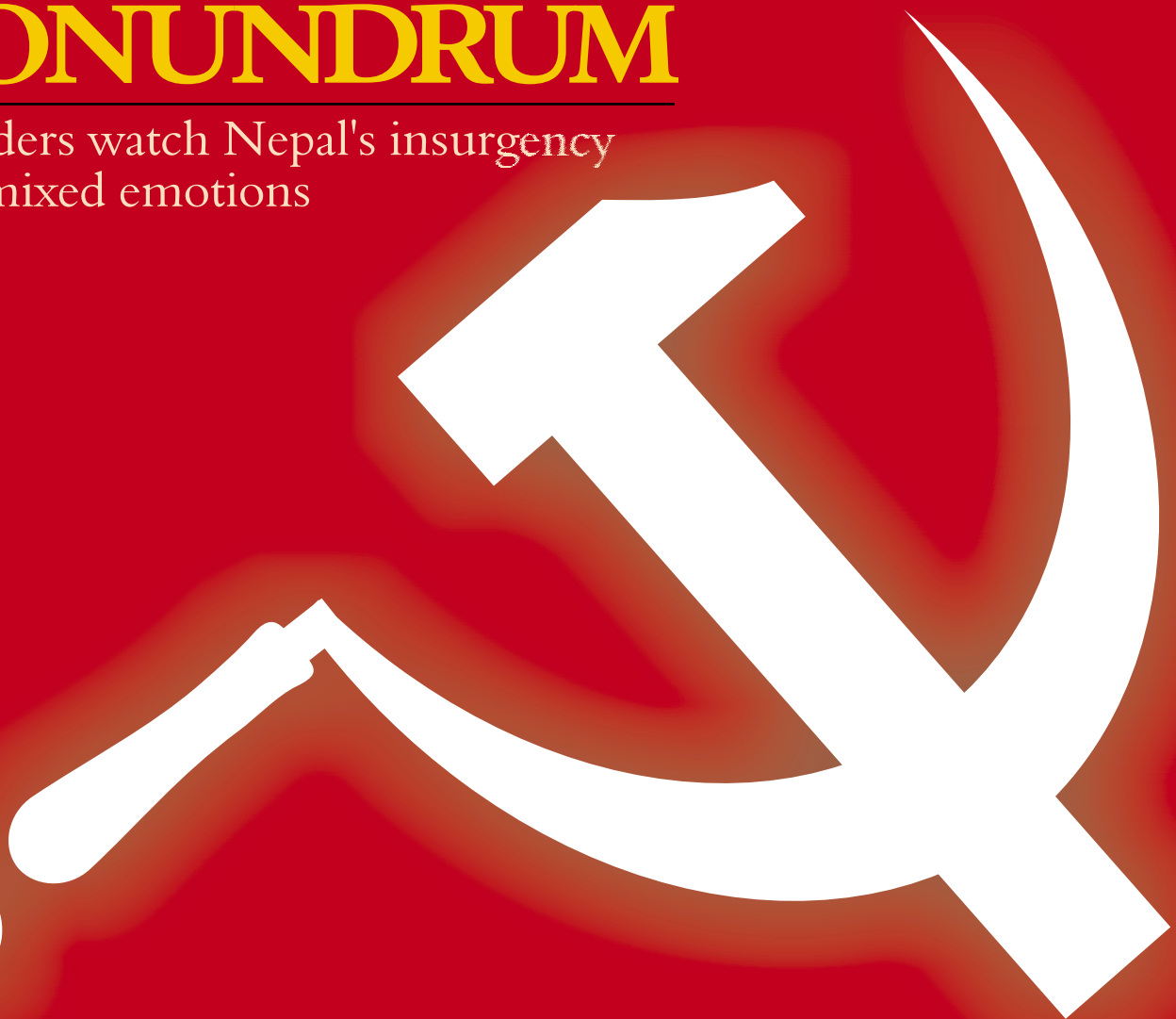
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WEEKLY

MAOIST CONUNDRUM

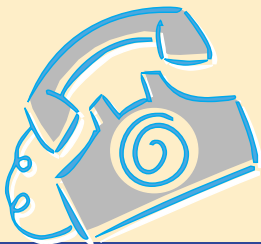
Outsiders watch Nepal's insurgency
with mixed emotions



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“The vacuum in representation will only benefit the Maoists and the royalists”

SUSHMA SHRESTHA

Untold story

YOUR COVER STORY LAST WEEK touched upon a subject not usually discussed in the national media: the friction between the Bhutanese refugees and the local community (“Unwelcome Refugee,” by John Narayan Parajuli, Jan. 2). It is an issue that deserves a lot more attention, both nationally and internationally, than it has attracted so far. While Nepal’s media has done quite well in highlighting the plight of the refugees in the camps, few newspapers bother to explain the pains of the host communities in Morang and Jhapa, the latter in particular where most of the 100,000 refugees now live. To the media that has an evident liberal bias, it becomes politically incorrect to even discuss the problems posed by the refugees. This, by the way, is the same media that never tires of reporting the umpteen parleys between Bhutan and Nepal and the official rhetoric that goes with them. Yes, the host communities in places like Damak have benefited from the money aid agencies have spent on the camps over the years. But something has to be done for the low-income group that suffers most when refugees work for close to nothing. You can’t blame them for resenting the refugees who at least have the aid agencies to support them. Here’s another refugee story. Many of the refugees, mostly the educated ones, in fact no longer live in these camps. They are holding various jobs—in schools, NGOs and others—in Damak, Biratnagar, and many have even settled in Kathmandu. You aren’t against them just because you write about them.

R. KARKI
DAMAK

Dharahara unsafe?

PERHAPS YOUR ARTICLE ON THE possible reopening of Dharahara missed one important point (“A Great View, but is it Safe?” by Dhriti Bhatta, Jan. 2). Tsunamis have once again shown how vulnerable we are to the natural hazards. Has anything been done to save Dharahara from another big earthquake after its destruction in 1934? Was the reconstruction done keeping in mind the visitors? I suspect not. Given the fact that our officials have shown little regard for national monuments, I for one would like to see thorough studies done on Dharahara’s engineering before its gates are opened to visitors. I have nothing against private parties managing the monument, but I would definitely like the concerned agencies to come forward and say that the monument can withstand the onslaught of daily visitors? This is a concern both for the national heritage and public safety.

ABHISEKH SHARMA
VIA EMAIL

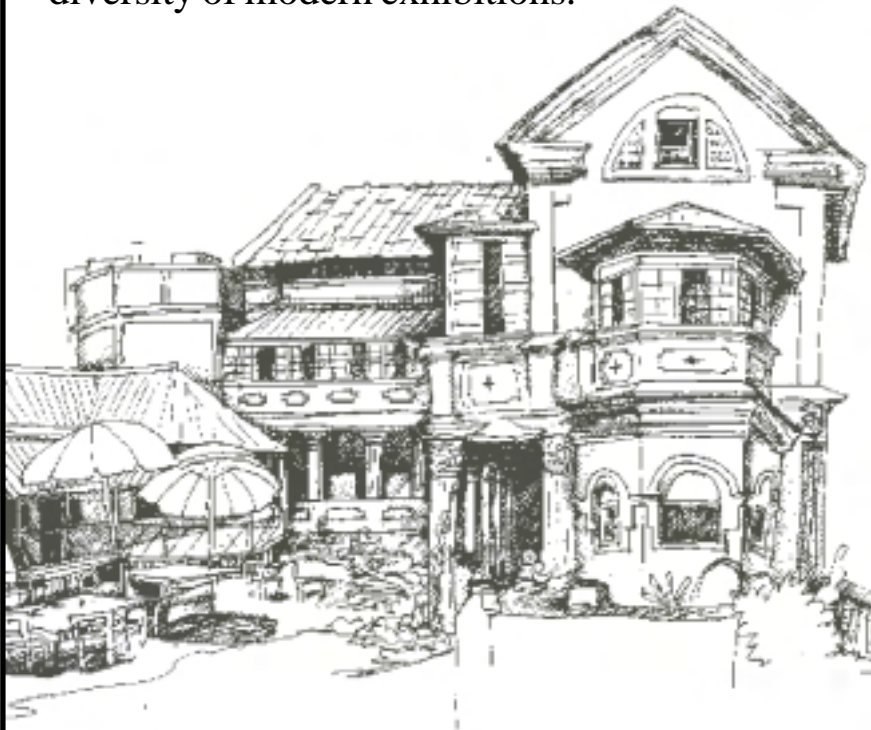
House restoration

SO NATION WEEKLY TOO THINKS that the restoration of Parliament is the best way out of the current stalemate (“House Reincarnation?” by John Narayan Parajuli, Jan. 2). Welcome aboard, join forces. The current state of affairs should not continue. The vacuum in people’s representation will only benefit two forces: the Maoists and the royalists, neither of whom seem overly anxious to restore the people’s government.

SUSHMA SHRESTHA
NEW ROAD

Indigo Gallery & Mike's Breakfast

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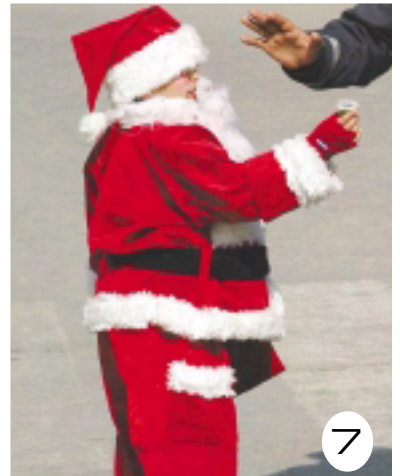
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By the age of nine, Kisbor Kayastha was already lugging around a camera and shooting pictures wherever he went. At fifteen, he was possessed by a fiery passion for photography. Since then, he has dedicated his life to art photography.

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1. OPEN FINALLY: Trucks on the Prithvi Highway after the withdrawal of a Maoist blockade on the Valley
 2. YOUNG BEAUTY: A young participant at Sano Pari talent contest, organized by Sulaxya, a division of Jeet Haamro
 3. BUSY: Workers at Patan industrial area boil silkworm cocoons for silk processing
 4. SKILLED HANDS: Yomari, a traditional Newari dish, being prepared for the Yomari

Punhi on Dec. 26.
 5. FOR PEACE: Film artists hit the streets rallying for peace
 6. MUCH NEEDED BREAK: Prime Minister Deuba dances on Lhosar at the BICC
 7. MERRY CHRISTMAS: A young boy dresses as Santa at New Road on Christmas Day
 8. A DAY TO SMILE: Celebrating Lhosar on Thursday, Dec.30.
 photos: nw/SS

TOGETHER FOR A CAUSE: A Buddhist monk on a carriage being driven by a security personnel during the peace rally in Ratnapark on Tuesday, Dec. 28

Bijay Rai





Let the Best Man Lead

The call by Koirala's party colleagues that he should make way for a younger generation of leaders is limp

BY JOGENDRA GHIMIRE

Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala is in the news again. But for a very different reason. Unlike his public persona since October 2002 of an angry and assertive leader of the opposition against the King's decision to assume executive powers, it is the accusation against him from within the NC ranks, of subversion of the party constitution and failure to hand over leadership of the party to the younger generation, that has been the focus of the media.

The criticism of Koirala by senior NC leaders—including its second-generation aspirants for the party presidency—are two-fold. One, that he led the NC central committee into misinterpreting the party constitution which allows no one to hold the party presidency for more than two terms.

The central committee said that the provision that bars a person against holding the party presidency for more than two terms does not apply to Koirala because he has only served one term since that provision was added in the constitution. Two, that at 82, Koirala should now make way for a younger generation of leaders to assume the party leadership. My argument is that neither of the two accusations holds much water.

Leaving the politics in the Nepali Congress central committee aside, it is difficult to see what was so unacceptably wrong about the interpretation of the provision in the NC constitution providing term limits. It was inserted into the constitution during the party's latest general convention, which elected Koirala for a second term. Since the right to contest elections is a substantive right, it is not difficult to see that the provision was intended to be applied to those who assumed the party presidency *after* the provision became law. That is how laws should be read because individuals should be not expected to accept a retrospective infringement on their substantive rights by a provision that comes into effect at a later date.

That an individual holding office at the time of changes in the rules governing the term limits on holding the office should not be adversely affected was a principle applied by the American Congress and three-fourths of the U.S. state assemblies when they debated and decided in favor of term limits on presidential office. After the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt, within 100 days of his fourth inauguration in 1945, his vice president, Harry Truman, assumed office. Despite FDR's popularity as the president who led the country during the Great Depression and the Second World War, there was considerable opposition within the Congress against the same person being elected for an unprecedented four terms.

FDR's four terms were against the convention set by George Washington and upheld by every other president since then who would hold office for only two terms. A proposal for the 22nd amendment of the U.S.

constitution was thus initiated during Truman's first term in 1947, and it became the law of the land in 1951, during Truman's second term. The language of the amendment makes an exception in case of Truman by stating that the two-term limit shall not be applied to the person holding the office at the time of the introduction of the amendment.

Truman could have contested for a third term, but he decided against it. Koirala should be able to contest for a third term, if he so chooses.

That brings us to the age issue and assertions from the 60-something NC leaders that at 82, Koirala should stay home. There is an element of defeatism in this assertion. Perhaps the second-generation leaders in the Nepali Congress feel that if it comes down to a contest with the old hawk, they do not stand a chance of winning. This age argument is unfair, for it assumes that an octogenarian loses his civil or political

rights, or that an individual in that age group is under legal obligation to bequeath his political legacy to individuals two decades his junior.

Or is it that the second-generation aspirants for the NC presidency believe that they've the right to have top party position handed over to them without having to contest for it in a democratic exercise?

Koirala is a man of many faults. As someone who has held the office of the prime minister for the longest period of time since 1990, and as a central figure in Nepali politics, he could be held responsible for many of the political ills of the present times. There may also be issues with his post-2002 brand of politics. But there can be no case whatsoever against the octogenarian about him turning senile or being mentally and physically incapable of assuming the responsibilities of the top position of a mass-based party.

He has been the most visible voice advocating the cause of the agitating political parties. From the perspective of those political workers, he is undoubtedly the most credible face in their

ranks. And he is by far the tallest personality amongst the many others who are at the forefront of their movement to end "regression."

There are instances of people in Koirala's age group assuming public positions that may be even more taxing than the NC presidency. Winston Churchill was 77 when he started his final stint as the British prime minister. Ronald Reagan was 73 when he began his second term. Closer home, Morarji Desai was 81 when he led the Janata government in India in 1977.

My argument here is not that we should go for older people while choosing leaders. But neither should we necessarily go for younger people. It is the individual's competence that should decide his or her standing, irrespective of the age. If Koirala is good enough to stage a daily *dharna* at Ratna Park and lead the front against the King at 82, he must be good enough to become the president of his party. **N**



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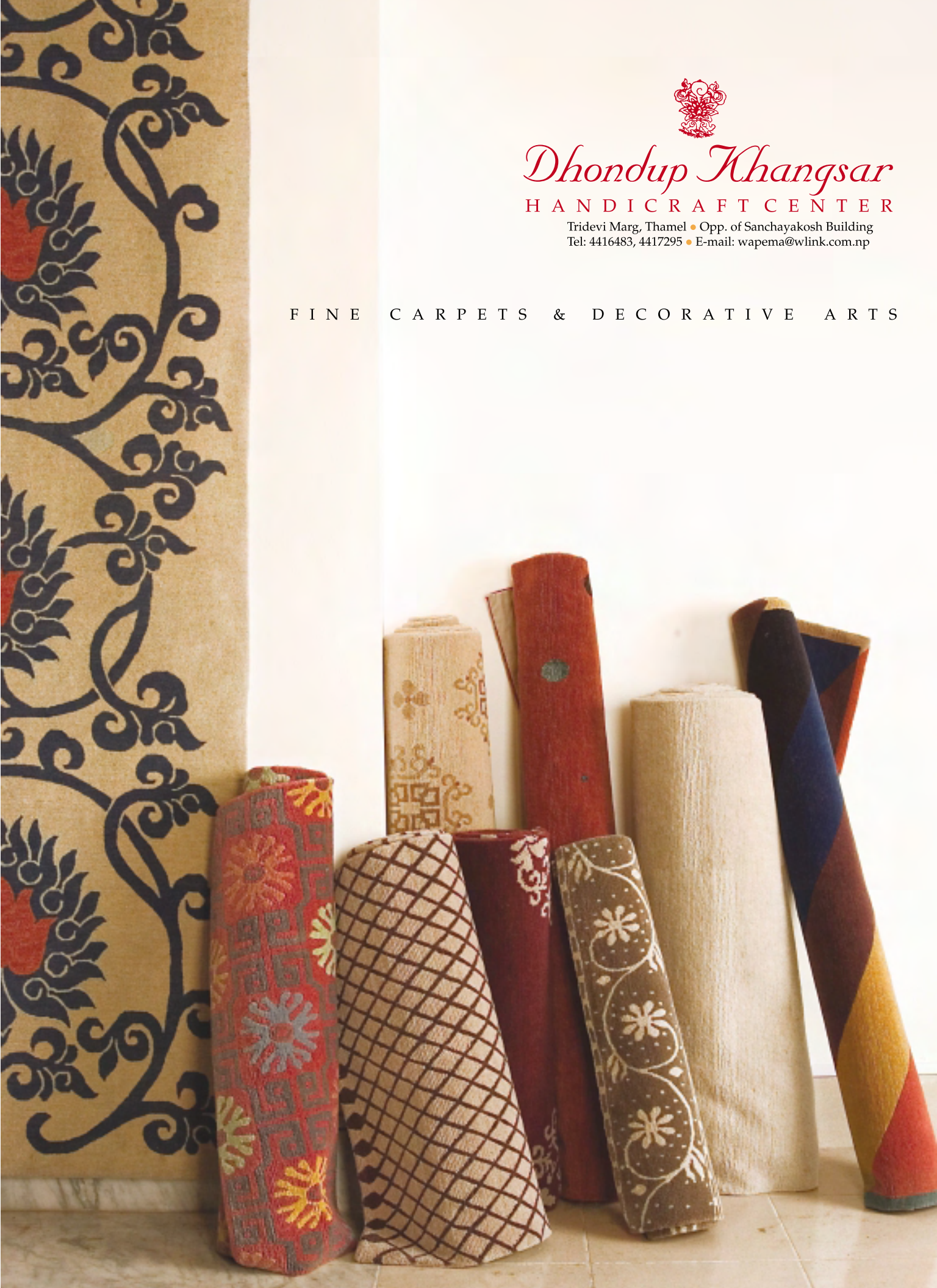




Photo by Pratik Taranga

DESPERATE MEASURES: Freezing temperatures led to this attempt to drive away the winter chills by igniting a tree

UNCHR chief

Louise Arbour, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, is slated to visit Nepal on a fact-finding mission from Jan. 23 to Jan. 26. She will be looking into allegations of human rights violations by both the security forces and the Maoists, reported *The Himalayan Times*. International right groups have, in recent times, shown deep concern over human rights abuses and the undue interference of the government in the affairs of the National Human Rights Commission. Amnesty International has recorded 622 cases of disappearances—the number was the highest in the world for both 2002 and 2003—since 1998, half of them since the breakdown of the ceasefire in August 2003.

House reinstatement

Members of the dissolved Parliament from the NC-D, Prime Minister Deuba's party, demanded the reinstatement of the Pratinidhi Sabha. Eighteen parliamentarians affiliated with the party, urged the party leadership to opt for the reinstatement of the Parliament if elections could not be held. They believe that a reinstated

house should take the initiative for peace talks. The reinstatement demand was raised during the first central committee meeting since the party president, Deuba himself, became prime minister.

Pashupati no more

Delhi Development Authority demolished a replica of the Pashupatinath Temple on the outskirts of New Delhi on Wednesday, Dec. 29. Devotees watched as the dozers ran over the 40-year-old temple. The DDA claimed that the temple was destroyed since it was built illegally. The temple management committee said they had received no prior notice from the authorities.

Stay order

The Supreme Court ordered the government to hold the decision to annul the license of Lumbini Overseas. Earlier the government had decided to cancel the license of the manpower company arguing that it was involved in tax evasion. The company had filed a writ petition at the Supreme Court on Dec. 7.

Peace rally

Over 300 organizations staged a massive peace rally in

Kathmandu on Monday, Dec. 27 to pressure the government and the Maoists to start a dialogue. Organizers say more than 200,000 people participated in the rally. It was the first time that such numbers of ordinary citizens took to the streets calling for an immediate ceasefire and resumption of the peace talks.

Narrow escape

A Qatar Airways A-7 ABX bound for Doha narrowly escaped mishap after its left engine exploded within moments of its takeoff from the Tribhuvan International Airport on Thursday, Dec. 30. According to witnesses, two huge explosions were heard as soon as the jet was airborne. The plane later made an emergency landing after circling the Kathmandu skies for half an hour with only a single engine.

Missing Nepalis

Three Nepalis have died and at least seven are still missing in Thailand after massive tsunamis occurred in the aftermath of a major earthquake off the southern coast of Indonesia. The body of Krishna Adhikari, a resident of Maitidevi, was recovered on Thursday, Dec. 30. Two more

bodies, those of Madhav Prashad Gaire of Palpa and Him Prashad Pokharel of Terathum, have been recovered since. The country director of CARE Nepal, Robin Needham, too died in the tsunamis in southern Thailand. But there is no news of the Nepalis currently in Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Bangladesh.

Noble cause

Ramesh Thapa and Sanjeev Pradhan, the winners of the "A Vacation With Nation" contest, a one-week subscription campaign, donated



their prize money to feed the elderly of the Social Welfare Centre Briddhashram in Gaushala. Shital Bhattra, Sujita Maharjan and Suraj Suwal also contributed to the noble cause.

Blockades off

The indefinite Maoist blockade of the various routes leading to the Valley was called off on Wednesday, Dec. 29. The blockade began on Dec. 23. The blockades on nine other districts surrounding the Valley have been withdrawn as well. The Maoist-affiliated Tamang Regional Autonomous People's Government said the decision to call off the blockade had been taken following appeals by human rights activists and the civil society. Two days before the blockade was called off, an estimated 200,000 people gathered at Ratna Park calling for peace in a rally organized by some 300-odd organizations. This is the second time such an indefinite blockade has been called in last five months.



SS/MS

Miss Teen Sherpa

Lemi Sherpa, 16, from Bouddha has been crowned the first Miss Teen Sherpa. In the event organized on Thursday, Dec. 30, the 10th-grader at Young Hearts Boarding School, outclassed 22 other contestants to win the title. Similarly, Yangzi Sherpa, 14, from LRI school (left) and Ang Lhakpa Sherpa, 13, from Sun Rise Boarding school won the titles for the first and the second runners-up. The event was arranged by the Nepalese Fashion Home and was organized by the Sherpa Association of Nepal. Nation Weekly was the official media.

Going hi-tech

All three district administration offices of the Valley will now distribute computer-generated citizenship documents. The move came into effect from Thursday, Dec. 30. On that day, Kathmandu handed out 65 new computer-printed citizenships, while Lalitpur and Bhaktapur distributed 23 and 20. The government is also making a new citizenship database, digitizing its paperwork. This will allow the information to be viewed nationwide. The computerization of the process aims to save time as well as remove possible human errors.

On and off

Construction work at the 70-megawatt Mid-Marsyangdi Hydropower Project, the second biggest in Nepal, resumed again. The resumption came after an agreement between the Maoists and the project management. The Maoists had been demanding kickbacks from the management. The work at the project has been irregular. After a threat of indefinite closure, work began again at the project three months ago but came to a halt after only a week. The management had earlier complained to the Maoists of the huge losses the company was incurring and the problems faced by workers at the project. About 1000 workers were left without jobs when the work stopped.

Army refrain

The Army called upon human rights activists to not get carried away by Maoist propaganda. The Army spokesman, Deepak Gurung, said that Maoist propaganda was causing international rights organizations to accuse the security forces of intimidating the human rights activists. He was responding to reports, in both the national and international media, about human rights activists being threatened by security personnel.

Amnesty deadline

The Malaysian government extended the amnesty period for immigrants working illegally until the end of January. Thousands of Nepalis have been working illegally in the country. This is the second time that the deadline has been pushed back. It was extended to Dec. 31 from the earlier deadline of Nov. 14. According to Dipak Dhital, acting Nepali ambassador to Malaysia, a total of 2,265 Nepali workers had returned home, until Dec. 30, after the amnesty offer came into effect from Oct. 29.

Fresh clashes

Twenty-two armed Maoists were killed in clashes with the security forces in Batkauwa, Kailali on Thursday, Dec. 30. The security forces also launched an aerial strike on a Maoist gathering at Ramaroson in Achham the same day. According to the Army, it suffered only minor losses in both incidents.

Counterfeit operation

Police arrested 11 foreigners from a rented apartment at Handigaon, Kathmandu. They were apprehended for possession of drugs and fake foreign currency. Among the 11, nine are from Cameroon and one each

from South Africa and Nigeria. Hashish, fake U.S. currency and devices used for minting fake dollars were found in their possession.

Footballing blues

Both Nepalis sides are out of contention in the San Miguel International Cup football tournament. Hannam University of South Korea beat Nepal Red 2-0 at Dasharath Stadium to enter the tournament final. Earlier, Indian giants East Bengal beat Nepal Blue, the other Nepali team in the tournament, 1-0, in the first semifinal. The final is slated for Sunday, Jan. 2.

Plant closure

Work at Udayapur Cement Factory, Nepal's largest cement plant, came to a halt after factory workers failed to turn up for work. They had been threatened by the Maoists to stay home, Nepal Samacharpatra reported. The factory is expected to lose Rs.4 million every day due to the closure. This is not the first of the factory's troubles. In May last year, the factory shut down due to lack of limestone and again in September due to labor strikes.



MS/SS

ARMY OPS: Communication devices obtained from the Maoist hideouts in Kathmandu

Postponed

The 13th SAARC Summit, which was to be held in Dhaka from Jan. 9 to Jan. 11 has been postponed in view of the devastation caused by the recent quake and its aftermath, the tsunamis, in a number of South Asian countries.

Bangladesh had earlier decided to go ahead with the summit. It reversed its decision on the behest of Sri Lanka, which endured the greatest human toll in South Asia. In its 20-year history of SAARC, this is the sixth time that a regional meeting has been postponed or cancelled.

Nepal was set to work on some important agreements during this summit. Besides the regular agendas on poverty alleviation and efforts for regional cooperation, Nepal had approved four economic proposals that included a limited multilateral tax treaty on avoidance of double taxation; mutual administrative assistance in customs matters; promotion and protection of investments; and the establishment of a SAARC arbitration council and new arbitration rules. These agreements were expected to ease the transition of the region to a free trade zone, the South Asian Free Trade Area, also known as the SAFTA, effective from Jan. 1, 2006.

The underwater quake, 8.9 on the Richter scale, which caused the tsunamis, centered off the coast of Sumatra in Indonesia on Dec. 26. The tsunamis, harbor waves in Japanese, hit hard not only in Indonesia but also swept through the coastal regions of Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India and Thailand. The total death toll has reached hundreds of thousands.

Meanwhile, Nepal has pledged \$100,000 to help Sri Lanka's cause in the aftermath of the disaster.



DUET GIN

McDowell's Nepal has introduced the Blue Riband Duet Gin. Priced at Rs.415, the gin in the 750ml bottles comes mixed with lime. It has the same alcoholic strength as other gins. Currently available only in Kathmandu, the gin will expand its market to other parts of the country soon. The gin requires no additional lime juice or additives. Blue Riband Duet is a brand extension of Blue Riband Gin.



9999 CEMENT

Siddhartha Cement Factory has released a new product, 9999 Cement, in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Butwal and other major cities of the country. The 53-grade cement has been manufactured using the Ordinary Portland Cement, or OPC, technology. OPC is the standard, gray cement used for most purposes.

SIX YEARS OF NTB

The Nepal Tourism Board has completed six years. The board was established in 1998 and was based on the concept of public-private partnership in tourism. It replaced the then Department of Tourism following the enactment of Nepal Tourism Board Act-2053. Since then it has focused toward developing, enhancing and diversifying tourism products and services in the country. For the time being, the board deems more investment on tourism publicity as its major challenge.

SALEWAYS IN KTM

Pokhara-based Saleways Department Store has started operations in Kathmandu. After their success in Pokhara, with two Saleways stores, a new one has been established in Jawalakhel. The new store aims at making the most of the retail market of the capital. It has a collection of more than 70,000 items, which it claims are cheaper in Saleways than at any other store in the Valley. Seventy percent of the items are imported, the store claims. It also issues gift vouchers to customers depending on their amount of purchase. Saleways is planning to build a retail chain in Kathmandu within the next five months.

TELECOM'S NEW SCHEME

Nepal Telecom is slashing the deposit charges for its Integrated Switching Digital Network (ISDN) services. ISDN phone lines allow users to browse the Internet without keeping the phone engaged. The deposit charge, which now stands at Rs.10,000, will be reduced by 50% to Rs.5,000. The cost reduction is effective from Dec. 30. It will now equal the current deposit charge for the normal Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) phone lines. The ISDN service will also give users access to voicemail and data transfer. Nepal Telecom is targeting corporate houses, schools and travel agencies for ISDN listings.

DABUR'S NEW LOOK

Dabur has a new logo and a new slogan. The restructuring has resulted in five brands; Dabur—the healthcare brand; Vatika—the herbal beauty brand; Anmol—the value from



money brand; Real—the fruit beverages brand; and Hajmola—the digestives brand. The new Dabur logo is an updated version of its old symbol and represents growth, strength and life, said the company. The two colors in the logo symbolize tradition and modernity. "Celebrate Life!" is the company's new slogan. Dabur, a leader in food, healthcare and beauty care products, exports its products to over 50 countries and has manufacturing plants in



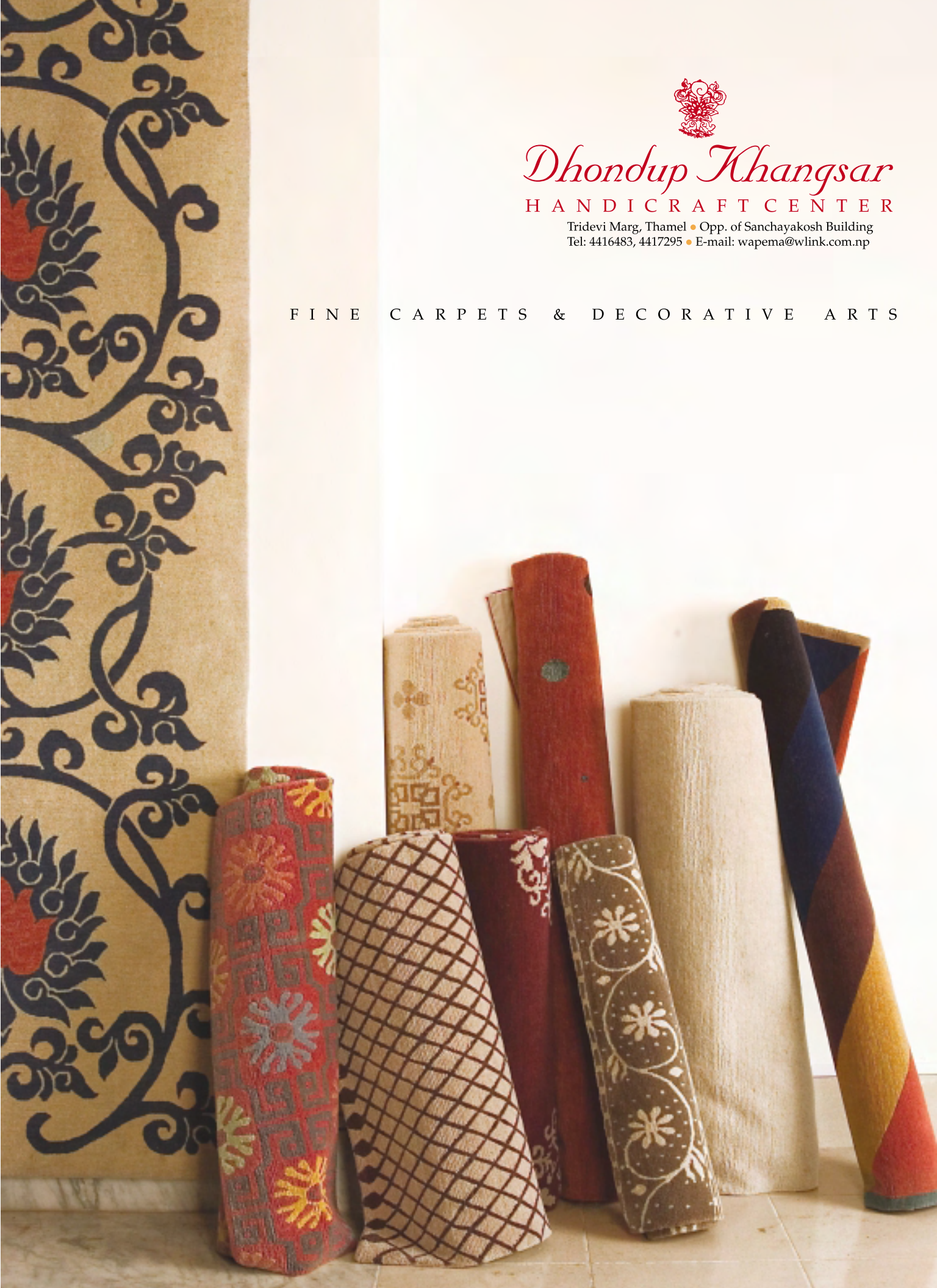


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F I N E C A R P E T S & D E C O R A T I V E A R T S





PASSION FOR PEACE

Those behind peace rallies believe they have generated pressure on both the Maoists and the government. We will have to wait and see.

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

THE TEMPERATURE IS DROPPING, but the heat is on the warring parties to come for talks. It's not as simple as it sounds though: There are so many groups with their own self-serving agendas that it is difficult to believe that they all mean the same thing when they talk of peace. But when the demand comes from civil society and the public at large, the matter takes on a new gravity. Such occasions are few and far between, partly because the public is not

organized, like the political parties are. But when masses come together for a cause, their effort is likely to have far-reaching consequences, because the legitimate voice of the people is hard to ignore. At least this is what the organizers of peace rallies in Kathmandu last week seem to believe. Are the parties to the conflict tuned in?

"They seem to be listening," says Mathura Prasad Shrestha, coordinator of the Civil Society for Peace. "As soon as I got home after the rally was over, I got an email from the Maoists stating that

they were not against peace." That was on Monday, Dec. 27. Two days later, the Maoists actually withdrew their indefinite blockade of 12 districts, including all three inside the Valley. "We are calling off the blockade following requests from human rights activists and the civil society," a Maoist statement said.

The peace rally last week saw more than 300 organizations come together for what was easily one of the biggest peace rallies seen in the country. Organizers claim that more than 200,000 answered their call to rally for peace. The demonstration was aimed at putting pressure on both the Maoists and the government to initiate dialogue. Supported by All Nepal Free Students Union, the ANFSU—known for its crowd pulling

ability—the turnout seems to have surprised the Maoists.

The insurgents are said to have protested to the rally organizers that they have been frequently projected as being anti-peace. “We have never said we are against peace,” said a Maoist statement Shrestha received from an unidentified Maoist leader. “All we have asked of the government is to prove its credibility; that it wields executive power and has the ability to negotiate with us.”

Such doubts and lack of trust on both sides have exacerbated the violence. The level of mistrust is such that neither side seems willing to commit to peace. Achieving peace is a political process. It involves building trust, but neither side is willing to commit to anything, even the smallest confidence-building measure.

Lack of trust also polarizes mainstream forces. The agitating parties are reluctant to extend their support to the government on the peace front because they fear this will grant the government legitimacy. Worse, there is competition between the political parties to take

credit for a peace process, should one ever happen. They seem unwilling to share the laurels. The competition is dividing their energy and efforts. The Maoists have played this division in their own favor.

Government officials complain that the media is making it sound as if the government is against peace. The government is frustrated on all fronts, and the prime minister’s frequent jabs against the media reflect this. “Why is the media putting pressure only on the government? Put pressure on the Maoists as well,” he said while inaugurating Nepal FM last month.

The hubris displayed by both sides is also compounding the conflict. The government was hoping that the Peace Secretariat would give momentum to peace; it hasn’t. Analysts say that the government thinks that establishing a peace office obviates any other effort or confidence building measure and that it wants the Maoists to come in from cold to reciprocate. It is wrong, say observers and peace activists. The government and the Maoists are believed to have been in

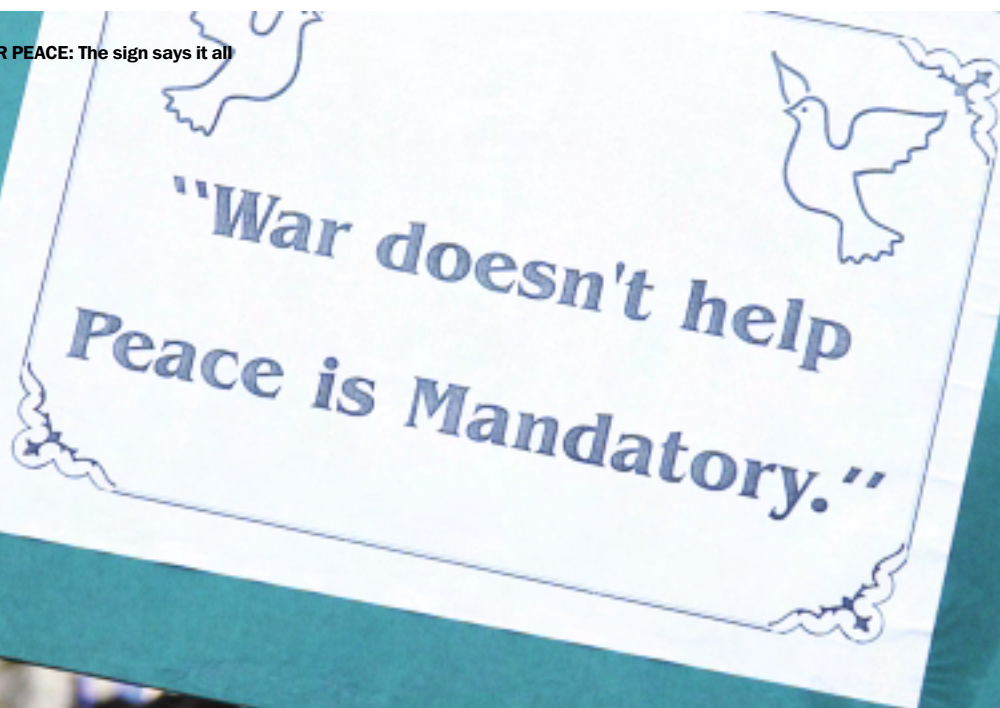
contact through backdoor channels, but the rebels want more from the government. In their own “holier-than-thou” stand they are calling on the government to prove its ability to hold meaningful talks.

The Maoist response to the peace rally shows the significance they attach to public opinion, say peace activists. No matter what their cadres are doing, they still seem to care about public pressure. More such rallies in the days ahead could result in greater pressure.

Participants in the rallies urged both the Maoists and the government to step up and start negotiations. The calls come with some apprehension: Peaceniks are troubled by the disturbing preoccupation with the violence that both sides have shown in past seven months, and they fear that military adventurism is overshadowing rational thinking on both sides.

“The voice of civil society will pressure the government,” says ANFSU General Secretary Thakur Gaire. And it might pressure the Maoists, too. But whether that will translate into peace remains to be seen. **N**

CALL FOR PEACE: The sign says it all





MAOIST CON

In February 1996, when the seeds of the Maoist movement were sown in Nepal, no one except, perhaps, its founders thought that it would consume the nation and threaten the existence of the state in less than a decade. The casual attitude towards the rebels was partly driven by the widespread belief that radical communism had become an anachronism, nearly extinct except for a few dark corners of the world like Cuba and North Korea. Certainly it couldn't take hold in Nepal, a self-proclaimed zone of peace and a kingdom to boot.

The Maoist movement received scant attention at first, both at home and abroad. Nine years on, it has become a headline grabber around the world and daily front-page fare in the Nepali press. Many who read of the insurrection sigh with sadness or shiver with fear. Others see it as good news, a revival of radical communism and a way to make long-overdue revolutionary changes in a system that has ignored the welfare of its citizens. Although no one condones the Maoists' use of violence, they do sympathize with the sentiments that sparked the revolution. The response in many countries to Nepal's insurgency is ambivalent, though the sympathy is pretty much on the wane due to the rebels' violent ways. People who keep an eye on Nepali affairs are on shifting perceptual ground. Except for those with a need, usually political, for a thoroughly partisan view, outside observers are both critical and supportive of the government and Maoist cause in equal measure.

The Indian academia is becoming pessimistic about Nepal. It sees a need for an honest broker to end the internal war. The fear is that Nepal is slowly failing and that a failing Nepal poses a serious threat for India's turbulent northeast and other regions affected by revolutionary movements of their own.

Many Americans feel sorry when they hear stories about the violence in Nepal, says Chitra Tiwari, a Washington-based, left-leaning analyst. "While they do not support the Maoists' revolution, many of them are sympathetic towards causes like poverty, backwardness and government negligence to the needs of the people in the interior parts of the country." Ambivalence is a common reaction.

UNDRUM

As Nepal struggles with its escalating insurgency, outsiders watch with mixed emotions

BY JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

IN/SS

**See
Last Page, 58**

During its initial days, few outsiders knew much about the insurrection. Many of those who were aware of it were leftists who held a romanticized view of the Maoists. People who shared the ideology of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement, the RIM—the umbrella organization of revolutionaries around the globe—saw the revolution in Nepal as a flagship project to be promoted. For

many years, though, the rest of the world was unaware of the growing insurrection.

All that changed after the royal massacre in 2001. The event was front-page news around the world, and attention focused on Nepal soon spread to the Maoist problem and the escalating conflict. As the world learned more about the situation and the rebellion turned bloodier, the level of violence shocked many scholars who had once held an idealized view of the movement.



UNFAILING SUPPORT: The US fears Nepal will end up a failed state if the Maoist problem persists

“Most of the Americans I have met are critical of both the Maoists and the military, and they also disapprove of the U.S. government’s military aid to Nepal,” says Biswo Nath Poudel, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Berkeley. Analyst Chitra Tiwari says that most Americans don’t know where Nepal is, let alone care about what is going on in Nepal. But he adds that those who know are against the United States supplying military hardware to the “royalist government” in Kathmandu. “Tucked into the upper stories of the Himalayas, Nepal hardly seems ground zero for the Bush administration’s next crusade against ‘terrorism,’ but an aggressive American ambassador, a strategic locale and

a flood of U.S. weaponry threaten to turn the tiny country of 25 million into a counterinsurgency bloodbath,” writes Conn Hallinan, a lecturer in journalism at the University of California, Santa Cruz and a foreign policy analyst for Foreign Policy in Focus, an American think-tank. Concerns like Hallinan’s are slowly finding a place in the U.S. policy toward Nepal.

Recently the American Congress tied human rights strings to military aid to Nepal. Late last year, the Congress passed a bill that requires the Nepali government to fulfill human rights obligations in order to receive military aid. It’s the responsibility of the United States government to monitor whether the provisions of the new law are implemented, states a draft of a letter prepared by an American academic who is leading a campaign to petition the Congress against providing unchecked military aid to Nepal. Perceptual ambivalence guides both official and unofficial policy towards Nepal. Americans fear

that if they don’t support the government, Nepal could end up as another failed state. In today’s interdependent world threatened by terrorism, that is perceived to be more dangerous than even a hostile but stable neighbor. That’s the take of not just the Americans but also the Europeans as well. The Economist’s (Dec. 4) editorial summed up the predicament: “Like a severely disturbed individual, a failed state is a danger not just to itself but to those around it and beyond.”

Many foreigners link the rise of Nepal’s Maoists to the fall of the absolute monarchy in the spring of 1990 and the subsequent introduction of parlia-

mentary democracy. They think that democracy failed to live up to the expectations of many Nepalis, especially the youngsters. As in other countries, the fall of authoritarianism led quickly to widespread corruption on all levels, social and political instability, bickering politicians and abuse of power. All of that fed frustrations among large segments of the population. Outsiders draw parallels between Peru and Nepal. They see poverty and backwardness as key to the emergence of strong revolutionary movements in both countries. Both have experienced sharp and growing divisions between the city and the countryside. Researcher and scholar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Stephen L. Mikesell believes that “appealing geo-cultural analogies” can be drawn between Peru and Nepal: Both countries straddle major mountain ranges in their respective continents; in both countries isolated valleys and high ridges have preserved a wide variety of cultural tradi-

tions. Neither country has a recent history of a foreign military conquest and occupation, in contrast to mid-20th century China where Mao ran a successful “peoples war.” Both Peru and Nepal have large rural indigenous populations subordinated to small ruling elites who use race, caste and regionalism to rule.

Even the restoration of democracy in Nepal deluded many. “After the introduction of democracy and a more open economy, wages remained virtually stagnant and GDP growth averaged an abysmal 2.3 percent annually until 1996,” writes Bertil Lintner, a Bangkok-based Swedish journalist who has written extensively on Nepal. The National Planning Commission, though, puts the figure at 4.8 for the 1992-2000 period. “This means that the population growth rate of 2.4 percent has eaten up all the economic growth,” says Lintner. Seventy-one percent of the country’s wealth is in the hands of the top 12 percent households, and only 3.7 percent of the national income reaches the poorest 20 percent of

the country's families, says Lintner, attributing the figures to Nepal South Asia Centre, a Kathmandu-based think-tank.

Other foreign scholars also see Nepal's huge social disparity and backwardness as one of the reasons why the country became a fertile breeding ground for a Maoist movement. But many scholars, though they find an element of truth in the premise, don't agree. "If social and economic marginalization alone were responsible for the emergence of the communist revolt, the hill districts in the Karnali, Seti and Mahakali zones would be far more likely candidates," writes Saubhagya Shah, a research scholar, in the book "Himalayan 'People's War': Nepal's Maoist rebellion." He says the emergence of the Maoists is "not only because of their [the people in Maoist-affected areas] grinding poverty and chronic food shortage but also because of the nature of the terrain and their remoteness from state centers."

Despite the dispute about local factors, all observers agree that international connections have contributed to the Maoist rebellion. The Revolutionary Internationalist Movement, the RIM, has promoted Nepal as a flagship project for their utopian red empire.

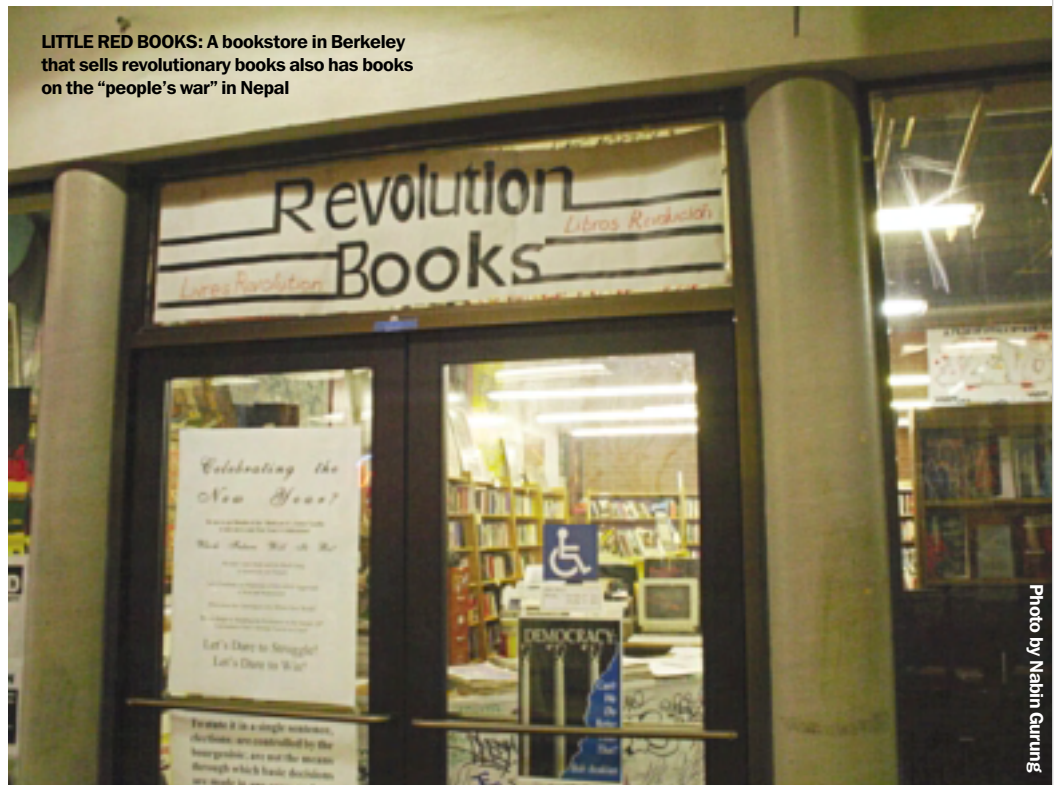
A radical view

The RIM sees the Maoist movement in Nepal as one of the most significant developments in the last few years, not only for the movement but for the worldwide revolutionary struggle as well. The outbreak of the "people's war" in Nepal in 1996 has given a much-needed impetus to the RIM's cause worldwide. Its members feel that the tremendous outpouring of revolutionary energy unleashed by the "courageous initiation of the people's war by the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist has been a source of great encouragement for the comrades" in all the parties and organizations of the movement.

The RIM has often been blamed for derailing the peace process in Nepal and encouraging the Maoists to keep fighting. They believe that settlement of an issue through war is the highest form of revolution and one of the central tasks that all revolutionaries who follow Mao's teaching must adhere to. According to RIM literature, if seizure of power by armed force was possible in China, it is possible—even desirable—in other countries as well. Mao said, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." His followers still believe that, more

involvement in the whole process of preparing and initiating the insurrection: "First and foremost, there was the RIM Committee. There was important political and ideological exchange." The Maoists say that, theoretically, they have no illusions about Nepal's place in the global revolution as a whole. They describe the Nepali people's army as a detachment of the whole international proletarian army.

The Maoists of Nepal see their armed struggle based on Marxism-Leninism-Maoism; from three perspectives, the



LITTLE RED BOOKS: A bookstore in Berkeley that sells revolutionary books also has books on the "people's war" in Nepal

Photo by Nabin Gurung

than half a century later. International Maoists argue that if the movement in Nepal fails, the entire RIM movement will suffer a setback.

"It seems that RIM regards the Maoist movement in Nepal as the most important current armed revolutionary movement in the world," says Tatsuro Fujikura, an anthropologist from the University of Chicago, who follows Nepali affairs. "They are staking a lot of hope on it."

Nepali Maoists have openly talked about their RIM connections and its influence on their movement. In an interview with a journalist from Latin America in early 2001, Maoist supremo Prachanda revealed that there was international in-

international, the Nepali and the Indian, writes B. Raman, director of the Tropical Studies Centre in Chennai, who keeps a close eye on Nepal.

Nepal's Maoists have talked openly about rising up against Indian ruling elites.

"Ultimately, we will have to fight the Indian army," said Prachanda in the interview with the Latin American journalist. "That is the situation. Therefore, we have to take into account the Indian army. When the Indian army comes in with thousands and thousands of soldiers, it will be a very big thing. In one way it will be a very good thing. They will give us lots of guns and lots of people will fight them. This will be a national war." Prachanda also sees the large

Nepali diaspora in India as the torch-bearers of revolution there.

Statements such as these make Indian officials nervous. Some intellectuals in New Delhi are already talking about the need to reorient Indian policy towards Nepal and, perhaps, even to include the Maoists within their policy framework.

The Indian outlook

Intellectuals in New Delhi feel that Indian policy towards Nepal has become obsolete and wrongheaded. They say that the country will have to break away from the legacy of supporting the monarchy as the symbol of order and stability in Nepal. Nepal watchers like S. D. Muni, whose views have often been unwritten policy guidelines for mandarins in South Block, feel that the monarchy has become

tary political system that failed utterly to keep its promises of social justice and economic wellbeing.

Many in India now seem to believe that the monarchy has contributed to the failures of democratic governance and that it has kept the parties and leaders divided and promoted infighting. The Indian government is now also deeply worried about the Maoists' strong anti-India rhetoric.

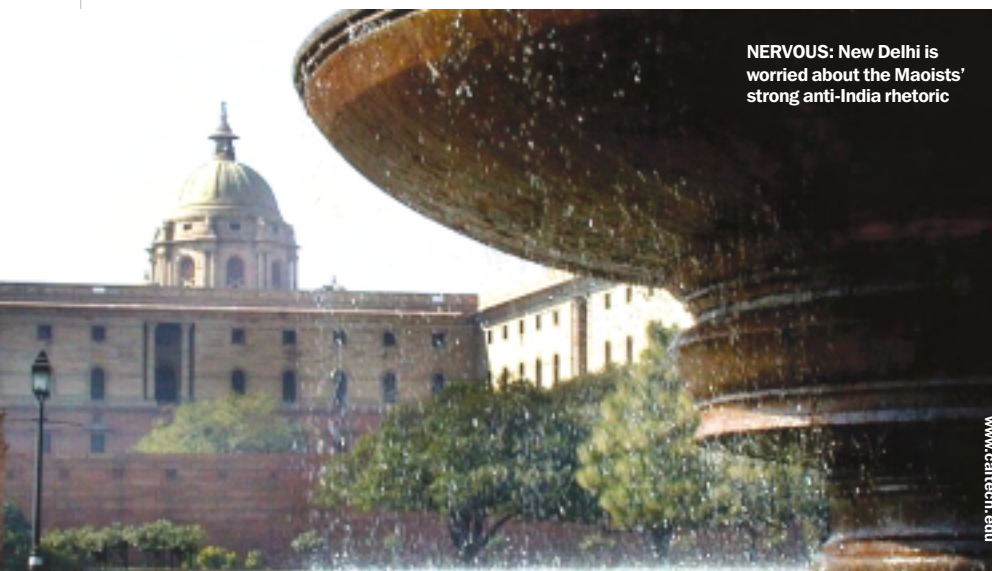
"There is a growing feeling that the Nepali Maoists are taking an anti-India line," says Jug Suraiya, an editor of *The Times of India*. "The link between Nepal's Maoists and Indian Maoists is also causing concern." Even though many Indians see the Maoists as a minor irritant that disrupts tourism and trade, the mood is rapidly changing in New Delhi.

and for the region, says Trailokya Aryal, a student of international relations at Peking University in Beijing. However, adds Aryal, they see a movement that was initiated by oppressed and downtrodden people, and they empathize with the roots of the movement. At the governmental level, the Chinese see the Maoist movement as an indirect security threat to their own territorial integrity. China fears that if the movement spills across Nepal's southern border, it could provoke Indian intervention. That would be unacceptable to China, which still sees India as its rival and a security threat.

The world's view of Nepal is converging, and a few points are clear: At the intellectual level, the world loathes the ongoing violent struggle between the government and the Maoists. Although they have sympathy for the problems that spurred the rebellion, they do not condone the Maoists' brutal methods. They also sympathize with the government's efforts to combat the violence and its duty to protect its citizens, but they are disgusted by the flagrant violations of human rights and the loss of civil liberties. As the *Economist* notes in its editorial, the government needs to be told by its friends that its brutal methods are increasing support for the Maoists rather than defeating them. Nepalis living abroad increasingly feel that both the Maoists and the government have distorted views about their chances of defeating each other.

The conflict has opened up a broad range of issues for discussions, touching on deep economic and social disparities as well as the constitutional crisis. All the issues need to be addressed to end the war. The conclusive view outside Nepal is that the demands and the concerns of the Maoists for social inclusion are legitimate but that the Maoists' means of achieving them are brutal and unacceptable. Many think without the Maoist movement, the issues of social marginalization would never have come to the fore.

But most observers say outsiders are neither entirely critical nor supportive of either side. Perceptual ambivalence abounds. They believe that those at the helm, King Gyanendra and the Maoist supremo Prachanda, are less than willing to give up their brinkmanship. To those watching, their firm belief in guns is protracting the problem. **N**



NERVOUS: New Delhi is worried about the Maoists' strong anti-India rhetoric

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a part of the problem and that it cannot be part of the solution to the present crisis. Scholars like Muni believe that Indian policy urgently needs to relate to grassroots and popular forces, including the Maoists. "India should therefore work with Nepal towards redefining its political order so as to help the rebels shed their arms and violent methods for a respectable and democratic place in the mainstream of Nepali national politics," he wrote in the *Sahara Times* in September last year, before Prime Minister Deuba's visit to New Delhi. Muni doesn't believe that the Maoist insurgency is behind the depressing developments in Nepal. He sees Nepal's problems as a product of more than 50 years of political distortions culminated by a parliamen-

A Maoist victory in Nepal will embolden Indian revolutionaries. Already radical communist parties on both sides of the border are collaborating to form a red zone across the border. Such collaboration is unlikely to sit well with other regional states, even the Chinese. China views Nepal's revolutionaries—they refuse to refer to them as Maoists—as a threat to regional security.

Chinese perceptions

The Chinese share the ambivalent feelings about the Maoists with the United States, India and the Europeans. Despite being the children of Mao's revolution, the Chinese are worried by the flourishing Maoist movement in Nepal, which they think is bad for both Nepal

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SUBSCRIBE AND ENJOY SUBSTANTIAL SAVINGS

Nepal is poorly prepared for the next major earthquake. We could do much better.

BY BISWAS BARAL

THE RECENT EARTHQUAKE centered near the Indonesian island of Sumatra killed more than a hundred thousand people throughout South and Southeast Asia. The devastation due to the quake and the tsunamis—ocean waves resulting from an under-

water earthquake—reminds us all of the havoc that natural disasters can cause. Thankfully, Nepal was spared. But danger looms menacingly for the country: An equally powerful earthquake could strike here anytime.

As a long-term average, an earthquake of magnitude of eight or higher on the Richter scale hits Nepal every 70 to 80

years. Since the last major quake, measuring 8.4, occurred in 1934, another could happen any time. We are not prepared.

In the event of a magnitude 8.4 quake today, at least 40,000 people would die in the Kathmandu Valley, over 90,000 would be injured and 60 percent of the houses in the Valley would collapse, according to a report prepared by the Kathmandu Valley Earthquake Risk Management Project, which carried out

HOW SAFE ARE WE?

URBAN SPRAWL: Kathmandu Valley with an estimated population of more than 1.5 million





QUAKE RESISTANT: A model on display at NSET

All Photos nW/SS



extensive studies on the risks and likely devastation of major quakes in Kathmandu from September 1997 to September 2003.

Ram Chandra Kandel, a civil engineer with the National Society for Earthquake Technology, says that it really doesn't matter exactly where the epicenter of a major tremor like the 1934 earthquake is. If it occurs in or near the Himalayas, the Kathmandu Valley will be disastrously affected. The amount of destruction isn't determined just by how big a quake is: The geographical condition of the place, such as the soil consti-

tution and rock formations in the earth's upper crust, are also very important. The combination of the size of a quake and the local conditions is measured by another scale called the MMI, an abbreviation for the Modified Mercalli Intensity Scale.

Even a major earthquake may not cause serious damage in places with ground conditions that yield a low MMI. Conversely, an earthquake of much lower intensity near Kathmandu could result in an MMI equal to or greater than the 1934 quake, because of the nature of the soil in the Valley. Loose and soft soil, characteristic of the Valley, which was once a lakebed, help to propagate the effects of an earthquake rather than absorbing the shock as other types of soil could.

The only way out for Kathmandu residents is to make our houses safer by making them more quake resistant. The safety of houses already built can be improved by retrofitting, which costs about 25 to 30 percent of the price of the original construction. At the time of construction, buildings can be made earthquake resistant for only five to 10 percent more.

Retrofitting is especially necessary when new stories are added to an existing structure, but special care should be taken when retrofitting old buildings.

A few tips

The emergency package kit for earthquakes should contain:

- Medicines taken daily
- A liter or two of water
- Packaged food items that are not easily destroyable
- Torchlights with batteries and extra bulbs
- Light radio and batteries
- Water purifying pills
- Birth and marriage certificates, passports, insurance papers, bank documents, and a paper mentioning important phone numbers
- The map of the house (may be necessary for search and rescue operations)
- Extra keys
- Some money
- A whistle

Emergency equipment that will come in handy in case of a major quake:

- A fire extinguisher
- Good supply of the emergency medicine
- Tools to close the electricity, gas and water supplies (which should be kept beforehand at easily accessible places)
- The first aid kit and its instruction manual
- Four liters of water per person per day for three days
- Packaged foodstuffs and non-degradable fruits. Milk for babies.
- Stove, oven or firewood and coal to cook food outside (kerosene oil, kept outside the reach of children)
- Inner clothes, shoes and blankets
- Toilet paper, soap, and things needed for personal hygiene

(Source: FAQ on earthquakes prepared by NSET-Nepal)

In some cases, building new houses maybe cheaper than retrofitting, says Kandel. He points out that not all houses can be retrofitted. Moreover, retrofitted houses may help the structure from collapsing and protect the residents inside, but they do sustain major damage during big quakes.

Making houses earthquake resistant during their construction remains the best option. Simple techniques like the proper binding of the iron reinforcing rods and erecting walls at certain favorable angles may significantly lower the risk later. If proper precautions have been taken during building, no further retrofitting should be necessary to elongate the life of the house.

findings shows that the country's hills are more vulnerable to earthquakes than the mountains or the Tarai belt. The people at highest risk are those from the western and central regions, where there are large and concentrated populations.

As the demand for affordable housing has grown, construction methods have worsened. The government announced a national building code last year, but only Lalitpur Municipality complied with the code and made inspection of new buildings mandatory.

"The threat is real, and the issue is very serious," says Shiva B. Pradhananga, the president of NSET. "We are on a mission to make every community safe

make existing houses safer. Since laborers and construction workers are often unskilled and employ traditional construction methods, NSET organizes training programs for them. To reduce losses due to earthquakes, the safety of the non-structural components should be insured too. Proper arrangement of furnishings inside, for example fastening heavy items to walls and floors, can minimize losses.

Even with the best construction techniques, a major earthquake will cause a lot of damage. Experts fear that Kathmandu's emergency management, not the best even during minor problems, will collapse in the face of a major disaster. In case of the repeat of the 1934 quake, only 10 percent of hospitals will be fully operational. Thirty percent will operate only partially, and 60 percent will be unusable. Moreover, the city has only seven fire brigades. There is neither a crisis management group nor an administrative department for post-disaster relief, and due to the soaring defense expenditures, improvements in disaster planning are unlikely.

A Japan International Cooperation Agency report warns that more than 90 percent of the houses in Kathmandu would be damaged beyond repair, almost all water supplies and 40 percent of the electricity would be cut off, 60 percent of telephone lines will stop operating and 60 percent of the bridges will be unusable should a disaster of the magnitude of the 1934 earthquake strike the valley again.

In the 1934 quake about 5,000 people lost their lives, over 25,000 were injured and about 60,000 houses were damaged. "We should learn our lesson," says Pradhananga. "The next big quake is near; we should be well prepared." Pradhananga says NSET, with the help of other NGOs and partners, is continually pressuring the government to implement the building code in Kathmandu.

There are about 1,000 earthquakes in Nepal each year, ranging from two to five in magnitude on the Richter scale. No one knows when the big one will strike, but it is certain that a major earthquake is coming. Along with keeping our fingers crossed and hoping for the best, it's critically urgent that we prepare for the worst. **N**



SAFETY FIRST: A retrofitted school in Sirutar, Bhaktapur

RM/SS

But 80 to 90 percent of the houses that are being built in Kathmandu now lack any kind of earthquake resistance, and many overcrowded localities are jam-packed with old buildings. There will be massive devastation due to buildings collapsing into one another. In places like Bhaktapur, where closely-placed houses and congested neighborhoods are the norm, up to 75 percent of all houses are likely to collapse during a major quake. At particularly high risk are old houses, those beside riverbeds and those in places where frequent landslides occur. A risk map produced by the United Nations Development Program and United Nations Center for Human Settlements with the help of geological

by 2020, and everybody is helping us. Many have begun to realize the serious threat an earthquake of the magnitude of the 1934 one poses."

The new colonies being built now are reasonably safe, since they have been constructed with proper earthquake resistance techniques and strong foundations, says Pradhananga. But most housing is not safe, and high population densities—Kathmandu is home to more than 1.5 million people and has a growth rate of 6.5 percent per year, among the highest in the world—plus poor construction techniques and lack of maintenance of old houses leave many people at high risk.

NSET offers free advice on better construction techniques and on ways to



HELPING HAND

Nepalis in UK offer employment to the families of Iraq victims

BY PRAKASH KHANAL IN LONDON

NEPALIS ENTREPRENEURS in the United Kingdom have offered to help the families of those who were murdered by Islamic extremists in Iraq in August.

The announcement came on Dec. 26 in London during the annual function of Nepalese Caterers Association (UK). Bijaya Thapa, secretary of the association, and a restaurateur since 1990, who owns three restaurants in and around London, made the announcement. The association has 45 members.

“Our association has decided to help the bereaved families whose members

were murdered by the Islamic extremists in Iraq,” says Thapa.

In October, the association offered to employ one person from each of the 12 bereaved families in their restaurants in United Kingdom. The overwhelming response from its members encouraged the association to send a request to the British Secretary of State for Home Affairs David Blunkett asking him to provide work permits and visas to 12 Nepalis, one each from the bereaved families.

“We tried to find out the reasons for their being in Iraq and the only answer we could find was that they were there in search of work,” says Thapa. “Our members have agreed to give them employment in their restaurants here in the UK.”

Whether Britain grants them visas or not, the offer for help from the Nepali caterers is an extraordinary gesture extended by ordinary Nepalis who are themselves struggling to get a footing in a new society. The association hopes this will also encourage other Nepalis, in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, to extend

a helping hand toward fellow Nepalis who are fighting to fulfill their most basic needs. There are around 80 Nepalis restaurants in the United Kingdom; 45 are located in and around London.

On Oct. 9, Dhruba K. Chhetry, president of the Nepalis Caterers Association in the United Kingdom, wrote a letter to Blunkett recollecting the horrific murder of 12 innocent Nepali workers in Iraq. The letter also mentioned the pathetic situation of the 12 families and the association’s decision to employ a member from each of the families.

In his letter to Blunkett, Chhetry also requested the home secretary to provide work permits as well as to help facilitate visa processing for the Nepalis. Once the Home Office gives its nod, the 12 Nepalis will be selected with help from the officials of the Hotel Association of Nepal.

“We are confident that the British government which has always been supportive of Nepali people and has been one of the largest providers of the development aid to Nepal will give due consideration to this humanitarian cause,” says Thapa.

The association, in the meantime, has been careful not to raise the hopes of the families who are already distraught by the tragic loss of their bread-earners.

Most members of the Nepali community in the United Kingdom used to be retired British Army officials and their families. But the trend has changed over the years. The estimated 35,000 Nepalis now living there belong to such diverse professional groups as medical doctors, nurses, engineers and restaurateurs.

Some Nepali entrepreneurs have been involved in charity work for some time. Ashok Shrestha, a young restaurateur who moved to Kent from Hong Kong five years ago, is one such person. Shrestha has raised funds to assist children in Nepali prisons who have been forced to live with their mothers or fathers serving their prison terms.

The caterers association recently honored UK-based Nepali restaurateurs, social workers and professionals. Professor Surya P Subedi, Gopal Manadhar, Ashok Shrestha, Dipendra Karki and several others were honored for their pioneering efforts as Nepalis in the United Kingdom. But the biggest honor probably goes to the caterers themselves for their efforts. **N**

SERVING NEPALIS: Munal restaurant in Surry, England, famous for its Nepali delicacies



A new law gives women equal rights to their husband's property. But counter-lawsuits showing that the men are bankrupt make it difficult for the women to claim anything.

BY SUSHMA JOSHI
IN BIRATNAGAR

THE MORANG DISTRICT Court is crowded at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 29. Police with guns take a breather in the open air as they escort detainees into the courtroom. Upstairs, a tiny woman braves the all-male crowd and rushes in breathlessly as a hearing is about to start in the civil bench. She sits down and covers her head with her sari's *pallu*. This is Alkadevi Shah, 38. She is here to find out if she will finally get property from her estranged husband.

A complicated case involving two lawsuits is about to be heard. Judge Mahesh Prasad Pudasaini reads his *misil*, the case file, as the lawyers arrive. Advocate Ram Lal Sutihar, of the Nepal Bar Association, Morang, addresses the judge. "Sriman," he says. "My client is a victim of domestic violence. She was thrown out of her house. A woman has a right to maintenance. My client is entitled to her husband's property. But her husband has taken an imaginary loan from another man and filed a counter lawsuit saying he is bankrupt after borrowing for his daughter's wedding."

The lawyer explains that the agreement between the lender and Alkadevi's husband, Manik Chand Shah, is false because the supposed lender is far poorer than the debtor. He also points out that experts at the Philatelic Society know the stamp put on the loan agreement was published months later than the date of the supposed loan—showing that the paper was forged at a later date. The witness of the *len-den*, the deal, also said he was not present when the paper was allegedly signed.

Manik Chand Shah, who has married a second wife and recently had a child with her, is not present at the court-

WAITING FO

room. His lawyer is there to represent him. "My client is not a man of means, Sriman," says his defense lawyer. "How can he give her property if he doesn't have any? Regarding the stamp—these things happen in villages. People don't always do things on time. And as for the witness who claimed he wasn't there at the time of signing—I can't remember what I did a week ago," he said. How would he remember what he was doing five months ago?"

The third lawyer, who represents the absent lender, is younger. He argues that there is no way Manik Chand Shah can escape his loan by getting his former wife to claim property. He has to pay his loan. His client has to get justice.

The judge asks if the woman has any children. "She had one daughter who is already married, Sriman," says Alkadevi's lawyer. "Then why should the husband give her his private property that he earned through his own work?" asks the judge. The lawyer cites a Supreme Court case and says that there is no concept of "private" in a marriage—what a man earns after marriage also belongs to the wife.

After the hearing ends, Alkadevi walks downstairs. "He used to beat me a lot," she says. "I don't know if they will do something else to stop me from getting property."

After her husband started to beat her, Alkadevi's brother filed a petition at the

IN A MAN'S WORLD: Alkadevi Shah at the Morang District Court



R JUSTICE

CDO's office. The husband went there and signed a "milapatra" saying he would live with her. He then ran away to Kathmandu, married another woman, and stayed in Delhi for a few years before returning to Biratnagar.

Alkadevi says life is hard. She lives with her sister by the jute mills. Her sister's husband was killed by dacoits, and the two sisters survive as day laborers in garment factories, where they make thread.

The property in question is 18 kattha, nine dhur (a little over six-tenths of a hectare). Split three ways between the man and his two wives, Alkadevi would get six kattha and three dhur.

In 1993, a case was finally filed in the Supreme Court to amend the Muluki Ain, the civil code, and give women equal rights over property. It would take almost nine years before a bill was finally passed on March 14, 2002. It came into effect from Sept. 27, 2002.

The new law establishes a wife's equal right to her husband's property immediately after marriage, rather than after she reaches 35 years of age or has been married for 15 years as before. A widow's right to claim her share of property from the joint family after her husband's death, and to keep this property even if she gets re-married, is also established in the law.

But legal professionals say that women still have difficulty getting property. Most common are counter-lawsuits which show the man is bankrupt, therefore making it difficult for the woman to claim anything. Counter-lawsuits showing loans, and even property division between brothers, are common in cases where estranged wives ask for property. Advocate Ram Lal Sutihar, who is fighting the case pro bono for a fellow villager, says that he has five or six other women in the same predicament.

In the evening, Judge Pudasaini gives his verdict: Alkadevi will get her share of the property, Manik Chand Shah will pay his loan, and the forgery case is dismissed.

Alkadevi, who's been coming to the courts for two years, may have the satisfaction of knowing she won her case. But getting the property is another matter. The land is under *rokka*—it cannot be bought or sold until the loan is cleared. The case can indefinitely be lengthened.

Some of the property cases have taken 20 years to settle, going from the district court to the Appellate and then to the Supreme Court. In a case involving an uncle and a nephew, the uncle finally died after the case had reached the Supreme Court after 15 years. His sons were in India and did not care about the land in Nepal. The nephew, who had spent almost Rs.100,000 in legal fees, eventually couldn't make it to the final hearing in the Supreme Court in Kathmandu because the trip from Nepalgunj would have cost him too much time and money.

"The legal game is about wearing out the adversary and supporting the lies of our clients," says a lawyer. If Manik Chand Shah plays his cards right and hires a good lawyer, Alkadevi will have gotten justice through the courts of Nepal, but she may never get her property. ■



ALL FOR THE LOCAL

The locals in Maoist-affected areas have already suffered a great deal from this bloody war, why make it even worse by scaring the tourists away?

BY NICK MEYEN

DESPITE OUR GOVERNMENT, like many others, warning against traveling in Maoist-affected tourist areas, we found those areas just about the best places to travel while trekking in Nepal. Although some safety and ethical concerns did come to our mind, we found the consequences of not going anywhere even more disturbing. Besides, the quietness of the trails and the lack of competition to find a lodge offered us good reasons to travel. Our personal story might make our claim sound more logical.

While trekking with my girlfriend from Jiri to Namche Bazaar in October, we both had to pay Rs.1,000 to the Maoists and Rs.1,000 to the government; we also spent around Rs.8,000 each, which went to the local economy. None of our two meetings with the Maoists proved to be threatening or unpleasant. Our receipt from the first meeting in Kinja, in Solokhumbu, proved valid for a second encounter with them in Nunthala, also of Solukhumbu. We learned from other tourists that their experience was similar and no one had any problems and some were even lucky to escape meeting the Maoists at all.

In Nunthala two young Maoists asked us for our receipt. When we explained to them about our first encounter with other Maoists in Kinja, the conversation became relaxed. I even proposed that we play a table tennis match. During our game they told me that most of the fighting in the area had taken place a year ago and that the area had become relatively peaceful since then. The conversation ended when I asked them where all the young people in the area



had gone; they were among the very few young people we met during the several days of our trek. A lonely female lodge owner told us later that her husband, together with many others, had fled the region last year and still didn't consider the area safe to return. We saw a bombed lodge; we were told that this happened when the owner couldn't pay the tax demanded by the Maoists. According to other lodge owners, two owners of a resort in Phakding were kidnapped and released only after their wives paid Rs.100,000 each.

Still, we couldn't understand why our own government should advise against traveling to the area in Khumbu. Curiously, there seems to be an enormous difference between the safety of tourists and the safety of villagers, a point never mentioned in the foreign media or government websites. The locals in

the region have already suffered a great deal from this bloody war, why make it even worse by scaring the tourists away? This based merely on some sham security or ethical concerns, and thus robbing the locals of their economic mainstay? Have I missed any reports of tourists killed, raped or tortured by the Maoists? Maybe I did, but targeting tourists doesn't seem to be their strategy, unlike the strategies of the insurgents in, say, Colombia or Iraq.

The gap between the perceived and the real danger of trekking in a Maoist-affected tourist area has become high due to both internal and external reasons. Since the royal massacre in 2001 and the subsequent escalation of the Maoist conflict, it was hardly surprising to see the people depending on tourism struggle. However what added to Nepal's woes was the overall post-9/11 stagnation in

ECONOMY



tourism. Since the 9/11 attacks, terrorism, very hard to define, and the “war on terrorism” has covered much of the international news coverage. More often than not, the outcomes of a very complex conflict are summarized as being violent acts perpetrated by “terrorists.” It’s old wine in a new bottle, though. Some governments in the west use the same Cold War rhetoric to justify their global politics. In Nepal, both the old and the new enemies are identified as “Maoist terrorists.”

No wonder then that the average tourist is worried for his safety while trekking in a Maoist-affected tourist area. In recent months, the tourist, however, has begun to realize that it isn’t all that unsafe to travel in a tourist area where the Maoists charge fees. It just became another exciting story to tell at home. But then there is still the ethical issue. Many tourists started

feeling ashamed or guilty of sponsoring a “terrorist organization.” Some even refused to pay while others stayed away from the area altogether due to “ethical reasons.” The ethical dilemma of paying a fee to the Maoists is a sham if you consider that by paying for a visa, you also contribute to the Royal Nepal Army, which has been accused of grave human rights violations, by Amnesty International and many others. If you want to uphold high ethical standards, you shouldn’t come to Nepal at all.

While considering safety and ethical issues, one should also think of the economy. How does your decision affect all those people who depend on tourism? After all, it is they who suffer the most if the tourists stop coming. Our own balance makes this perfectly clear: For every Rs.10 we spend, one was for the “terrorist government” (the Maoist fee), one for

the “old regime government” (the Everest park fee) and eight for the people living in the area. And it’s not just the lodge owners and the shopkeepers who suffer. On and around the trail, whole communities depend on the tourist money. Porters, waiters and even farmers suffer when the local market for their products collapses. While one can hardly expect governments like ours to stand in favor of traveling to these areas, or the Maoists peacefully retreating from them, people from Solu can only hope that peace will return to their villages. And with peace, safety and the money-spending tourists who keep the local economy alive. ■

(Meynen, a Belgian, traveled in Solukhumbu for two weeks in October. A year earlier he visited Nepal to collect research materials for his master’s thesis on the impact of the Maoist movement on education. His visit this time to Solu, however, was as a vacationer.)



All Photos nw/SS

Heritage Haven

Dwarika's Hotel looks like a haven, feels like a haven and is a haven

BY VENEETA SINGHA

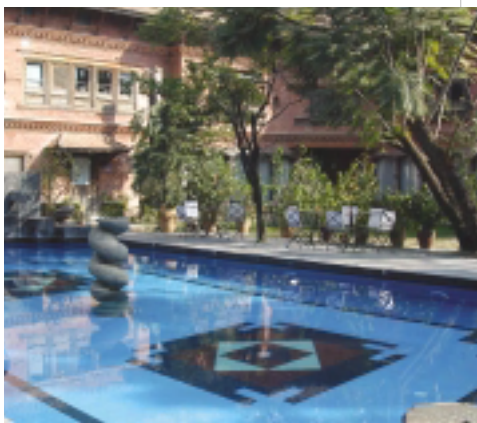
Kathmandu is a city of dusty tire-worn roads and misshapen buildings sprouting around them. Few locales are architecturally beautiful and well planned. Old palaces loom large in some places but much of the traditional architecture is gradually succumbing to urban pressures. Cramped teashops and

crowded bus parks are becoming landmarks in their own right. Bright lights and big city buzz are fast transforming the once serene city into a cluttered urban sprawl.

Still, there are some exceptions, a light of hope at the end of an otherwise dark tunnel. One is the unique museum that is also a luxury hotel. In the midst of screaming motor horns and swerving

cars, there stands a redbrick building—a mark of traditional Nepali architecture. It is not imposing but graciously inviting. The doorway is a carved wooden one. Inside, a pleasantly arranged array of buildings form the Dwarika's Hotel. The lounge is decorated with richly carved artifacts collected and preserved by the late Dwarika Das Shrestha. A smiling lady ushers you in and you experience what will be truly heavenly.

Travelers get a welcome respite from the bustle of the Kathmandu city. But





the hotel offers much more. Pam Walker wrote this about the hotel in the Travel magazine: "It is a living museum of the history and craftsmanship of the ancient Nepalese... a true delight for anyone to visit." Carved windows are everywhere and the lady with the smile explains that the brickwork of the buildings has been replicated from the ancient Malla wood-carvings. Spacious reclining areas lead to the corridors where the now famous rooms are housed.

You notice that the door to the elevator is also a wooden carving but it has a mix of ancient carvings with restoration work that typifies the hotel in general. Modern amenities are everywhere but blended beautifully with traditional and often ancient crafts, craftsmanship and historically significant ar-

chitectural styles. And the result, as Conde Nast Traveller magazine described it, is "elegant, restful and diverting."

Diversion from urban detritus and a welcome walk into history—Dwarika's gives you these with singular panache. Tony Hagen wrote: "Dwarika's looks like a palace, Dwarika's feels like a palace, Dwarika's is a palace." It won the Pacific Asia Travel Association Heritage Award in 1990.

Besides the plush rooms, there is a Fusion Bar, a swimming pool reminiscent of 12th century Malla Dynasty baths, the Toran Restaurant, the Library Lounge, a terrace for morning tea and reading, and the Krishnarpan Restaurant famed for its Nepali cuisine (and visited by Prince Charles, no less).

The Fusion Bar's walls are decorated with pictures of Hollywood icons but there is a wooden carving in the center—a symbol of east and west coming together. Bharati Motwani wrote in Go New magazine: "Dwarika's Hotel in Kathmandu is accustomed to being described in superlatives." And this is not without merit. Each room, restaurant and area is built, designed and preserved with exceptional vision.

Dwarika Das has infused life into dying art and created a haven for the weary. In the process, he has managed to breathe into Kathmandu a little of the history and culture which have earned Dwarika's a distinctive place in the city. Dwarika's looks like a haven, feels like a haven and is a haven. **N**



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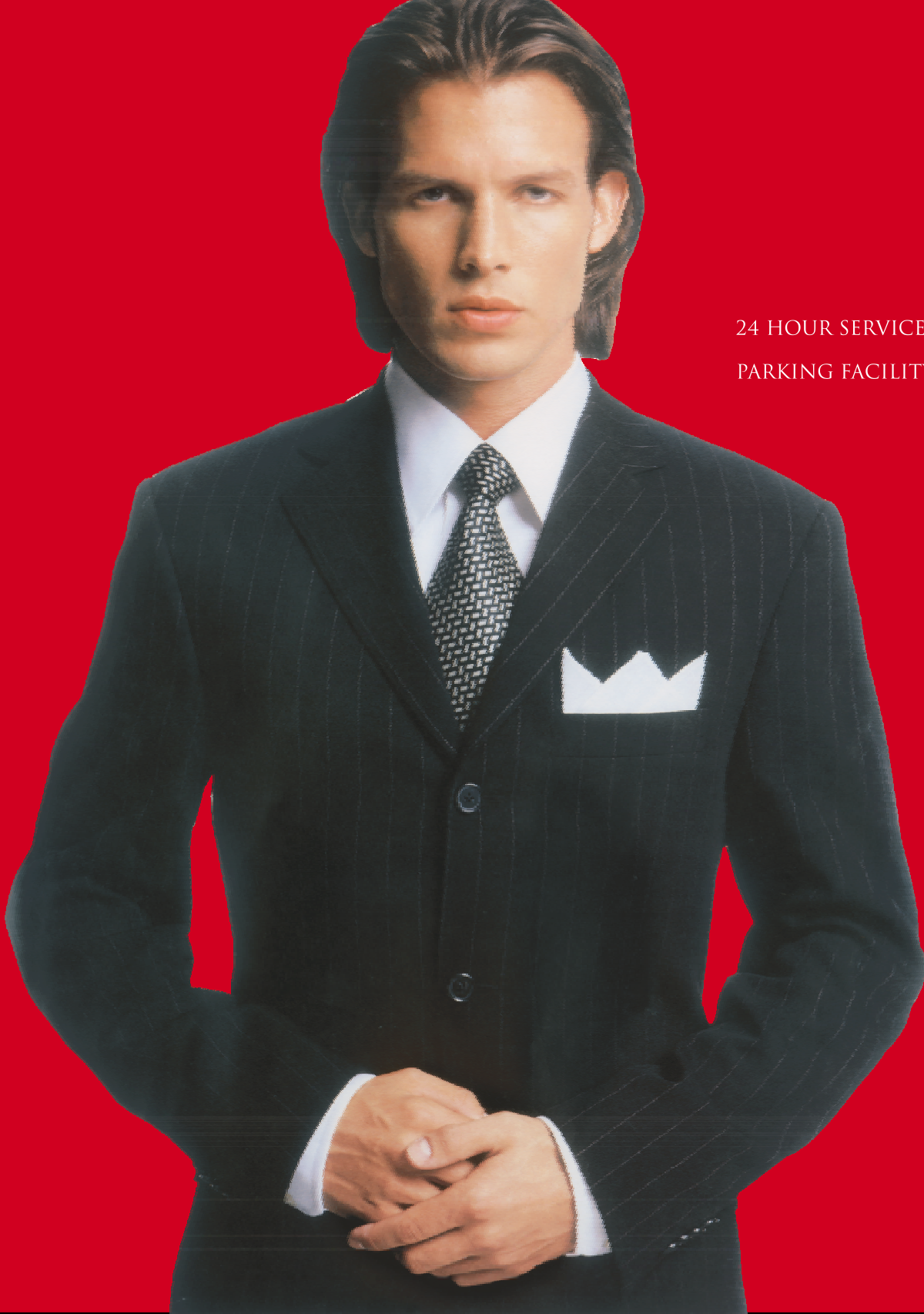
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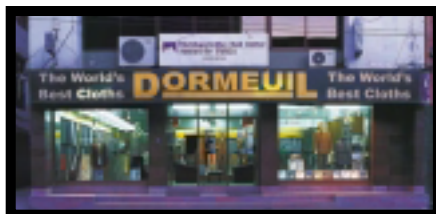
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The Explended Lakeside

Placid and peaceful, Pokhara is practically paradise

BY KUNAL LAMA

Disparagingly referred to as the “ghetto” by some mysteriously twisted minds, Thamel is the epicenter of the tourist industry in Kathmandu: In Pokhara, Lakeside takes that honor. Apart from their ready propensity to break out in a “street festival” at the merest of excuses and the roving gangs of youths hanging out truculently in bars and clubs, the two have little in common. Thamel is furrowed with confusing, narrow, winding lanes overcrowded with shops, pedestrians and vehicles of all shapes and sizes. The only view one gets from here is the distant pinnacle of Swayambhunath, that is if you manage to get to the top of some of the multi-story neo-Newari buildings that are rapidly replacing the cute and quaint rows of houses with dwarf-sized carved windows and tiled roofs. Amazingly, Thamel still happens to harbor a

going to be a good one. I usually set off for the Phewa Hotel, ironically one of the few hotels actually by the lake. Each morning, groups of neatly uniformed children row themselves across from the other side, docking their wooden boats with an expertise way beyond their collective age. They deftly step on shore, oars slung over shoulders as their only insurance against boat theft. Families of chestnut-headed pochard bob excitedly up and down, then dive out of sight for a few seconds. A red sail suddenly sweeps by, slicing the little island of Barahi Temple out of view. A gang of water buffaloes is herded into the shallow waters. They wade in splashily, tossing their heads and then, with huge sighs, settle down for a long, cool wallow. Between snaking water pipes disappearing into the far depths of the lake, a line of women on their haunches in the middle of sudsy patches beat the hell out of their week’s quota of laundry. Little ripples on the lake surface glint in the sun. A gentle breeze ruffles my hair.

Totally mesmerized by the lake, I spend hours here, barely kept awake by copious cups of coffee.

The shops on the straight-ish, wide and clean street of Lakeside look very similar to those of Thamel. Wedged between them, curiously named restaurants—Moon Dance, Billy Bunter, Boomerang, Lemon Tree and Tea Time—vie for the attention of hungry punters. Pavement-side display boards proclaim their specialties: “verities of cousins,” “French fried,” “cheese kurket,” “fresh crap from the lake” and my all-time favorite, “explended view of the lake”! Without consulting the Oxford English Corpus, a database which provides an extensive picture of current English as an international language, I have decided that “explended” is going to enter my personal vocabulary. I will use it when I come across something so ineffably exquisite and splendid that only the word “explended” would cunningly catch and combine the nuances of these two words.

In the evening the drinking holes rev up their music systems and switch on their twinkling lights. Some of them, like Club Amsterdam, Old Blues Pub, Club Paradiso and Busy Bee, feature live bands, but you quickly discover that the same band often hops from one club to another on different days. They all have giant-sized TV screens showing football matches. Colorful balls dart about the pool table. The air is thick with the smoke of tobacco and marijuana. Subliminal messages shout out “Chill out! Loosen up! Relax!” Away from home and life’s mundane rigors and responsibilities, people gradually lose their inhibitions. They find themselves in an exotic and alien land. In some of them, the beguiling mask of anonymity begets confidence; confidence begets garrulity. Eager to share new experiences and adventures, they discover striking up conversations with strangers become easy. Like your newly acquired friends, the holiday mood cheerfully grows on you. It’s no wonder then that I feel Pokhara’s Lakeside frequently beckoning me. Explended! **N**

vibrant Newari culture. Without any warning, elaborate palanquins housing clan deities, borne on the strong shoulders of festively inebriated devotees and accompanied by a discordant band, hurtle their way comically through the traffic, disregarding rules entirely. More disconcertingly, I once saw a huge headless carcass of a freshly-sacrificed buffalo being dragged into *abahal*, leaving a long slash of blood on the street. In Lakeside I have seen very little evidence of the local culture, but the stunning presence of nature is compensation enough.

There is much one can do in Pokhara: hiking, paragliding (or parahawking as Time magazine put it rather hyperbolically), microlighting, swimming, boating, sailing, cycling, etc. It’s a sporty little town full of adventures. I, though, always end up going through the same routine, my senses relaxed—dulled more like—beyond recovery by the languid atmosphere of Pokhara.

It’s always a delight to wake up to the sight of the sun slowly revealing Machhapuchhare in ever brightening light, a sure sign that the day is



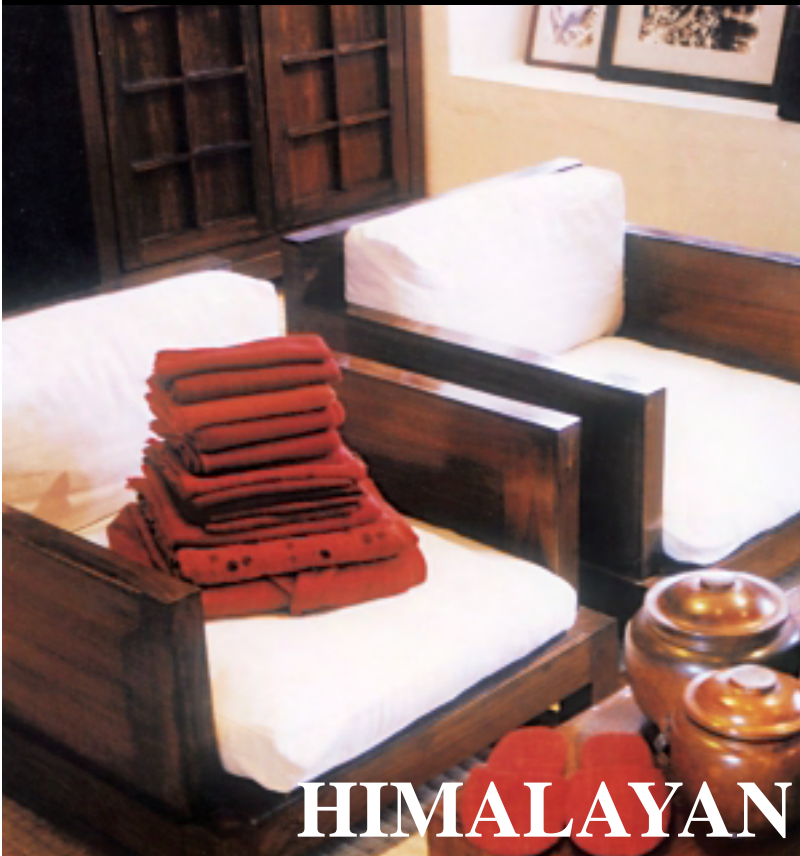
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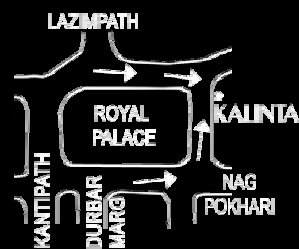
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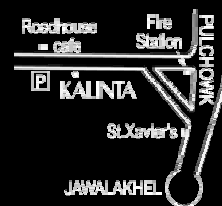


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MISSION Psychology

Changing the world one mind at a time

BY INDRA ADHIKARI

At 6:30 every morning, after an hour of mediation, Yogi Vikashananda sits in his library with books on philosophy, religion and health. Reading, writing and teaching occupy the rest of his day.

The library is well stocked with books on every subject: art, culture, religion, politics, adventure, geography, science and more. Vikashananda thinks of them as his friends. He even talks to them at times, he says.

Vikashananda is a philosopher, embarked on a journey of knowledge. “Nepal should start producing philosophers now—there has not been one since the Buddha,” he says. “The mission, though ambitious, is possible. My efforts are centered on the creation of fertile ground for the development of philosophy in Nepal.”

The work of the world’s great philosophers has changed the course of human history, and Vikashananda believes that Nepal needs an environment for debates on philosophy to achieve our own higher goals. The keys



to intellectual development in the west, he says, with a fist firmly planted on one of the huge tomes on his table, are “positive thinking, healthy criticism and acceptance of constructive criticism.”

According to Vikashananda, positive thinking is a must to succeed in any venture. Positivism brings positive changes in society. Problems are in the mind, not the situation, he says, and changing the psychology of individuals will eventually change society. His motto—“strive to change the world, but start by changing yourself first”—clearly illustrates his mission.

His methods are diverse; some stem from mainstream teachings, others are as unconventional as his own intellectual path has been.

His path started humbly in June 1961, when a woman worshipping at a Ganesh temple in Chhetrapati found a baby lying there, crying helplessly. Maili Bajei, as she was known in the area, looked around but could see no one. The parents had obviously deserted the poor child. Finally she handed the child to the then childless couple of Krishna Man and Purna Devi Shrestha of Chhetrapati who adopted him. The family priest named the child Ekadantaman, after one of the names for Lord Ganesh.

His early life was hard: His father drank and family quarrels fueled by alcohol drove the boy to fight and misbehave. He remembers that his mother and grandmother went for days at a time without food. "When I was young, I was one of the most notorious children in the neighborhood," he writes in "Baal Lila," a book about his childhood. As he grew he became more violent and irresponsible. He rarely attended school and hated reading. His parents divorced when he was 10.

Vikashananda's life changed when he started attending art classes with Chandraman Singh Maskey and thangka painting sessions with Premman Chitrakar at the age of 12. The praise he got from his teachers encouraged him to pour more of his energy into art. His devotion won him a trip to the erstwhile Soviet Union in 1979 after he was placed first in an art competition. There he learned a little about Lenin and was greatly impressed; he is still influenced by the communist philosophy.

After he returned to Nepal he began to read more about Lenin. The readings widened to other great philosophers like Marx, Socrates, Plato, Nietzsche and Vivekananda. Each left him enthused for more, but poverty kept him from following most of his interests. His health suffered from poverty as well. He consulted doctors to no avail and then finally turned to yoga.

Vikashananda attended yoga classes at several institutes. The more he learned the more interested he became. He left for India at the age 27 to devote his life to yoga and meditation. In Benares he learnt yoga in depth while he was studying Shastri, equivalent to college graduation course; then picked up Buddhism and traveled to

Madras, Unnab, Bihar and other parts of India to learn different forms of meditation.

After six years of extensive study of yoga and meditation in India, he returned to Nepal and set up the Ananda Yoga Centre at Matatirtha in 1994.

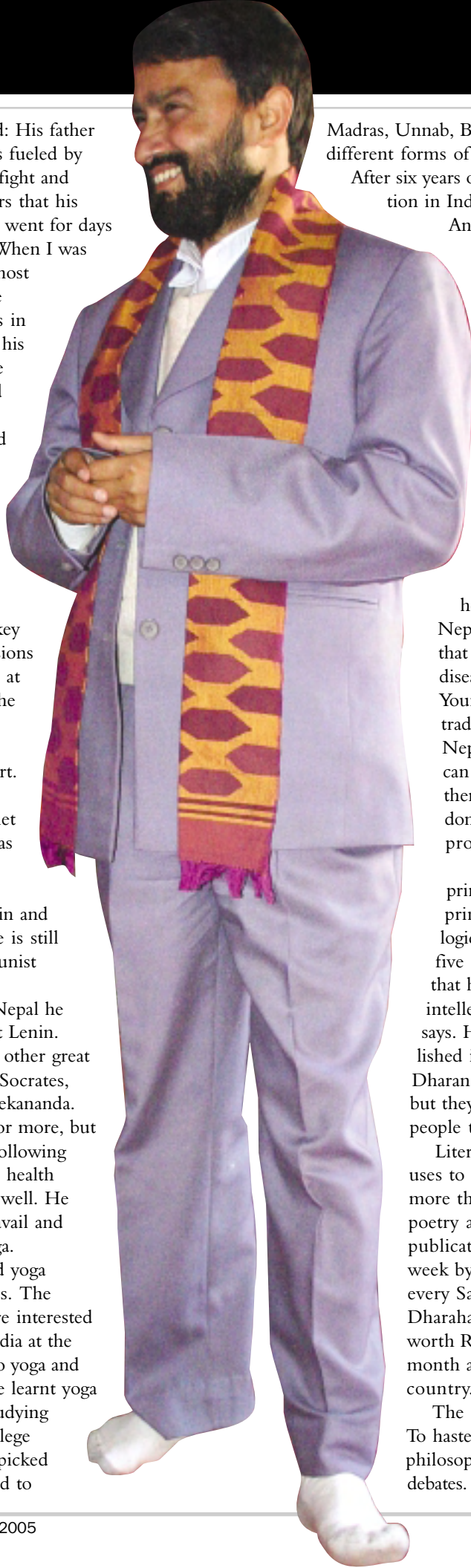
Though there was already a buzz about yoga after it was re-introduced in Nepal by the Osho Centre, the yoga classes by Vikashananda didn't catch the public's imagination. When he introduced *reiki*, a traditional Japanese healing technique, in 1996, quite a few people turned their ears. He was the subject of talk among other yoga practitioners after giving yoga classes to the inmates of Nakhu jail and the personnel of the Royal Nepal Army.

But his efforts are centered only in the urban areas. *Reiki* has not been a heart winning method of healing in the Nepali society. While Vikashananda claims that *reiki* can heal most of the stomach diseases, very few people attend his clinic. Young Nepalis don't too much faith in the traditional healing system he introduced in Nepal. The question may then arise: How can he influence the people and encourage them to awaken philosophically if they don't believe in the very practice that he promotes?

He toils on with his philosophy and his principles though. He has named his principles "manokranti," literally, psychological revolution. *Reiki* yoga is one of the five principles of manokranti, the mission that he started to make people healthy, both intellectually and physically, Vikashananda says. His teaching centers have been established in Nepalgunj, Pokhara, Dang, Butwal, Dharan, Phidim, Itahari, Banepa and Chautaran but they will take years to attract the local people to his mission.

Literature and discourse are the tools he uses to spread his teachings. He has written more than 70 books, including dozens on poetry and stories. These days Manokranti's publication division publishes a booklet every week by Vikashananda. About 300 of these sell every Saturday during his discourse at the Dharahara Party Palace in Sundhara. And books worth Rs.200,000 to Rs.300,000 are sold each month at about 40 bookstores around the country.

The earnings drive Vikashananda's mission: To hasten the time when all Nepalis will discuss philosophy and participate in intellectual debates. ■



CITY ThisWeek

EVENTS

WAVE WEB WINNER 2004

The entries for the third annual Wave Web Winner, Nepal's first and biggest web designing contest, have started to come in. The contest is open to all Nepalis under 30 living inside Nepal. All sites, including corporate sites, hosted on free servers like Geocities are acceptable. However, socially sensitive, political and adult oriented sites will not be accepted. A participant may submit multiple entrees. The submitted sites can be in any local language, but only Nepali and English sites will be eligible for the Best Site Content Award. Participating sites must have the tag <!—WWW 2004 participant—> at the top of their homepage. To provide



all participants a fair playing field, a contestant may submit more than one site for the individual categories—visual appeal, user friendliness, content and technicality. It will be compulsory for the participants to design the sites using the contents of www2004.zip to be eligible to win the Wave Web Winner 2004 title. For further information: 554-3333. Or log on to: www.www.com.np.

Basketball Training Camp

The Godhavari Alumuni Association is organizing a basketball training camp at the GAA Hall, Thamel. Children between 6 to 14 years are eligible to participate. Date:

Dec. 22 to Jan. 22. Price: Rs.500. Limited seats only. For information: 441-4785

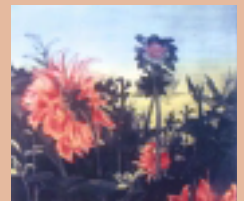
Cine Club

Movie: Le Buche (2000). Director: Daniele Thompson. Starring: Sabine Azema. At the Alliance Francaise,

Emerging Voices

Three young artists, Sushma Shakya, Rukmani Maskey and Dal Bahadur Rai exhibit a total of 48 prints in a group exhibition at the Siddhartha Art Gallery. These three aspiring artists are students of the famous printmaking husband-wife team Uma Shanker Shah and Seema Sharma. Printmaking is not easy. These young printmakers have immersed themselves in learning the technicality of time bite, gum bite, collograph, wood block and sugar-lifting to understand the crux of this modern graphic artwork. Dal Bahadur Rai has depicted the natural heritage of Nepal; Rukmani Maskey has her work influenced by religion and culture and Sushma Shakya surprises the viewers with elements of mystery in pictures that might seem conventional at first glance. Till Dec. 5. For information: 421-8048.

PRINT EXHIBITION



Tripureshwore. Date: Jan. 9. Time: 2 p.m. For information: 424-1163.

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Dwarika's Package

This Christmas and New Year, Dwarika's Hotel comes up with an exciting package for all. Enjoy a night's stay at the hotel at the minimal of prices. Benefits include upgrading to deluxe rooms (subject to availability at the time of check in), daily complimentary breakfast and dinner in the hotel at a venue of choice that will include the special Christmas Eve barbeque. Date: Dec. 20 - Jan. 5. For information: 447-9488.

Jomson Trip

For just Rs.5999 for Nepalis and \$199 for expatriates, the Jomsom Mountain Resort provides two nights and three days accommodations. The price will also include round-about airfare from Pokhara to Jomsom, daily buffet breakfast and dinner, pick up and drop from the airport to resort and a walking tour of the Marpha village in Jomsom. For information: 449-7569.

ONGOING

Shahanshah Winter Splash

Want to sweat in the winter? Go and experience Shahahshah's indoor heated pool and relax in the steam and sauna. At Rs.350. Exclusive ladies' day on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Time: 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Nepali Platter

At the Radisson Hotel every Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Come and enjoy this special moment in the festive season. The scheme applies to Royal Stag, Ultimate Gin and Ruslan Vodka. Time: 6-8 p.m. For information: 441-1818.

Jukebox Experience

The jukebox experience with Pooja Gurung and The Cloud Walkers every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at the Rox Bar. For information: 449-1234.

Seasons Specials

Exotic Thai, sizzling tandoori, traditional Nepali and Italian cuisine, daily for lunch at the Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-la Hotel. Date: Dec. 1 onwards. Price: Rs.450 per person, includes a bottle of mineral water or a soft drink.

Tickling Taste buds

Barbeque every Friday Evening. At the Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-la Hotel. Time: 7 p.m. onwards. For information: 441-2999.

Fusion Night

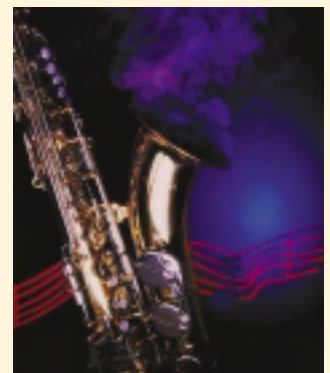
The Rox Bar welcomes everyone to be a part of the Fusion Night. The rhythmic and harmonic beats of eastern and western instruments—a treat for the senses. Enjoy the sarangi played by Bharat Nepali with a well-blended mix of western tunes played by The Cloud Walkers. Every Wednesday. Time: 6 p.m. onwards. For information: 449-1234.

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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: 447-9488.

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Fat or Fit

New health and fitness clubs have sprung up across the city in recent years. Once the province of the young, the clubs are now more likely to be patronized by people in their 30s and 40s.

BY KUMUD NEPAL

You remember Prakash Ojha's song: "Jaaun ki kya ho ma pani gym-khaana..." went the lyrics. It got quite a few people dancing last year, and not just because of the catchy, folksy tune. The song tells the story of a lanky young man who aspires to become brawny. The timely theme helped the song stay on top of the charts for many weeks.

Physical fitness is a major concern for urbanites today. People are taking time from their hectic schedules each day to look after themselves. The urban middleclass has pushed physical fitness up its priority list, and an increasing number of fitness centers and health clubs across the Valley are catering to this group. Physical fitness is slowly becoming an indispensable part of a successful life.

"There is a sudden urge in people to remain fit," says Shyam Shrestha, a trainer at the Hardic Fitness Center in Pulchowk, one of the city's busiest fitness clubs. Lack of space for exercise and busy lifestyles have forced people to turn to health clubs. Shrestha says most people who come to his club are overweight, diabetic or suffering from hypertension.

The trend of going to gyms and fitness centers started in Nepal almost a decade ago, but back then they generally appealed to the younger generation.

The story is different now; middle-aged people are redefining fitness.

Pradip Shumsher Rana, former general manager of the Tiger Tops resort in Chitwan and an ex-member of the national football team, starts his day early with an exercise session at the Hardic Fitness Center. "A 56-year-old like me has no dreams of having a brawny body," says Rana, a regular visitor to the gym for the last three years. "I come here daily to remain fit." Sagar Tamrakar, the trainer at the Shaligram Hotel Gym in

Jawalakhel, agrees that fitness is a "major health statement." He

believes it is no longer the fad it might have been considered 15 years ago.

Over the years, the trend of morning walks and cool-evening jogs has dwindled. But that is due to increasing worries about security than because of lack of interest in exercise. Fitness awareness has not faded away: People are just finding alternative ways to exercise.

Suresh Bhattarai, 38, a senior officer at Bhrikuti Paper Mills, bought a treadmill for Rs.18,000 as a replacement for

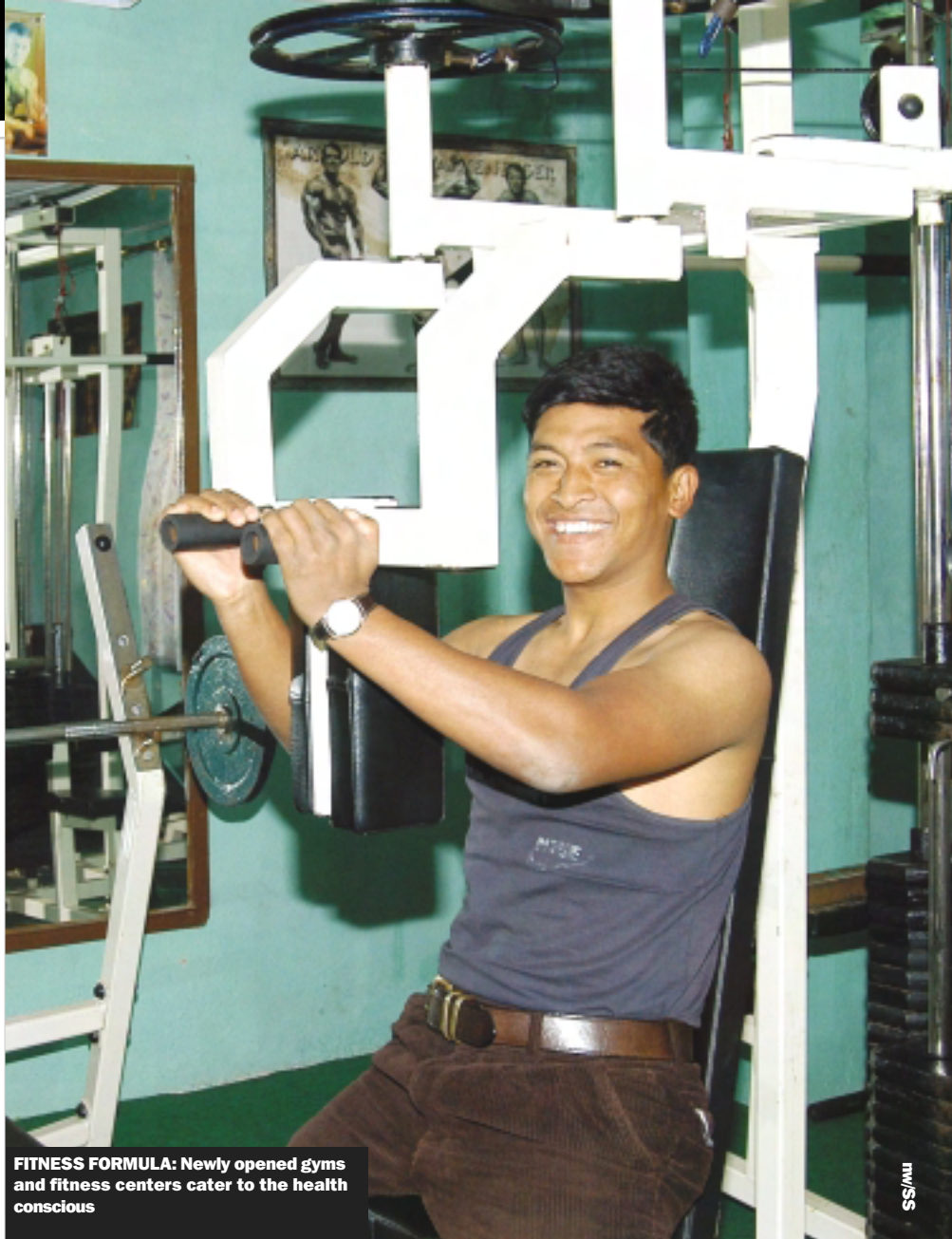


SS/MS

his morning walks. A timed session on the treadmill allows him to get his exercise; it has other benefits too. "You don't have to worry about security [when exercising] at home," he says. "Moreover, you know your speed, the distance walked and your pulse rate."

Bhattari goes to the Kundalini Club at Chandol to use the swimming pool and the tennis court there. The steam bath and the sauna attract other people of his age to the club, but he is purely interested in swimming and tennis. The heating system in the pool means he can swim year-round. Keeping fit, he believes, has added to his personality and social standing. As a regular member, Bhattarai pays Rs.12,000 a year; he says he is fully satisfied with the service he gets in return.

The amounts fitness clubs charge for their services isn't a problem for their members. In fact, more and more people are joining the clubs. The Hardic Fitness Center charges Rs.16,500 annually per person, inclusive of the club facilities and health checkups. Shaligram gym charges Rs.23,000. Shrestha of the Hardic



FITNESS FORMULA: Newly opened gyms and fitness centers cater to the health conscious



club doesn't think the high membership charges will

keep people from coming to the clubs. He says that 100 people visit his club each day. "There are enough people in the Valley who will not compromise with their health," Shrestha says. "They

are willing to spend as long as their fitness is ensured."

Other clubs charge less. Local fitness facilities like the Patan Gym at Gwarkho charge around Rs.500 per month for gymnasium facilities. These gyms serve 100-200 people a day. Even women come to these bodybuilding centers. Shaligram's Tamrakar, also the proprietor of the Patan Gym, says that 15 percent of his customers are women. While women were generally concerned with their figures in the past, many have been attracted to strength training lately. Prasiddhika Rayamajhi, a model, an actress and a TV anchor, exemplifies the growing interest in bodybuilding among women: She took part in the Dharmashree bodybuilding competition last year.

While young women like Rayamajhi find gyms alluring, older women pre-

fer aerobics and yoga. Yoga lessons by Swami Ramdev on Aastha Channel have a substantial female following and have attracted some men too. Yoga and meditation are not incompatible with fitness training: Bhattarai believes his physical training at the Kundalini club and the mental and spiritual exercise he gets doing *dhyana* keep him perfectly fit every day of the week. His blood pressure has been steady since he started his two-way fitness program.

Whatever the fitness practice, it is obvious that people are becoming more health conscious, either practicing yoga or joining the fitness centers. This trend shows that people of all age groups and of both genders are realizing that fitness is important. Tamrakar says, "Fitness awareness has increased with urbanization, and its appeal is only increasing." **N**

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There are two sides to every story.

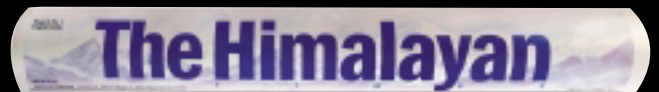


Business Advantage/TH/04/07

There are always two sides to every story. Who's right and who's wrong does not depend on which side you're on. To a third person, there may not even be a right or wrong, just a difference of opinion.

The important thing is to move on, change and adapt while keeping your goals intact.

The Himalayan Times is not about taking sides. It is about positively expressing the view of both sides.



A GREAT NEWSPAPER

All for Fair Play

San Miguel Cup saw big crowds. But the party was marred by some ordinary match refereeing.

BY SUDESH SHRESTHA

Saturday Dec. 25, 2004. It was the second day of the San Miguel International Cup football tourna-

ment. Nepal Red, with many of our internationals, was playing the Kolkata giants, East Bengal, equipped with several high-profile foreign recruits. Local fans who had been waiting for quite a

while for a quality tournament at the Dasharath Stadium flocked to the match.

The tournament organizer, the All Nepal Football Association, reportedly made more than Rs.800,000 in gate collection from that match alone. ANFA officials could not be prouder of their decision not to contract out the ticket sales to a private party. The price tag for the nine-day tournament was Rs.1.6 million. And what's more, Nepal Red, much to the crowd's delight, won the match 1-0.

For once it appears that ANFA is well on course to fulfill its long cherished dream: decent crowds and good performances from local sides. It would be too early to cheer, though. There are still a few big chinks in ANFA's shining armor.

One of them, more closely connected to the game and the events occurring on the pitch—the officiating in these games—has been the center of talk, sadly for all the wrong reasons. The referees have been the target of severe criticism for a while.

“The level of referees and linesmen is very poor,” says Subash Bhowmik, the East Bengal coach. Bhowmik was reacting to referee Gyani Raja Shrestha's decision to book East Bengal's Brazilian striker Paolo Roberto Da Silva for a second time, resulting in his sending off for what was, he claimed, an innocuous tackle.

East Bengal, which was exerting intense pressure on the Nepali side, lost its bite once it was reduced to 10 men. “Nepal Red benefited from the indulgent referee,” the Bengal coach retorted after the match.

The tournament organizers may well dismiss that as just another gripe from a losing side. But Bhowmik was not alone in questioning the standards of Nepali referees.

The chief coach of Han Nam University from South Korea, Park Cha Wha, who was among the spectators of the



B Rai

TOUGH CALLS: Match-refereeing is a big responsibility

Nepal Red-East Bengal match, was not amused either by what he saw of Shrestha.

"The referee is an important part of the game," says Wha. "He cannot make easy mistakes." But he also suggested that ANFA work hard to improve the level of refereeing "because they [the mistakes] spoil the game." "It'd be difficult to bring in quality teams if the problem persists," he warns.

ANFA officials reacted by defending its referees, while acknowledging that "sometimes they make mistakes." Shrestha is considered the most competent of the five Nepali referees holding FIFA licenses.

Individual errors aside, the referees are blamed especially for lack of uniformity; leniency toward foul play and rough, unsporting behavior; inefficiency, for example, in stopping deliberate and vicious tackles against opponents, tackles which could lead to injuries.

The referees have been on the radar since the Martyrs' Memorial League. In a league match, a referee mistakenly penalized a defender for a foul that was actually committed by an attacking player.

Shree Ram Ranjitkar, a former FIFA international referee, concedes that there have been mistakes from the match offi-

cial, resulting in some questionable decisions. But he suggests "a close analysis of the situation" at hand before jumping the gun.

"The referee's influence on the result is too big and his responsibility too heavy," he agrees. "But instead of passing critical judgments in general, it would be much more wiser to confront the main bone of contention," he says, "the argument over individual opinions."

He suggests that match officials and those officiating the game on the pitch have to keep abreast with the changes in the rulebook and points out the need to improve the refereeing where it needs improvement. The reputation of the men in black is extremely important if they are to enjoy respect from the players who are on the field and those who are watching the game from the gallery.

Often, many of the matches get mired in controversy because the players themselves have a poor understanding of the rules that govern their game or deliberately pretend to ignore what they know. "Sadly even some of the national players with international exposure fail to comply with prevailing rules," says Ranjitkar, recalling how a national player, during a league cham-

pionship a couple of seasons ago, mistook the referee's signal for an indirect free kick for a direct one. "The player guided his shot into back of the net. But when I disallowed the goal, all the players started to hurl expletives at me."

Clearly, these mutual recriminations are not going to get us anywhere. Yet there is too much at stake to just ignore them. ANFA President Ganesh Thapa maintains that the association has been trying continuously to raise the standards of the local referees with the help of the Asian Football Confederation and the world football governing body, FIFA.

"Several referee training camps and clinics have been conducted in different districts over the years," he says. "We have even asked the referees' committee to develop a suitable program for this purpose."

That may not be enough. The matter needs to be addressed with utmost seriousness by ANFA, taking steps to ensure referees make more accurate calls in the future. The buck has to stop somewhere. As the governing body of football in the country, ANFA has to own up the responsibility for the poor umpiring. ■



FOOTBALL FERVOR: The crowds are coming but keeping them coming is a tough task



Testing Times

SHIWANI SINGH THARU, a model and the bubbly and feisty hostess of “Mero Geet Mero Sandesh” on NTV, has been unusually grim the last few weeks. She has her reasons. The Maoists had abducted Tharu in Achham on Dec. 16 and accused her of spying for the government. “I repeatedly refuted the allegation,” says Tharu, “but they released me only after I signed an affidavit saying that I was a spy and that I would resign from my post upon returning to Kathmandu.” After the eight-day ordeal, Tharu was free, but still visibly shaken.



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Behind the Lens

For BIKASH RAUNIYAAR, a photojournalist with Kantipur, photography is all about passion, observation and having an eye for small, intricate details. This law graduate never trained himself to be a photographer. “I believe if you have passion for a job, you will excel,” says Rauniyaar. Last week, the Reporter’s Club Nepal awarded him the Babuchhiri Sherpa Photo Journalism Award along with a cash prize of Rs.25,001. Awards make Rauniyaar happy but nothing compares with taking pictures that speak for themselves, he says.

CONNECTING MINDS

Tanneri.com is the newest Nepali e-zine and BIBHOR BARAL is among the brains behind the project. Run by Nepal Youth Society, Tanneri.com offers a wide range of articles from literature to technology. Baral, the chief editor of the e-zine, wanted to do a lot more with computers than just surf the net and check mails. For the last one year, the information management student at the College of Applied Business at Tangal has been involved in such ventures as ketaketi.org, peacejournalism.com and damadol.com. He then decided to start Tanneri.com, “a complete diet for young minds,” as the site claims. It will take the combined effort of many young minds like Baral if Nepal is to harness the true power of technology.



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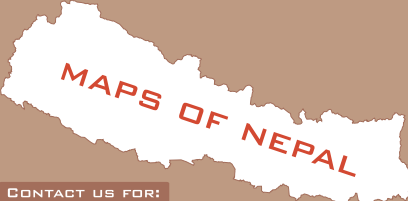
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
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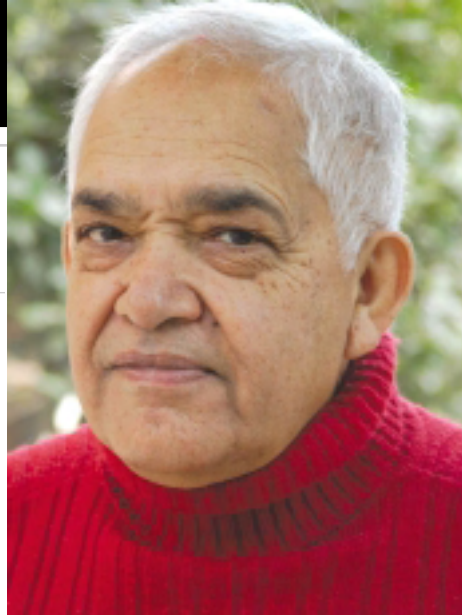


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Old Hand

Tara Nath Sharma, known popularly as Tanasarma, has a command over both the English and Nepali languages that is probably unmatched in the Nepali literary world. Over a career spanning four decades—his first book “Namaste” in Nepali was published in 2018 B.S.—he has written a total of 98 books, in Nepali



MM/SS

and English. Sharma, who holds a doctorate in linguistics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has tried to build bridges between the two vastly different languages he writes in. He has till date translated seven Nepali books into English and two in English into Nepali. Recently his translation of BP Koirala’s novelette “Sumnima” in English was published in “Bagar,” a literary magazine. Dhriti Bhatta talked to Sharma about his association with BP, translations and the difficulties they present.

Why did you choose to translate “Sumnima”?

BP Koirala has many brilliant works. Each of BP’s creations is special, like the novel “Tin Ghumti,” which focuses on existentialism and “Modi Ayin,” which, unlike the original Mahabharata epic lauding the heroism of the Kauravs and the Pandavs, looks at the horrendous aspects of war through a soldier’s keen eyes. But “Sumnima” is a classic; a novel like that has never been written before. It asks us to celebrate humanity and love Mother Earth—the sheer beauty of it. Merging humanity with spirituality makes the book a very interesting read.

You seem to be fascinated with BP as a writer...

I’ve always loved reading BP’s books. But the fact that I knew him personally makes me respect him even more. I first came in contact with him before the Panchayat system was instituted. At the time, I used to tutor one of his relatives at his place. More than teaching my pupil, I would end up discussing, at length, the books that he gave me. That

way, we used to exchange a lot of opinions. My literature was influenced by many of his ideas.

Weren’t you influenced politically as well?

Well, when BP and I talked, literature was always the central theme. We talked very little about politics. He did want me to go into politics, though. Many might be shocked to know that even BP followed Winston Churchill’s philosophy: to follow Marxism until the age of

I think the younger generation should get more engrossed in Nepali literature for the long-term continuity of our language

25. According to him, this would make an individual more enthusiastic and passionate. I followed that, too, and like BP, it did make me more fervent. I had even planned to contest for a public post in my native Ilam after I was 25. But unfortunately after BP was jailed during the Panchayat, those dreams were lost, and I focused all my attention on literature.

Coming back to translating, how difficult is it?

Translation is a tough job. While translating “Sumnima,” I had to turn to Sanskrit scholars to understand the nuances of the many Sanskrit texts in the book. It was important for me to stay true to the book’s spirit and, at the same time, try not to offend the cultural beliefs of the

west. This way, it was not only vital to concentrate on the language but on human sentiments and perspectives as well.

Do translated texts retain the essence of the original?

Well, most don’t. Take a rhyming Nepali poem, for example. How can the rhyme and rhythm be maintained while translating the poem into some other language? A ditto-grammatical translation is nigh impossible. However, that it is hard to do doesn’t mean you should not try. I try to project Nepal even through my translated English texts. Like the adage—“style is the man himself,” my love for my mother tongue is reflected in my English texts, which retain, if not all, some originality.

Have you translated “Sumnima” with a specific readership in mind?

My target audiences are foreigners. I don’t expect many Nepalis to read the translated version. After all, they can read the beautiful original itself. I want the people outside Nepal to read the translated version and appreciate the fact that great works of literature exist here as well.

What about the state of Nepali literature today?

With private schools sprouting all over the place, English literature is dominant. At a time when the world is dependent on English, I don’t think this is a big problem. Even countries like China have started to include English in their school curriculum. However, I think the younger generation should get more engrossed in Nepali literature for the long-term continuity of our language. **N**

Essays on Something and Nothing

Sometimes you find something. At other times, you encounter nothing.

BY NETRA ACHARYA

A Pond of Swans and Other Essays” is a compilation of 36 essays published in different literary magazines and newspapers. The author writes, “I have mentally divided them into roughly two equal sections. The first half of this collection is about nothing and the second half pretends to be about something.” And this is true. These essays—mostly ruminations on, and mental journeys into, various spheres of social and personal life—make pretensions of being about something and nothing.

In the essays, Devkota’s thoughts traverse diverse terrains—from philosophy to politics to literature to social awareness. Sharing his experience of standing in front of the American Embassy, in “Glocal Harassment: The Presence of America in Nepal,” he poignantly describes the kind of troubles Nepali are putting up with because of embassy policy. He expresses his anger against the embassy authority’s shooing people away from the footpath outside the embassy gate and questions if they have the right to do so. In the same essay, he talks about academics’ understanding and “misunderstanding” of the American Studies Program, which was launched some three years back.

“Education and the Women’s Uplift” reflects on instances of social evils from the perspective of women. While the cultural significance of women and their aspirations have featured high on the list in academic and intellectual discussion throughout the world, Nepali women are still confined to the kitchen and the cowshed and deprived of educational opportunities. Worse, they are accused of being witches and beaten to death. The essay argues in favor of a national battle against corruption and of all forms of exploitation, and not just against male domination. The essayist thinks, some-

what cheekily, that Nepali males are as exploited as females and “sometimes even more so because of illiteracy and ignorance.”

“A King of the People” is a personal reaction to the “royal massacre” of June 1, 2001. King Birendra could feel the spirit of the times; his declaration in 1979 of a national referendum, which eventually took place in 1980, is a proof of it, says the writer. The smooth political transition from a party-less Panchayat to a multiparty constitutional monarchy speaks of the King’s courage, his understanding of the aspirations of his people and his awareness of global trends and movements. He loved the people, and the people in turn loved and worshipped him. He was at ease with the people, walking in the streets of Kathmandu without his bodyguards flanking him. This down-to-earth attitude was what the people liked him for. As news of the

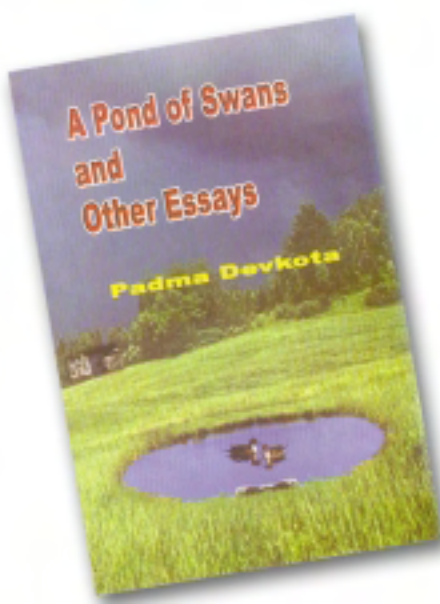
massacre flashed on TV screens, so grief-stricken was the writer on the gruesome death of the King that he wished that someone had displayed the dress of the King and counted the bullet holes in it.

“The Numerical Rhizome” analyzes the secrets behind numerical concepts. The author says, “Each number attaches itself to some fundamental concept of life and the world.” Zero as a circle represents naught or void from which creation begins. One represents the absolute or the unique; two, the creative dualism. Three is the trinity—the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost—in the west and Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwor in the east.

Troubled by the “the scum on the surface of a thick, black, stagnant semi liquid they call Bagmati” where he had to bury his mother’s remains, the writer ponders, in “Cremation Right,” on the ways of cleaning the river. Among other things, he suggests the use of electric furnaces to incinerate the dead, though this may “initially disturb the Hindustically (sic) cultured mind.” Perhaps the most beautifully written piece, “A Pond of Swans” is a kind of travelogue that describes “a real life experience that comes out of travel and the exposure to Nepali life.”

More than half of the essays in the book are related to literature. Some of these essays focus on the works and lives of authors like Laxmi Prasad Devkota, Kedar Man Vyathit, Balkrishna Sama, Mohan Koirala, Madhav Prasad Devkota, Madhav Prasad Ghimire, while others focus on the English literature as well as the activities taking place to promote the Nepali language. These essays show that the writer is at home talking about both English and Nepali literature.

Primarily a poet, Padma Devkota writes with clarity. He shuns abstract ideas in his writings. His language is smooth and, in an understated way, good. He uses quotes and excerpts of poems liberally to bolster his arguments without offsetting the balance of his language. The readers drift with the flow of his language. Sometimes they get something; at other times they encounter nothing. **N**



A Pond of Swans and Other Essays
by Padma Devkota
New Hira Books Enterprises (2004)
PAGES: 212
PRICE: Rs.195



The Killing Fields

There was a time in 1996-97 when many of us in the cities privately gave the Maoists grudging respect for articulating our failure as a society. Six years of parliamentary democracy had delivered very little: Living standards for most people had barely budged, solid policy initiatives were few and far between, and issues of social exclusion had been reduced to lip service from MPs and ministers during the perfunctory Zero Hour and annual budget speeches. Without effective institutions and a history of liberal values, we were, perhaps inevitably, held hostage to the avarice of corrupt officials. Where were the systemic checks and balances to avoid abuse of authority and the mechanisms to punish the corrupt and reflect the aspirations of an agrarian society and the poor peasantry?

In 1996, Sher Bahadur Deuba's government—his first of three—epitomized all the ills of democracy gone astray. His NC-RPP jumbo Cabinet gave the impression that no one was in charge, not least Deuba himself. Politics became an end in itself, a dirty game of survival where every single parliamentarian decided that all he wanted from his political life was to be a minister. There was no tomorrow, no political legacy to worry about. Deuba himself holds several dubious distinctions. He was prime minister when the Maoists decided to go underground in 1996; he was again prime minister when the government finally mobilized the Army against the Maoists in November 2001. And in October 2002, he became the first prime minister after 1990 to be sacked by the King—for "incompetence," no less.

As disenchantment with the failings of our leadership grew, it also became clear that the Maoists did not hold the moral high ground. By 2000, thousands of cases of Maoist atrocities had been documented: forcible conscription of

child soldiers, summary executions of those they suspected of spying for the government and pervasive extortion to support their fast-expanding party ranks. In time, Nepal's allies perceived the rebels as a serious security threat too, both to Nepal and the outside world.

A 2001 article in Frontline magazine expressed fear that there was growing coordination between Maoists in Nepal and those in the Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand. The April 14 massacre of 14 members of the Gram Raksha Dal, a voluntary group in the village of Belthu in Hazaribagh district in Jharkhand, was described as unprecedented. "Never before in the history of Jharkhand and Bihar has a 2,000-strong MCC [Maoist Communist Center] force taken part in such daring attack," Frontline said.

The western press discovered the Maoist problem soon afterwards. Scores of journalists flocked to Kathmandu in the wake of the royal massacre on June 1, 2001 and found that a lot more was happening in the country. Nepal has constantly been in the eye of the western press since, though not all the coverage has been accurate or nuanced. More often than not, the stories are grim and center around the challenges posed to the Nepali state by the Maoists.

Last week, the news was of the chilling toll of the "people's war." The Royal Nepal Army said 3,380 Maoists rebels had been killed in security operations since peace talks collapsed in August 2003; 336 of its own were also killed in the period. Most of the world didn't take notice of the toll in the wake of the more than 100,000 tsunami deaths.

**See Cover Story
Page 20**



Akhilesh

Akhilesh Upadhyay, Editor

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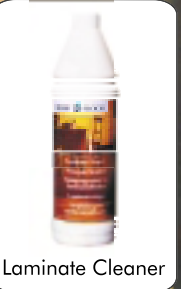
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