

## **IT WAS DIPENDRA.** Probe team finds smoking gun.

## **KIRAN NEPAL**

inally, it is official: Dipendra did it. Two weeks after the mass murder of Nepal's royal family, a high-level inquiry has concluded that Crown Prince Dipendra killed his father, mother, brother, sister, uncle, and three aunts in cold blood before shooting himself. Six other members of the royal family, including Queen Komal, were seriously injured in the Friday night massacre and are still in hospital.

The two-member commission led by Chief Justice Keshab Prasad Upadhaya and House Speaker Taranath Ranabhat presented the findings to King Gyanendra Thursday evening. In a function televised nationwide, the king untied the blue velvet cover of the report and read three pages of its summary before handing it over to Prime Minister Girija Koirala. "I am giving this report to you so that you can undertake necessary actions according to the constitution and prevalent laws, and to present the facts to the citizens," the king told Koirala. Then he thanked the Chief Justice and the Speaker, requesting them to "take this report to the people immediately."

An hour later, Ranabhat presented a summary live on television and radio to a raucous press conference at the parliament secretariat. Rifles, magazines, cartridges, boots and military fatigues were on display. Most details confirm early media reports about a drugged and drunk prince going berserk with automatic weapons, mowing down family members.

New facts emerging from the report: • Dipendra was intoxicated even before the family dinner, and was carried up to his room where he smoked a joint with hashish and an unidentified black substance

- Dipendra made several calls to Devyani Rana in a slurred voice, she was worried and asked his orderly to check if he was okay
- Orderly and governess found him on the floor, trying to take his shirt off, he vomited
- Soon after, Dipendra donned military combat fatigues and carried a 9 mm MP-5K submachinegun, a 5.56 mm M-16 commando with laser targeting and a 12 bore French shotgun. Two 9 mm revolvers were also found, one was used.
- He fired at the ceiling and the wall, then at his father, King Birendra
- He changed guns and returned to spray his father with the submachine gun, killing and wounding family members

• He returned to spray the survivors once more, killing his sister Sruti

- He then backed out into the garden, eye witnesses saw a woman in a red sari (Queen Aishwarya) and Prince Nirajan hurriedly following him there
- There were gunshots from the garden, Queen Aishwarya's body was found on a landing and Nirajan's on the lawn. Brain tissue, bits of bone and blood covered the area • Dipendra was found near the bridge, still alive and wheezing.
- Most members of the royal family were declared dead on arrival at the Chhauni hospital at about 2115 on Friday night. Sruti died at 2155, Dhirendra and Dipendra two days later.
- When brought to hospital Dipendra was still wearing boots, black leather gloves and army fatigues.
- Many questions were left unanswered, but Ranabhat said many questions would be answered in the 200-page report. The panel interviewed royal survivors, eyewitnesses, examined hospital records, lab analyses, forensic evidence and mobile phone records. It was not clear whether post-mortems had been carried out on the dead before cremation. Not

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Prasad Upadhaya . Guns and a trunk with clothes in foreground.

all the blood reports, fingerprints or ballistic analyses were in. There were more than 60 specialists who helped in the seven-day investigation. An internal army probe into security is also expected.

Although determining the motive was not in the team's terms of reference, several sources have confirmed that Dipendra's decision to wed Devyani Rana, over which there was a major disagreement between him and his parents was the reason. They said there had been violent arguments in the past between Dipendra and his immediate family members over his choice of bride-to-be.

The committee asked Nepal's ambassador to India, Bhekh Thapa to talk to Devyani in

India, and heard her taped statement in which she said details of her relationship with Dipendra were a "personal matter".

Security was tight in Kathmandu as the committee presented its report to King Gyanendra. More than 1,000 leftist activists have been rounded up. The probe panel's report is diametrically opposed to the conspiracy theory put forward by the Maoists and some left parties, who were holding mass meetings all week to convince the public. This position is nearly identical with the Maoists', whose leader Prachanda in two statements praised King Birendra's and said the killings were a conspiracy against a "nationalist king".

#### by KUNDA DIXIT

trickling out within hours of the shooting from eyewitnesses and close relatives. But this information never got to the greater public. Indeed, until the probe panel findings came

out Thursday night, no government and palace source had actually told Nepalis that royal family members were murdered. If this is what you do, can you really blame the public for believing in conspiracies?

We have to blame the Orwellian information controllers at the two durbars, and a politically-motivated media.







COMMENT If truth be told

wo weeks after the ghastly slaughter at Naryanhiti Palace, the findings of the probe panel have finally brought us closer to the truth. But, like a mirage, the truth keeps receding the closer we get to it as an intrigue-obsessed public finds reality too hard to

was what really happened.

Citizens deprived of credible and accurate information have grown to believe more readily in a complex untruth than in a simple truth. We will not let the truth get in the way of a juicy conspiracy theory.

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swallow. They are swayed by the government media's secretiveness, the private media's proclivity for either self-censorship or politically-inspired sensationalism, and the fixation of our Panchavat-era mandarins with information control. We are trapped by the lies.

Official media have been habitual liars on behalf of the government of the day. It is a habit hard to break, and 12 years of democracy has not changed that. All we did was play doleful music, broadcast bland official pronouncements, and vacuous news bulletins that carried lengthy messages from foreign heads of state. We did precious little to quash wild rumours. It took decades for our official electronic media to forfeit public trust, they cannot regain it overnight. The result was that when a crown prince ran amok and killed his entire family there was little Nepal TV or Radio Nepal could do to convince the public that

We insist on believing what a Bollywood actor never said, but we steadfastly refuse to believe what an heir to the throne actually did.

Post-massacre public reaction came in three categories:

- those who have the access to information and contacts in high places, and know the truth
- those who do not have access to this information, • and find it hard to believe the truth
- those who know the truth, but find it inconvenient, • and therefore peddle conspiracy theories that suit their agenda.

For the first few days after the massacre the only people who knew what really happened were members of our traditionally secretive royal family and those close to them. So the truth remained a secret, locked up in vaults of silence. Bits of facts had started

Anywhere else in the world, the media's role is to find the facts that point to the truth and then look for an explanation, but most of our politicos and press did the opposite: we looked for a conspiracy theory that fit our political posture and cooked up the facts to fit it. Now that the truth is out, it is clear that the conspiracy theories were themselves a conspiracy.

The officialdom responsible for these serious lapses looked for scapegoats and found the editor and publishers of Kantipur, and in an overreaction that smacked of vendetta, they locked them up.

The future is tinged with uncertainty, and the lesson from this crisis is clear: restoring the credibility and trust of our press by unshackling the state-owned media from government control. We must foster a professional and responsible press committed to pluralism and independence. One day, the truth will set us free.







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## KE GARDEKO?

Those were the last words King Birendra spoke as he collapsed in the billiard room on Friday, 1 June. Shock, rather than pain, was writ large on his face. More than the shock of being shot, it was the shock of knowing who had just shot him.

What have you done, he murmured, as he slowly slumped to the floor. Nepalis will also want an answer to that haunting question as they agonise over what happened that night. As individual citizens, and as a nation, we will have to come to terms with this unspeakable slaughter and move on with our lives in the days ahead. We will soon know what happened, we will be told in excruciating detail of the exact sequence in which the royals were slain, we will get the forensic and ballistic evidence, we will hear clinical descriptions of how many bullets, and about the nature of the fatal wounds. There may even be hints as to motive.

But no one is going to be able to explain what was going on in the head of this young man, and what psychological or chemically-induced rage made him convert what he may have seen as a personal dead-end into a dead-end for his family and a kingdom that he would have inherited. Nepalis will ponder this cataclysmic event and what it means for the direction our society, culture and polity are headed in. An unimaginable tragedy like this isn't just a lesson in morality, it turns our beliefs and value system on its head. Where does insanity end and evil begin? An entire generation of Nepalis alive today will carry this as a burden on its collective conscience. There are no answers: just a numbing sense of the senselessness of it all. And finally, it will only be the inexorable passage of time that will give us the distance from this moment.

Some of us will try to find solace in the Ramayana and Gita and look for parallels, but we will not find anything there that approaches the magnitude of this crime: the cold blooded murder of parents, the slaughter of siblings and relatives. Even our holy books didn't foresee senseless carnage on such a wild scale-not among the warlike gods of our pantheon, not among lesser mortals. But the Gita does have a message that is relevant: how to gain wisdom from suffering. The epic battles of Kurukshetra, the jealousies, greed and vanity that afflicted our gods bring them down to a human level so that we can recognise our own failings in them. The Gita explores the limits of an individual's free will, the dilemmas of reconciling conflict when both sides are convinced they are right, it seeks an explanation for the suffering of innocents and responsibility of the rich and powerful towards the weak and the voiceless. Our holy books, like Greek tragedies, bestow upon readers a sense of relief by catharsis. They give us a glimpse of the abyss, so we do not take the plunge.

With time the conspiracy theories will also lose their scornful and cynical edge. But like theories of the third gunman behind the grassy knoll in the JFK assassination, or the bombing of Rajiv Gandhi, they will never really go away. Our future school text books will tell of an epochal slaughter of royals in the year 2001 that dramatically changed the course of Nepal's history. But decades hence there will still be rumours.

The fact that our democratic institutions have withstood this crisis more or less intact is an indication that despite our deep sense of insecurity and loss of self-esteem, our multi-party setup is much stronger than we might have thought. Our pluralistic democracy, free press, our civil-military relations, the government-palace combine took a major battering, but the institutions of democracy showed a hidden resilience. Let us not underestimate the power of our democracy to survive and adapt.

by CK LAL

# Keep us informed

"Completely unbelievable is relatively more believable than the scarcely believable. If one has to lie, tell a big lie rather than a small lie."

hen the curse of history strikes the angst of geography, debris from the collision is scattered far and wide. No event in Nepali history, not even the royal coronation of 1974 brought in as much media attention to this country as did the royal massacre last week. Twenty-five years ago, the paparazzi had to be lured with the promise of celebrity royalty in Shangri La. This time, they came on their own, attracted to royal gore like vultures to carrion. When hotels are full of hacks instead of tourists, you know your country is doomed.

STATE OF THE STATE

This was archetypal parachute journalism. Barring a few well-informed writers with an empathy for and understanding of this complicated land, the rest behaved like the US Marines beaching on some remote shore. They don't call them ambulance chasers for nothing. They beg, bully, buy their way to the most bizarre sound bites possible, get their talking heads, their pan of tyre-burning, and then they're off-to Basilan, or Aceh, or Gujarat.

In Kathmandu, it was difficult to get anyone to talk, so they filed on the curse of Gorakhnath, the conspiracy theories, sordid second-hand rumours of a royal love affair, dark predictions of court astrologers, feuds between nobles of the same clan. So what if the cameras set off a few riots just by their presence? ("Great footage we got today on the

Celebrations about the coming of age of Nepali media, it seems now, were rather premature. Nepali media is still at the bottom of the learning curve. The good news is that from here, the only way to go is up. It's never too late to begin.

This was the story: a god-king on a weekend family soiree, a queen with a mind of her own, a lovelorn trigger-happy crown prince, a prince-turned-commoner, another prince barely out of his teens, and a beautiful, intelligent princess who liked to paint. Other assorted royalty enjoying a family get together inside a maximum security palace. Enter the Prince of Darkness. This is the stuff not just of Greek tragedy, but an epic of Mahabharatan proportions. Dhritrastra, the blind king of Kurus in Mahabharata, had a factual reporter in Sanjay and a riveting scribe in Vyasa. But when tragedy struck us in Nepal, most of our journalists were caught napping. Most snored their way through the mourning period, abdicating the terrain to foreign satellite and cable TV and radio which had a field day and did our work for us.

Given the complete lack of information in the days that followed the massacre, Nepal was no different than the days of the Kot Parba. The principle source of information for most people was the bush telegraph. In the age of satellite and Internet, we relied on word of mouth. Radio Nepal maintained a screaming silence for nearly twelve hours after the tragedy, and even then gave official announcements in officialese. No one believed a word they were saying. Commenting on the sorry state of affairs, Hem Bahadur Bista, the former chief of Sagarmatha FM and once head of Nepal TV had this to say: "FM stations simply tagged their services to Radio Nepal and went back to sleep. Even the This is Radio Nepal' announcement was broadcast over supposedly independent FM channels!" The print media, with little or no access to the drama unfolding inside the palace, were reduced to recycling reports from Indian and foreign cable TV channels. Ace Nepali reporters seemed to have no sources of information inside the palace. Part of the explanation may lie in the tight control Narayanhiti maintains over the flow of information as a matter of policy. After all, even the prime minister was informed of the killings a full two hours after it happened. But that is a feeble excuse. Journalists who pride themselves upon accurately forecasting cabinet decisions days in advance should have deep throats within the palace-military complex. They tried to make up for it by culling juicy bits of bazaar rumours and serving them as reports and analysis.

more than the notorious opinion piece by Baburam Bhattarai. It was Soviet-era propaganda at its best, and proved the maxim: 'since the completely unbelievable is relatively more believable than the scarcely believable, it makes more sense, if one has to lie, to tell a big lie rather than a small lie". Baburam's piece was untruthful, in bad taste, and came at a volatile time. You could question the editor's judgement. But come on, Home Minister, to put him in jail? By its inept handling of the Kantipur affair, the government has helped shift the focus of attention from a specific instance of incompetence of our national media to the larger issue of freedom of the press. The fact that our so-called national dailies are little more than broadsheet versions of yellow rags of yesteryear has now been eclipsed by this needless controversy.

Here is a government that muddled with the state media, and is now trying to distract attention by meddling with the private media, giving the impression that it is muzzling the press. Refusing to learn from their own mistakes is the defining characteristic of Nepali politicians, and the Ministry of Information and Communication has blundered once again by insisting that foreign journalists acquire accreditation before reporting. In this day and age?

Regulating the press is not only impossible, it is pointless and counterproductive. It gets the rumour mills going, and information-starved people begin to believe the wildest rumours, the wilder the better. The only institution that can regulate the press is its own professionalism. That will take time to develop, and there are no short-cuts to learning by doing and committing one's own mistakes. By imprisoning media, the government makes matters worse by pushing the press to manufacturing self-justification rather than carrying out self-examination. As for the palace, the lesson of the crisis is clear: the traditional opacity of the royals is an anachronism that weakens constitutional monarchy. It must open up in future if it is to maintain its dignity. Only transparency can stop the domestic yellow rags and the international gutter press from displaying dirty royal linen. In India's countryside, villagers cope with black humour. Whenever there is a caste massacre, the first to arrive are the vultures, followed closely by reporters, then the police, and finally the priests. So it is here too. We will know when the cameras of Zee and Star and CNN have finally left the Valley (following Mr Sapkota and the elephant-borne ghosts of dead kings) that at last things are getting back to normal.

15 - 21 JUNE 2001 NEPALI TIMES

## NO DEMOCRACY WITHOUT INFORMATION, NO INFORMATION WITHOUT DEMOCRACY.

The street violence that followed the royal tragedy were driven by three factors: spontaneous shock and anger, an official information blackout, and political forces inciting violence. A post-mortem of this crisis yields one important lesson: the reason it is so difficult to convince citizens about the truth is that official sources of information have lost all credibility. Officialdom squandered its integrity because when it did come out to tell the public what had happened, it lied. Not once, not twice, but repeatedly. They lied to correct their previous lies. Their silence was a lie.

Our information machines are governed by Panchayat-era mandarins who believe in treating the public's right to information with contempt, and insulting their intelligence and common sense with outdated mourning rituals of requiem music and news blackout for 13 days. This is why it was so easy for extremists who infiltrated the crowds to inflame passions. The people were ready to believe anything, but the truth. And putting journalists in jail does not help. In the marketplace of ideas, it is much more clever to win the people over with information that is more credible, accurate and independent than what the other side is saying.

Let us be clear about it: democracy and free press must safeguard each other. You can't have one by undermining the other.

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It didn't help, of course, that here was reality at its most utterly unbelievable. If facts are so grotesque, why invent fiction? This was a royal whodunit that made Dodi and Diana sound like a fairy tale. But even then, we were not satisfied, and we invented wild conspiracies to embellish an already extraordinary tragedy. But if the foreign media was obnoxious by its actions, the Nepali media was obnoxious by its inaction.



Nothing epitomises this frame of mind



### COMMENTARY

by HARI ROKA

ever before in the 250-year history of Nepal's royal palace has there been a catastrophe of this magnitude. In the aftermath, there are three streams of opinion about what happened and why:

- A streak of irrationality in the family A conspiracy within the royal
- family A combination of internal and
- external conspiracies

The high-level probe panel is due to present its finding shortly. If the first theory comes out to be true, the country may not have to live through similar traumas in future. But if the second or third scenarios are right, then this massacre will have marked just the beginning of a series of future upheavals. Either way, the killings of 1 June have already pushed Nepal towards a new political transition. Twelve years after the restoration of democracy, we are now moving into uncharted territory-there will be new alliances and new polarisations. We will be getting hints about the nature of these shifts from the political realignments in the coming days.

The stability of our political system, our economic and social development will be strongly affected by this new balance of power between the palace, Nepali Congress and the left. This triangular play of forces began 12 years ago after the people's movement ushered in democracy and a constitutional monarchy. Post 1990, new ideas gained voice: gender equity, the language movement, social and economic justice. Because of new freedoms, political parties allowed these new demands to come up, but did precious little to fulfil them.

The three-way tussle between the palace, the NC and the left has been complicated in the past five years by the entry of a fourth force: the phenomenal rise of the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) and its "peoples' war". The uneasy equilibrium between the three postdemocratic forces was already going off balance. The role of the royal palace

## **Nepal's tripod of stability** was gaining importance in inverse

proportion to the disarray and disunity within the NC leadership, the inability of the mainstream left to articulate the needs of the masses, and the indecisiveness of the smaller parties. The tug-o-war between Singha Durbar and Narvanhiti in the past year over the deployment of the army to fight the Maoists was one indication of this greater royal assertiveness. The people, for their part, were getting increasingly disillusioned with the decay of democracy and there was an unexpressed and growing desire that the palace step in within the framework of the constitutional role of the monarch. And then this happened.

Nepal's traditional political forces have been caught completely unawares by this unexpected and unimaginable tragedy. The decimation of King Birendra's lineage within the royal family has weakened the palace, and shaken its triangular relationship with the other two political forces. It is going to take some time for the palace to regain its previous stature and power. It may therefore be forced to interfere less in day-to-day politics and play more of a coordinating role in keeping democracy on track.

King Gyanendra would know that even if the political parties are disunited, weak and in disarray their very presence spared the country from total anarchy during this crisis. They have worked as a safety valve to release the public's grief and anger. The result has been that despite an information dampdown and two days of street violence the Nepali people in general showed remarkable composure, tolerance and maturity in dealing with this unprecedented calamity.

If there is one clear lesson from this, it is that in times of crisis there is a serious threat of instability if even one of the three power centres is weakened considerably. Worse, if two of these power centres are

Even if the political parties are disunited, weak and in disarray their very presence spared the country from total anarchy during this crisis. Democracy worked as a safety valve to release the public's grief and anger.

weakened then it is quite possible that there will be a fatal imbalance in the political equilibrium. It is therefore imperative for the royal palace in its weakend state to do everything to support Nepal's democratic pluralism. By supporting the constitution in word and deed, the palace will be strengthening itself and restoring Nepal's tripod of political stability. Otherwise, opportunists and conspirators will thrive in the uncertainty that will follow.

## Nepali Congress

Even before the present crisis, the ruling party was already torn to shreds by factionalism and infighting. The party had lost its direction, there was an ideological vacuum, and a rigidity that had made this once-monolithic party a fragile shell. The Nepali Congress has been trying to manipulate the triangular political power balance by allying with one of other forces to demolish the third, and was brittle because of its own autocratic leadership. That is why it has not been able to project its image to the public as a party that can deliver on its election promises, and it has floundered seriously during the present royal crisis. If the party does not resolve its internal strife, work to restore the equilibrium with the palace and the left opposition, and bringing other political forces into the fold under a minimum programme then the Nepali Congress may find its very existence in peril. It will be doomed to repeat its past mistakes and and it will

## **CPN (Unified Marxist-Leninist)**

The main opposition left had been showing its most ineffective and indecisive character even before this crisis. It was not fulfilling its role as a creative and strong opposition party. So, when the royal massacre took place, its response has been haphazard and contradictory—as shown by its backing out of the high-level probe panel after initially agreeing to it. For its own sake, the party needs to formulate a policy consensus and bring like-minded parties into its fold. If it doesn't do that, and the UML tries to camouflage its internal weaknesses, and keeps on unnecessarily disturbing the power balance then it will be doing itself and the country serious damage.

## CPN (Maoists)

After appearing as the fourth political force in the past five years, the Maoists exposed themselves badly with statements they issued after the royal massacre. On the one hand, the Maoists proved that earlier accusations that they had pro-palace leanings may not have been completely unfounded, and also that their avowed republicanism is a sham. They have shown classic immaturity characteristic of the ultraleft by disregarding the prevailing power equation and unilaterally calling for a leftist interim government. As the country teeters on the brink, it is now becoming more obvious that a resolution must be found within the present multi-party polity. If the Maoists' fail to recognise this and push the country towards more instability, then it may be fatal for them and there will nothing left for them, but to repent.

Try as we might, we cannot hide the fact that Nepal is one of the poorest and least equitable countries in the world. There are serious challenges to surmount in the social, political, cultural and economic spheres. Neither the ruling party, nor the opposition seem to be serious about addressing these long-term problems. These are such serious

problems and solutions are required so urgently that a government, any government, cannot even start to solve them alone. And that is not just because of the present climate of bickering and partisanship. The lack of institutional development of the political parties, the personality cults within them, and their extreme shortsightedness and fecklessness make them even less capable of resolving the country's development crisis.

Nepal's monarchy therefore has a role to play in bringing political parties into line. It is imperative that the constitutional monarch take a more unabashed role to protect national sovereignty, to safeguard our borders, to keep the kingdom united, and to be a symbol of the common aspirations of all the Nepali people.

The aftermath of the royal massacre and the political uncertainty of the present demands that the two big parties (the Nepali Congress and the UML) show more maturity, accountability and greater internal democracy. The smaller parties also need to be less opportunistic and play a positive role. The last 12 years were a time of economic and social transition, and it was a wasted decade. Now, there is a time of political transition as well. This moment in the country's history needs to be tackled with responsibility, patience, faith and vision otherwise there will be nothing left to save. Divisiveness, disunity and distrust will only bring underdevelopment and loss of our independence.

Internal strife will foster external interference. Our territorial integrity, our existence as an independent nation state demands that political parties be resolute, patient and tolerant. Otherwise, the next time history takes a leap, the nation may cease to exist and none of us may be able to call ourselves Nepalis anymore. ♦

Hari Roka is an independent leftist analyst.



I he post-palace massacre scenario in Nepal is reminiscent of Jorge Luis Borges' imaginary planet of Tlon, where truth is what anyone fancies. In the case of Nepal, for something to pass off as a gospel truth, it has to satisfy just one arbitrary condition: accord with the conspiracy theory that the tragic palace massacre was masterminded by the new King Gyanendra and/or his son Paras. If this condition is fulfilled, the most outlandish gossip gets quickly exalted to the rank of doctrinal truths. Everything else that does not is condemned as a heresy with equal alacrity.

Given that the Nepali people seem to have already divined the secret morphology of the massacre, the nation is heading towards a culde-sac from where it may never emerge. For any investigation that stops short of accusing King Gyanendra and/or his son will be rejected as a blasphemy, a coverup, to be greeted with radical scepticism of the sort currently being bandied around by most people. Therein lies the rub.

Every reader of detective stories knows that the key to a problem lies in dispassionate thinking. The worst blunder that a detective can make

is to jump to a conclusion before investigating the facts properly. The most plausible hypothesis is the one that leaves the fewest number of loose ends dangling. Equally important is the question of motive. From these considerations, the conspiracy theories swirling around Nepali communities everywhere appear to be the least plausible as far as hypotheses go.

### Ram Limbu Sydney

We are deeply saddened by the untimely and tragic demise of King Birendra and his family. On behalf of our school, we send, from the bottom of our hearts, condolences to the royal family and the people of Nepal. We pray for the departed souls to rest in peace.

Priya D and Divya D Dewan St. Joseph's College Darjeeling

Although we are born and brought up in India, being Nepalis we have great respect and love for the king and the Kingdom of Nepal. And the news on June 2 was shocking and unbelievable. We mourn along with our people in Nepal. May the departed souls rest in eternal peace and may all of us Nepalis have the

courage to bear this tragedy. Pravatika Rai and friends Darjeeling

Democracy is supposed to ensure freedom of speech, expression and information . So, what is the government trying to prove by cutting off news channels? When Nepal TV or Radio were silent, people had no option but to depend on other sources of information about what was happening in their own nation. What kind of democracy is this anyway?

PR Tamang Rabi Bhawan

This is to compliment you on your editorial "I may die, let my nation live on" (#46). Objective, well written, to the point, and absolutely true. It would be a great help if our politicians could take this wisdom to heart. Rajeev Thapa via email

I am a proud Nepali, and feel belittled by the last two sentences in your editorial (#46): "They must remember that they need to first save the country. If the nation ceases to exist, they will have nothing to fight over." Is Nepal such a flimsy country

that it risks oblivion every time something happens? We are going through a traumatic period, but what has that to do with the country's existence? Nepal has been around as a country for centuries, and many

become weaker and weaker.



terrible things have happened in our history.

This "nation in jeopardy" refrain is a popular one with Nepal's jittery establishment who are quick to raise this bogey whenever their snug position is jolted. Nepal's strength is its people's faith, and their original cultures, languages and heritages. They are the reason Nepal has maintained its national identity for as long as it has.

## Arbind K Singh Kathmandu

via email

I would like to thank Daniel Lak of the Nepali Times and the BBC for his impartial and objective reporting of the horrendous events of 1 June. He is a shining example to our journalists and a true friend of the Nepali people in our time of need. His reporting has been free from the sensationalisation that some local and regional private media stoop to. A Rana

I would like to congratulate nepalitimes.com for being the first media to make us aware of the tragedy last Friday and giving us regular updates. But the truth is still hidden, and rumours and hearsay are

being spread. The national media is silent, the foreign media has been giving us indigestible news. Whom are we to believe? The recent arrest of a newspaper editor for using his rights to freedom of press highlights the fact that Nepal has a long way to go on the path of democracy. Expecting the truth, Pranu Singh

## by email

The royal massacre of 1 June is probably the most horrible and tragic event in the history of Nepal. I am still hoping that it is only a nightmare and when I wake up I will find our beloved king and the royal family out of harm's way. Reality hurts. But the nation must go on. We must subdue this ache, discard our petty differences in the greater interest of our nation, we must safeguard our national integrity and sovereignty and devote ourselves honestly and earnestly to the task of nation building. There cannot be a greater tribute to His late Majesty King Birendra.

Bijaya Bahadur Mali Chhetrapati

More letters on p. 4  $\Box$ 

In his column "A tribute to history" (#46) CK Lal laments "our education system ... the decadence of the middle class..." which supposedly "prompts people to run amok with guns ... " Lal, an otherwise perceptive and provocative columnist, has resorted to cant and cliches. I fail to see what the muchmaligned "middle class," our "values," and "religious moorings" (or lack thereof) have to do with the recent tragedy. Given the information we have so far from various reliable and "unofficial" sources, it appears that a distinctly nonmiddle class family's private discussion gone horribly wrong. Our respected and exalted royalty has received the best education in the world, formally at educational institutions and at the royal court. We can conclude that proper moral values and etiquette were also imparted to them. Despite being the creme de la creme, despite even intimitation (or is it "imitation") of divinity, there was no guarantee that our royals would emerge as perfect human beings. Alas, they are human and make mistakes. In this case.

perhaps one of them committed a terrible and irreversible one.

### Rajendra Khadka Baneswor

As former long-time resident of Nepal, I was deeply shocked and saddened by the unbelievable news of the demise of HM King Birendra and other members of the royal family. May their souls rest in peace. Listening to Radio Nepal's account over the Internet of the installation ceremonies of HM King Gyanendra, I am sadly reminded of the coronation of King Birendra in 1975. I recall the very pleasant and frank discussion about Nepal's prospects and problems we had here during a meeting with HM King Dipendra two years ago. Like all foreigners who have had the privilege to live

## these difficult times. Michael Witzel

## Department of Sanskrit & Indian Studies Harvard University

I try to keep updated on events in Nepal even though I have now been away for over three years. The constant and petty bickerings of our so-called democratic leaders, the rampant corruption that has become a norm, and the growing insurgency from the havenots in the guise of Maoists have disillusioned me. Instead of taking one tiny step forward towards genuine progress and development, we seem to relish in taking two steps backward towards anarchy and chaos. My disappointment was heightened by the recent turn of events. The regicide that has deprived us of perhaps the most popular monarch in our turbulent history will haunt us for long. But nobody can undo the damage. Instead, we should perhaps unite in finding ways to prevent such disasters from recurring. Let this be the time for all Nepalis, beginning with the newly enthroned monarch, to reflect upon our many past errors to be strengthen our resolve for a better future. If we consider ourselves true, law-abiding citizens, we must uphold the constitution and recognise King Gyanendra as the legitimate successor.

He has been considered a hard-liner in the past, ergo his unpopularity. But, in a "hallai halla ko desh", who can really substantiate this? Should he indeed turn out to be the dictator as assumed , we, the people, shall no doubt be able to once again unite against any erosion of our basic rights. We should give our new ruler a chance to prove his mettle. In an ethnically diverse nation such as ours, we certainly need an institution that is commonly revered. That institution has so far proven to be the monarchy. Let us give our new monarch an opportunity to show us whether he is a uniter or a divider.

## Deep Lamichhane New Jersey, USA

The best way to mourn the royal demise is "not to declare holidays

our departed royals, to show our genuine commitment to national unity, revival, peace, and prosperity. Mourning is important, but we have outdated mourning methods.

#### Rajeeb Satyal Baluwatar

We are very shocked by the recent tragedy in the Kathmandu royal palace. We offer the relatives, the government and the people of Nepal our deeply felt sympathy and wish them courage and strength in their efforts to cope with this great bereavement.

Dr GK Mitrasingh General Secretary, International Council for Friends of Nepal The Netherlands

Lost in a myriad of emotions anger, loss, grief and overwhelming uncertainty— Nepalis are still in a state of shock. I, too, have been trying to come to terms to what has happened, and it saddens me that we could not ensure that our late king's final journey to Pashupati had the honour and dignity due to him. It was humiliating to observe people shouting slogans, running wild, being divisive and irresponsible. We have lost a King, let's not lose his vision. Charu Chadha Rizal. Kathmandu

I left Nepal on 6 June, and made my way to the airport through burning tyres, rock littered streets, and tear-gas laden air. It was hard to believe that this was the Nepal I have loved for so many years. The tears in my eyes were not from the teargas, but for the future of Nepal, and the dreams that evaporated in such a short time. Thank you for your newspaper, and may the gods stand by your side.

> D. Michael Van De Veer Hanalei, Hawaii

We are still searching for what really happened. Thank you for publishing the special edition of the Nepali Times (#46)—especially the moving picture of King Birendra on the back page. It symbolised the hope and inspiration that springs from this unimaginable tragedy. **Prazolla Shahi** 

Kathmandu



### We offer our prayers and thoughts for His Late Majesty King Birendra's soul, a gentle sovereign who believed in peace. We offer our prayers for the souls of the royal family tragically taken on that darkest of Fridays. But it is time for Nepalis to look for a new beginning, for peace, King Birendra's legacy. Let us protect a Nepal we still have with His Majesty King Gyanendra.

Priadarshani University of Arkansas, USA

Please try to give us the true information behind this massacre. It is very hard to believe that crown prince could kill all of this beloved family. I am trying to convince myself 1,000 times, but it is really hard to believe. The truth will be our great tribute to our late king.

#### B Adhikari London

Like so many people across the world, I am deeply shaken by the sorrow and unspeakable tragedy that has befallen my beloved Nepal. I feel helpless. But writing this letter has eased my heart a tiny bit.

Sue Morrow Flanagan Ossining, NY, USA

We are pelting stones, chanting slogans against new monarch, making ourselves a subject matter of foreign media's breaking news. We base our anger on rumours because we have been deprived of information. We must be mature and wise. If we take part in violent rallies believing the Indian media, we will destroy our own country. Let us stay united to build a better Nepal. Subindra Bogati

## Patan

Now is not the time to take advantage of this national crisis to further self-interest. His Majesty King Gyanendra's address to the nation was wise and well-meaning. We must understand that the events of the past few days have been as difficult, if not more, for him. Besides having to deal with the personal grief of having lost so many family

## 15-21 JUNE 2001 NEPALI TIMES

make it any more difficult for him and ourselves. We wanted the truth and the truth has been promised. Hypocrisy and shirking from responsibilities is not going to help. We must rise above our petty differences and come together as a unified nation, not allowing ourselves to be misquided by false information. Let us not forget that the issue at stake here is Nepal's sovereignty, democracy and future. Astha Thapa by email

I hope Nepali Times will take a leadership role in fighting the spread of disinformation, recognising the dangerous, destabilising effects rumours could have. I am always amazed by the ability of the average Nepali to find conspiracy and treachery in the most mundane of news. At such an emotional time, people will be looking for explanations which are more acceptable than the horrible truth. As journalists, I hope you will see your role not only as reporting what is said, but also evaluating it and discrediting comments born of pain, disbelief, or a desire to protect. You could become a voice of reason and truth. Maybe you should step back from absolute journalistic impartiality in this crisis and through editorials and critical journalism based on facts help the Nepali people slowly and honestly come to terms with this horrible tragedy.

Mark Ludwick by email

We would like to extend our heartfelt condolence on tragic death of His Majesty King Birendra, Her Majesty Queen Aisharwya, King Dipendra and other royal family members. We pray to the Almighty to grant us courage and patience. We also pray King Gyanendra be given the courage to unite the hearts of all Nepalis.

Raja Ram Giri

and work in Nepal for some time, I wish the Nepali people strength and unity in and take people away from work" but to work harder to take country to prosperity, to fulfill the dreams of members, he now has to shoulder the responsibilities of a monarch. Let us not Friends of Britain and Nepal London

#### HERE AND THERE

# A free, democratic country

t seems unlikely that the horrific events at the Royal on the 1st of June can ever be fogotten or reconciled in the minds of Nepalis. Time heals but scars remain. But lessons can be learned at all levels and I wonder if the most important, especially in the aftermath of the killings, isn't that democracy cannot co-exisit with restirctions on information. The mishandling of the flow of informatoin to the public has produced immense frustration and all sorts of wild conspiracy theories. The rumour mill is working overtime. And the longer that the authorities wait before coming clean on everything they know, and I mean everthing, the worse it will be for this country.

A society that is not trusted enough by its elite to be told the truth will respond with anger and belief in the improbable. The curtain of privacy around the royal family has been ripped aside in the rudest and most tragic manner possible. The full and insensitive glare of the international media has been focused on the drawing rooms and personal lives of Nepal's first family. Many people here don't like it, but that is neither here nor there.

The British tabloid press, Indian satellite television news, gossip magazines, all these have their own dynamic, and a strong notion of what their audience want. They will get their story, no matter who gets hurt or offended in the process and it makes little sense to protest or beat your head against the wall.

The way to cope with the sensation seeking hordes that fly around the world

There is no democracy without freedom of expression

looking for other peoples' miseries is to have an open and comprehensively fair society where hypocrisy or wrongdoing is exposed on a local level, by the local media. Newspapers, radio stations and yes, television, needs to be free to investigate problems at all levels of society, and to publish and be damned, with only libel, slander and truthfulness as parameters. Potential problems, even in lofty revered institutions, can be headed off and resolved before they boil over, only if there's information available and informed public debate. The head-in-the-sand approach doesn't work. Even ostriches don't do it.

Arresting the editor and executives of the country's most popular newspaper at a time of unprecedented crisis was foolhardy and plays straight into the hands of Nepal's enemies. If someone steps over the bounds, the first option of a healthy, self-confident state should be a word in the ear of the offending party, not a policeman's truncheon or a jail cell. Requiring allegedly free and private FM stations to cease all programming for a week only feeds the rumour mill and sense that something grand and evil is being cooked up to conceal the truth. Government ministers who disappear for days at a time, and refuse to take phone calls from the press, do themselves or democracy no favours.

This country will recover from the horror and tragedy at the beginning of this month, though it will never be the same. I am impressed beyond measure by the resilience and perspective I see all around me, in the capital and in the hinterland. People feel the loss of a beloved king and his family at a very personal level. But they cope even as they grieve. They raise their children, get back to work and by doing so, they build the country. These are not frightened, immature, untrustworthy, panic-prone lemmings who must be protected from vicious and unpalatable truths. These are people who are ready for a Freedom of Information act, a lively, private media sector in broadcasting and newspapers that tell them everything that is going wrong, and right, at the moment.

Nepalis should not be getting their news about national tragedy from international broadcasters or the Internet. They should hear it on Nepal Television, Space Time Network, Sagarmatha and K.A.T.H. FM and in the press. To sweep the unsavoury details of this trauma under some notional rug is to dishonour its victims. Democracy and freedom of information. Ponder those two concepts in the coming days and weeks, and remember, you can't have one without the other.  $\blacklozenge$ 

## by DANIEL LAK





If a crisis of this magnitude fails to unite our bickering politicos, what will?

#### **BINOD BHATTARAI**

he silver lining in the dark clouds that shroud the country today is that despite the enormous crisis that has befallen us, our democratic institutions have survived. They are rickety, but they were like that even before this tragedy struck. The royal successions have taken place in an orderly and legal fashion which in itself is surprising considering the fact that no one could have foreseen a massacre of this magnitude when the rules of succession were made. The army is in the barracks. The prime minister is in a shaky position, but what's so new about that? It is the democratic space

provided by the 1990 constitution that appears to have provided us the flexibility and the elasticity to deal with this crisis.

However, at any time during this transition things could have gone seriously wrong. And we are not out of the woods yet. Although individual political leaders showed sobriety, the same can not be said of opportunistic political parties.

The royal massacre has eclipsed the crisis that this nation was in. It may take some effort to remember just how bad things had got before 1 June. Here is a brief recap of the past two years: May-June 1999: General elections, septuagenarian Krishna Prasad Bhattarai elected Prime Minister. He initiates a commission to try to hold dialogue with the Maoists before he is toppled.

March 2000: Fellow-septuagenarian Girija Prasad Koirala pulls the rug from under Bhattarai's feet. NC rebels paralyse the party and government. But they fail in two attempts to topple Koirala both as prime minister and party president. December 2000: Fringe Maoist students force schools to shut down and five million children stay home, and hotels shut down for a day.

Nepalis riot over what a remark a Bollywood actor never made. January 2001: Koirala is re-elected NC president and the UML-which apparently was hoping that NC dissidents would get rid of him-steps into the fray. Winter session of Parliament is paralysed. April-May 2001: UML takes its protests to the streets, attempts to prevent the prime minister from commuting to work. Koirala remains unable to rally his party. Maoists pull off the bloodiest massacres of police-more than 100 killed in a week. King Birendra reluctantly approves the government's "hearts and minds" programme involving the Royal Nepal Army to provide security for

programme involving the Royal Nepal Army to provide security for development. Army chief is sceptical about mobilising troops without allparty support. Prime Minister nearly resigns twice, but changes his mind both times.

While the parties bickered, and the country shut down incessantly due to strikes and bandhs the people were getting fed up. But many had faith that at least there was the constitutional monarchy. Now, even that is gone. 'This was the only stable institution left and it is badly hurt and weak," one prominent political analyst told us. "It is said a nation's resilience is tested in times of crisis, here's one staring at us right in the face."

That may be, but the message doesn't seem to have filtered to the political parties who see this as a juicy opportunity to capitalise on the crisis. None of the political parties have begun serious discussion among themselves or with others on how to move on from here. The prime minister is said to have begun one-onone meetings with different party leaders, but on Wednesday there was no sign that the talks were getting anywhere. Politicians seemed unaware of what they should do—and still are. The monarchy is still recovering from the shock. The only party with a sense of existence are the Maoists, who analysts say are doing their best to cash in on the sense of uncertainty.

The main opposition party had a chance to take a leadership role and steer the nation out of the crisis by lending its credibility to the investigation team, but squandered the opportunity on a legal technicality. "Madhav Nepal missed the call of history, responsibility that country had given him, and it will impact badly on him badly personally and also his party," says Shridhar Khatri, who teaches political science at Tribhuvan University. "He could have asked the questions that needed to be asked to make the report credible." It is clear that although Nepal had agreed, his comrades in the Standing Committee got cold feet.

UML stalwart Raghuji Pant says it is business as usual at the UML's Balkhu secretariat. "Our demand for the Prime Minister's resignation is still valid," he said. "We've not discussed how to present ourselves in the next parliamentary session." The Marxist-Leninists (ML) showed more maturity, forming a three-member team to interact with other parties and strategise on ways to ride the crisis. "As a national party we feel that government and opposition should work together, take the initiative and do what needs to be, we can only support them," says Sahana Pradhan, ML chairperson. "The uncertainty cannot be allowed to continue."

The most cynical opportunists have been the small communist factions who have decided that they must strike while the iron is hot and use the crisis to bring down the government. Samyukta Jana Morcha's Lila Mani Poudel, was first to organise a rally at Patan Durbar Square on 8 June and publicly denounce the possibility that Dipendra could have pulled the trigger. Poudel echoed the Maoist reasoning that King Birendra's "liberal" politics was reason for his murder.

Comrade-in-arms in the communist alliance, Narayan Man Bijukchhe, of the Nepal Workers and Peasant's Party (NWPP), has also reached similar conclusions. Bijukchhe, told us the killing was a "conspiracy" by foreign hands, adding that "his logic defies that Dipendra was the killer". Though both Poudel and Bijukchhe fear that nationhood is threatened, they don't seem have solutions about how to minimise this threat or whether by pursuing the conspiracy theory they do not destabilise the nation further. •





We astund our hearty felicitations to

His Majesty King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev

On His Majesty's Accession to the Thrane of the Kingdom of Nepol

proy for this peace, prosperity and progress of the country through his dynamic leadership.

> Martin van Kan General Manager &

Hyatt Regency Kathmandu Family

The Shan gri-La family extends hearty felicitations to

His Majssty King Gyanendra Bir Bikaram Shah Dev

Its Majesty's accession to the throne of the Kingdom of Nepal and wish for the progress and prosperity of the country through his Majesty's dynamic constitutional leadership.

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## 6 NEPALI ECONOMY

# Another blow to tourism



#### HEMLATA RAI

he 1 June tragedy has not only left an indelible mark in modern Nepali history but has also severely impacted industry and business, although few are talking about it. Many business and industry leaders we met were unsure if this was an appropriate time to discuss losses and declined to speak on record. Others were more forthcoming, and though not as concerned about immediate losses, were more worried about how business would fare in the days to come.

Cancellations began flooding hotels and travel agencies almost as soon as the story of the royal palace bloodbath began to make headlines early Saturday. Airlines flew in almost empty and tourist arrivals dipped to all-time lows. Even tourists already in the country cut their visits short as curfew-bound Kathmandu was rocked with street violence.

Tourism was just recovering from serious trouble—riots and hotel

Many feel this is not an appropriate time to discuss slow business, but tourism will hurt from the last two weeks for some time to come.

## worker strikes in December and March had already

caused some concern among potential travellers. The Maoist insurgency had not affected trekking, but news of fighting was making an impact. The palace shootout and the resultant protests and curfews served the final blow. About the only hotels that were in business were those putting up international news crews, and now even they look deserted.

The Yak & Yeti, where most international correspondents were staying, had roughly 53 percent occupancy, while the rest lingered in the high twenties at best. If hotel occupancy in the first week of June is an indication, say industry sources, we may as well write off the \$168 million tourism brings to Nepal every year. One of the largest hotels in Kathmandu, the Taragaon Regency that opened last year, had just four international guests last week.

The numbers compiled by the Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN) tell the rest. Occupancy at most of the hotels was about half compared to June last year (see box), itself a very bad year for tourism. That was the month Indian Airlines had resumed flights to Nepal, after the December 1999 hijacking. Nepali tourism officials were hoping to reverse the trend in Indian arrivals, and had launched a special marketing campaign in India with the now

ironic-sounding slogan: "Nepal Festival

of Life". The strategy was aimed at getting more Indian tourists to fill up hotel rooms in the June-September low season. The other tourists in Nepal in the monsoon are booked on tour groups flying to Tibet, and even that has been hit.

Nepal's tourism has been on the downslide since end-1999. It began with the hijacking of an Indian Airlines aircraft after take-offfrom Kathmandu, and continued shortage of airline seats until the Indian Airlines flights resumed, political instability, strikes and increased publicity on the Maoist insurgency all further disrupted arrivals.

Last year's arrivals were down 11 percent to about 435,000 from over 490,000 in 1999. Indian arrivals, which make up one-third of total annual visitors, slumped by about 32 percent, down to just over 100,000. The low arrivals mean price cuts are snowballing. A manager of a five-star hotel told us he is selling rooms at three-star rates and still there are very few takers. These cuts are on top of already low overnight five-star rates in Nepal in the summer, where an average room goes for less than \$150.

Both bad luck and the inability to control the damage have brought things to this pass. Arrival figures had started to pick up in May with the Nepal Tourism Board's Festival of Life campaign in India. Festival posters still greet the few tourists arriving at the Tribhuvan International Airport everyday, but not many are the Indian tourists the campaign is directed at. On 1 June, Indian arrivals were a little over 580, by 9 June, the figure was down to 48. The NTB has suspended its marketing programmes as part of national mourning, but does not know how to handle the rest of the campaign that was to end next month.

"Tourism will definitely suffer but international tourists are good at getting information and we expect them to start coming as soon as we

रेडियो सगरमाथा

return to normalcy," says Tek Bahadur Dangi, director, Tourism Marketing and Promotion at NTB. The tourism board is also planning a survey on the impact the royal tragedy has had on tourism. The NTB may be hoping against hope that all the different political and non-political forces that seem to have been working overtime to ensure more instability will let life come back to normal.

But the industry is not. "It will take as long as two years to boost the confidence of international travel agencies and their clients after the damage the street protests and curfew have done to our image," Madhav Om Shrestha, executive director of Hotel Association of Nepal, told us.

Bad press can be won over by good press, or by getting accurate information out before bad news and rumours spread. But that is where government has failed badly: not only did it not provide the right information, but it was totally unable to correct the confusion created by contradictory information given out from the palace secretariat.

Early this year Nepali Times predicted that Nepal would need to attain a robust seven percent increase in tourism traffic for the coming two years to regain the business lost in 2000. But things seem to be going from bad to worse, at least partly because no one seems to care. Even so, the situation is bad, but not dire. Bookings for the first two weeks of June were cancelled, but reservations for the coming months stand, Shyam Bahadur Panday of Shangri La Hotels and Resorts told us. "So there is still time for us to take corrective action. We can prevent cancellations by rebuilding our image. The more negative news there is about us the more it will affect us," he adds. Government and the opposition politicos should listen to him.  $\blacklozenge$ 

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Sun	0615-0645	<b>BBC</b> Agenda	
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## FELICITATION

Q.o., i.

On the Auspicious Occasion of the Accession to the Throne of the Kingdom of Nepal, we devotedly extend our hearty felicitations to our loving Monarch His Majesty the King

## 15 - 21 JUNE 2001 NEPALI TIMES



## **Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev**

for his Majesty's long and prosperous reign, excellent health and longetivity.



## **INTERVIEWS**

## 15 - 21 JUNE 2001 NEPALI TIMES

## "We cannot pretend to have a constitutional monarchy when our laws are archaic and feudal."



Harka Gurung Academic, former minister A tragedy of unusual magnitude has taken place. Instead of speculating how it came about, we should look forward to how the damage can be minimised. The commission of inquiry is working on it. I don't think it will be possible to satisfy everyone. I would say now there is much bigger responsibility on the part of political parties. There is no point in comparing the personalities of Birendra and Gyanendra. The king is not an individual but an institution. The main responsibility for Nepal's future actually lies with the politicians who have been entrusted with the people's confidence and votes. Will they become statesmen, or remain petty politicians? Infighting and fighting between the parties should be replaced by reconciliation so we can get on with the job of building Nepal. I'm not optimistic about political parties, but I am optimistic about the people and Nepal as a nation. The continuity of the state is shown by the spontaneous expression of the public's grief after the royal tragedy. I hope the politicians rise to the occasion.

#### Chaitnya Mishra

Academic, former NPC member I have a six-point checklist. The murder has to be investigated fully and independently. If more time and skills are needed, let there be arrangements for that. If certain issues cannot be answered, they should be left open, not ended forcibly, otherwise questions on the legality of the report and the new king and queen will remain. Foreign powers may also take advantage of the confusion and extract concessions from Nepal. The new king should tell the people personally, honestly about the facts he is aware of. For the longer term, government and political parties should assess the incongruities in constitutional monarchy and implement the outcome. The Maoists should stop their killings immediately and government should fully withdraw security forces deployed to tackle them. The government should withdraw all lawsuits against the Maoists and declare a general amnesty. The government should call general elections. Whoever comes to

power can change the constitution if needed. The government may not be unwilling to do that. Political parties and the people should lobby to get all the aforesaid implemented and struggle if needed.

## Yankila Sherpa

Entrepreneur This is the greatest national tragedy Nepalis have ever had to face. This terrible incident has shocked us, and left us grieving. It is taking time, more time than we imagined, for people to get over the grief. But we have to live our lives, not just for ourselves, but also for our families and our nation. It is imperative we continue the task of building Nepal and moving ahead towards a bright future. We, the business community who form the backbone of Nepal's economy, have to run our businesses as soon as we are



out of mourning. Our businesses provide livelihood, jobs, food, education, and housing for many Nepalis. Successful businesses are a sign of hope. We must continue to be optimistic regarding important industries such as tourism, which is definitely more affected than others by a crisis in the country. The task now for the industry is to assure the international community that Nepalis will continue to extend gestures of welcome and hospitality to all our visitors. We tourism people will have to work harder and more closely with all sectors of Nepali society to promote and secure a continual congenial atmosphere of peace and prosperity for all in Nepal.

Mangal Siddhi Manandhar Politician (UML) The tragedy has occurred, but it will



**CP** Mainali Politician (ML) The people don't believe what they have been told, let us hope they will make up their minds after the commission makes its report. All this has taken place in a certain political backdrop—conspiracy or no conspiracy. The backdrop is: some people are trying to make democracy work while some are trying to change it using force. The massacre cannot be analysed in isolation of this. Even if external and internal political forces were not involved, they would try to affect our politics and developments. Our first duty is to tell the public the facts and win their trust. We face many problems as a nation—they were there before, they are there today. We now need to take steps to resolve the problems. We tried to maintain a status-quo in terms of governance after 1990. Political players turned out to be unethical and corrupt and failed to address the problems of the masses. There are issues of health, education and equitable distribution of national resources and wealth. The people were unhappy with how things were. They are still sad. This is expressed as individual grief and public anger on the streets. We need to find solutions through dialogue. There are fears about political instability, some even fear democracy could be derailed. To prevent that, political parties especially left parties, need to sit down and prepare a joint programme to address to the people's problems. Narahari Acharya

crowd, but was killed in the royal palace. The responsibility of saving the nation is on the shoulders of the political parties, which did play their roles to help cushion the sudden outrage and street protests. We need to strengthen our political institutions and one way to do that is to make them more democratic. We need to be responsible, democratic and people-oriented. Our strengths can come only from our ability to abide by democratic practice. We have to look into our rules and laws, which are unsuited to the present times. We have democracy and constitutional monarchy but our laws and practices, are feudal-it was evident from how the tragedy was handled. Our traditions and laws prevented us from being transparent and getting information to the people. It is clear that the sustainability of the institution of monarchy depends on the support of the people, and for that people need to have full information. Information on the habits, behaviour and character of royal successors. Parties would need to consider reviewing the laws to make royalty more transparent. We cannot pretend to have a constitutional monarchy when our laws are archaic and feudal.

Arzu Rana Deuba Development worker I feel we should stand behind our new



king who is the constitutional head and the rightful heir to the throne. We must support him—we have nobody else. We need to take a look at where our country is headed. I think this shock is also an opportunity—every crisis is an opportunity for all Nepalis, of all political colours to take a look at what is happening to the country. If we want to survive as a nation we should all pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and get on with building a brighter tomorrow for Nepal and Nepalis.

### Shyam Bahadur Panday Hotelier

Tourism has been directly affected. This is the first time we're at zero growth. All bookings have been cancelled. At the minimum, we need to come together and tackle



the issues through the media. We need to choose between saving our country and our businesses and running after after hearsay. After all, we have to live here and the country has to go on. The tourist groups that were to come during this period have all cancelled-it has been almost 100 percent. Because the cancellations for the coming days have not come in yet, there is still time for us to take corrective action. We can still prevent cancellations by rebuilding our image, because the more negative news there is about us, the more it will affect us. We all can help by being more patient and responsible, otherwise there can be nothing but sadder days ahead. We must survive this and show that we can be a patient people and can get along, despite the magnitude of this unprecedented incident. Rama Thapaliya Film Artist

Every Nepali who believes in constitutional monarchy should respect the crown and work together to develop the country. This is a big tragedy, but now we need to think of the past as past. With all our resources, we should move on. Now it is up to every Nepali to bring about change. Change will only take place if we put in our effort and knowledge to work aggressively. There is corruption, and no assurance of a secure society. The law must be strictly enforced. There is law on paper, but not in practical terms. The new king and democratic institutions should think about improving this. I am part of the visual media and we are always trying to spread socially relevant messages. The problem here is people watch us happily, but once the movie is over, they fall back into lethargy. People are not changing their attitudes. These are the kind of people who are now gossiping wildly. I think each individual should take the responsibility of developing the nation and spreading pure thoughts. We should work together and construct a society that is hard working and disciplined.





take time for the wounds to heal. Time does not stop, and time will



heal. We cannot stop and stay, as we are now. Even before this tragedy, the country was already in crisis. Now the situation has become worse. The inquiry report should be believable. Sometimes what we don't like can be true, but the truth should be one that is acceptable. We have to take into account the international and national situation and move forward. The tragedy has lead to a national crisis, and made the country's situation even more complicated. People have to be provided full information to get past the incident, and also have to be shown the way.

devastating crisis Nepal has faced since unification. But the country cannot stop here, it has to move on, learning from what has happened. We have to discuss the implications of the tragedy for Nepal's future. We need to worry about stability. Our monarchy symbolises unity, and this incident raises many questions. Our responsibility is to work to ensure the institution regains its stature. Maybe the people's representatives should be given charge of overseeing security-we did not look into this for the past 10 years of democracy. Our king was always safe among people, whatever the size of the

Politician (NC)

The 1 June incident is the most



## Better Coverage Samacharpatra





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pinished even in post-democratic Nepal. Paras was seen as disorderly when he was high, and an outraged country blamed the father and royalty in general. Significantly, after he was crowned, Gyanendra while naming his wife Komal Queen was silent on the subject of a crown prince.

As a prince, Gyanendra inherited a hotel which he parlayed into an empire that included tea, tobacco, and other enterprises. Executives and workers alike claim that Gyanendra's touch is so light as to be almost nonexistent, but his vision was revolutionary by standards of the day. Workshops, seminars, management excercises, international exposure, but

most of all, his selection of the right person for the right job marked the of his corporation. His message was made even clearer: an enterprise seen as a failure was closed down with no-nonsense efficiency.

These are traits he is expected to lend to his role as constitutional monarch. Clear, succinct, urbane, King Gyanendra is not expected to suffer fools. As palace adviser, he has been known to cut short courdiness and traditional formality to get to the heart of matters. His vast library is said to display eclectic taste and the books in it are well thumbed through. He is known to converse knowledgably on a variety of subjects.

Several ambassadors went a few months ago to visit Gyanendra and stay overnight in a lodge in the forests. Among them were the Chinese, German, Indian and American envoys in Kathmandu. One of them recalled a fascinating evening filled with conversation that ranged over a variety of subjects on which the prince's grasp was sure, and his opinions culled from personal experience and extensive reading were sound. The king will be

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ries and their Heads of State, and is likely to display the same deft touch in his dealings.

When Prince Charles came to Nepal in the late seventies to go into the Himalaya to decide whether he should marry Princess Diana, it was Gyanendra and his kid brother Dhirendra who devised the "Royal Trek" below Machhapuchhre. Charles later recalled that while both princes were hosts extraordinaire, Gyanendra's knowledge of international affairs and both Britain's and Nepal's role in them was profound.

When the first SAARC summit was planned and Nepal was named host, it was Gyanendra who oversaw all the details with painstaking meticulousness. His planning started from the décor of the VIP lounge at the airport, went onto a renovation of the venue, the Summit Hotel, and he even undertook the supervision of building the SAARC suites where the late Rajiv Gandhi, Sri Lankan president JR Jayawardene and other heads of state stayed. A contractor on the suites recalled that Gyanendra was with them well into the night to see them completed in time.

As a known conservationist, King Gyanendra gave assent and helped plan the highly successful Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) that had visitors and Nepali citizens alike applauding the initiative, but not necessarily its behind-the-scenes mover who preferred to remain away from the limelight.

Gyanendra while always being a part of the palace, also chose to stay away from it as much as possible. And it is this role as eminence gris that always had him in a nebulous grey area, the target of whispered

vilification that he never acknowledged as long as jobs entrusted to him got done. Preferring privacy over public acclaim, Gyanendra chose never to justify his actions and even the open praise of those he worked with never quite attached to him. He was always the unknown quantity, the Dark Prince. His intellectual worth set him even further apart.

So after the palace deaths, and the mourning and the street violence and curfews, the rumours and terrible doubts, King Gyanendra must learn to change from being the private prince to a centre stage player where the spotlight is relentless. From there he must use his considerable skills to weld together political parties constantly fighting each other, so that his country (and he himself) can emerge from shadowy sidelines to a place in the new global order where transparency is everything, where the media, to its detriment, robs efficient but private people of their right to privacy.

King Gyanendra's detractors, and there are many of those with vested interests, must look at the validity of Nietzsche's saying: "They who chase wrong doers must be careful lest they do wrong themselves. And those that stare into chaos must be aware that chaos stares back at them."

Just as King Prithvi Narayan Shah, with whom this all began, left the mountain fastness of a small place called Gorkha to allow his vision of a unified Nepal to bear fruit, so must his descendent King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah take his Nepal and his people that inevitable step forward from a developing nation to an emergent one. From poverty to pride, from being patronised to becoming a patron in its own right with its own creative genius.



Shah King of Nepal's 225 years old dynasty. This was his second coronation. The first instance was a hasty

Narayanhiti Darbar made up of the chief justice, the speaker of the Lower House and the leader of the opposition, and gave them a three-day

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On 4 June 2001 beneath the tall shadow of Basantapur and the grim spectre of royal deaths, conspiracy theories, and a kingdom riven with political strife Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah was crowned the 12th

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Immediately after his second enthronement at 11am of 4 June, King Gyanendra appointed a commission to investigate and report on the deaths of the royal family in

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# Shangrila





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## **ROYAL FAMILY**

# **hree** princesses



Princess Shanti Singh

rincess Shanti Singh (1941-2001) was the first child of King Mahendra and late crown princess Indra Rajya Laxmi. Her sister Princess Sarada Shah was born in 1943. Shoba Shahi, now the only surviving daughter of King Mahendra, wasborn in 1949.

The sisters studied at the Loreto Convent, Darjeeling, and the late Princesses Shanti and Sarada went on to Tribhuvan University. Princess Shanti's husband, the late Bajhangi Raja Kumar Dipak Jung Bahadur Singh predeceased her. She is survived by two sons and a daughter. Princess Sarada and her husband Kumar Khadga Bikram Shah, a noted writer and academic, were both killed at the palace on 1 June. They are survived by three sons.

The late princesses were involved in social work and founded a number of social welfare organisations and charities. Princess Shanti founded the Nepal Leprosy Relief Association in 1972 and became its patron in 1994. She was also life member of the Nepal **Red Cross Society and the Family** Planning Association. She was also known for her love of plants and animals-she set up teh Nepal Kennel Club. But most will remember Princess Shanti's contribution to the welfare of disabled persons in Nepal. She was president of the Disabled Welfare Fund Management Committee in 1987 and during the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981 she garnered a good deal of support from international organisations for her work among the disabled in Nepal. "She was very humble. She enjoyed her work and was sincerely dedicated to her work," recalls Indira Malla, one of the late princess's closest friends. Princess Shanti was honoured with the Orders of Tri Shakti Patta 1st class, and the Gorkha Dakshin Bahu 1st class (1972), Vishesh Sewalankar, and Coronation medals (1956 and 1975). The late Princess Sarada founded the SOS Village-Nepal in 1971, and was chairperson of the project. The staff at the SOS village in Jorpati remember the princess as a calm figure who loved the children at the Village and always had the time to listen to their needs. She also played an active role in the Nepal Children's Organisation and child welfare programmes of the government. She was affiliated with many organisations, including the Nepal Red Cross Society, the Disaster Relief Subcommittee, and the Child Welfare Subcommittee. She was honoured with the Order of the Gorkha Dakshin Bahu 1st class (1972), Coronation medals 1956 and 1975, and the Order of the Precious Crown 1<sup>st</sup> class of Japan (1978).



Princess Sarada shah



During the Panchayat era, the late princesses often accompanied their brother King Birendra on state and unofficial visits abroad.

Those who worked with the late princesses recall their dedication. Princess Shanti often repeated: "No gain without pain." Princess Sharada was known to say that above all she believed in "Awakening the social consciousness" of the country.

Princess Javanti Shah (1946-2001), known for her contribution to cancer relief programs in Nepal, was the daughter of King Mahendra's youngest brother, Prince Basundhara and Princess Helen Shah. The late princess received her early education at the Woodstock School in Mussorie, the Loreto Convent, Darieeling and in Switzerland. She received her degree in Kathmandu in 1970. From 1982 she was chairperson of the Nepal Cancer Relief Society and pioneered cancer awareness in Nepal. Businessperson Basanta Chaudhary, who was the general secretary of the society in 1990, remembers her intelligence. "When hardly anyone talked about cancer and its cure was a matter of myth, the princess came up with new ways to raise social awareness," says Chaudhary who also mentions the princess' achievement in involving various international organisations to establish a cancer hospital in Nepal. "She also did a lot of anti-smoking campaigns" he adds. However the princess stepped down from active patronage of the society after the advent of democracy. Chaudhary says the princess was also very aware of environmental issues and she was planning to improve conservation efforts in Nepal. Her business ventures included Bottlers Nepal Pvt Ltd the franchisee for Coca Cola in Nepal. The princess actively promoted tourism and social awareness programmes and regularly attended international conferences, presenting papers in Europe and America. She was honoured with the Order of the Gorkha Dakshin Bahu 1st class, and Coronation medals (1956 and 1975). She was unmarried.

## **Dhirendra Shah**

Dhirendra Shah (1950-2001) was said to be the wayward one of King Mahdenda's three sons. Even as a teenager he had a reputation for carousing and in 1989 was stripped of his royal title and privileges. He had been living in London as a commoner and had returned to Nepal two days before the shooting at Narayanhiti on 1 June. It was rumoured that he was about to have his royal title restored.

A friend of Dhirendra Shah in school, Neer Shah, remembers

a "fantastic person" who was rather like his elder brother, King Birendra, in demeanour. Friends describe the former prince as a fun-loving and generous person, given to spontaneous acts of kindness. Dhirendra lost his royal title and privileges because he married a foreigner after separating from his first wife, Princess Prekshya, sister of the late Queen Aishwarya. He is survived by four daughters, Puja, Dilashma, and Sitashma from his first marriage, and another daughter from his second wife Shirley Greaney.

Like his elder brothers, the late King Birendra and King Gyanendra, Dhirendra also went to St Joseph's College in Darjeeling. He went on to receive his MA from Tribhuvan University. While at school, he was very interested in the theatre. "He was a very good actor-I remember him as Cassius in



Shakespeare's Julius Caesar," says Neer Shah. A keen sportsman, Dhirendra had a black belt in karate and was patron of the National Sports Council. In 1975, he was Chief Scout of Nepal, and in 1987, chairman of the National Youth Fund.

During the Panchayat era, Dhirendra was said to have helped his brother King Birendra in overseeing national affairs. Dhirendra is remembered as a staunch nationalist, which has to

be understood in the context of how nationalism was defined and expressed in Nepal during the Panchayat years. The former prince was in the news as recently as last July, when at a function he attended organised by Parivartan Nepal to celebrate the birthday of Crown Prince Dipendra, one of the speakers said he would not hesitate to shoot the prime minister. For two days, legislators charged Dhirendra with trying to topple multiparty democracy. In an interview that followed in a local weekly, he clarified: "My commitment is toward my nation, Nepali people, constitutional monarchy, and democracy." He was member of the Rajya Sabha from 1977 to 1988.

Dhirendra has lived mostly in London after 1989, but friends and relatives say he had returned to Nepal settle down permanently.

Khetan

## **King meets communist**

Jana Aastha National Weekly, 6 June

"I have devoted most of my life to the communist cause and I wish to die a communist. Despite all this, I am a responsible citizen. First I am a Nepali and then a communist. I have become a nationalist communist for several reasons.

It is because of this that the first time I met His Majesty [King Birendra], I was overcome with respect for him. This was late in 1993 (Karthik 2050), in the Mangal Sadan of Narayanhiti Darbar. Madhav Kumar Nepal, then secretary of the UML, was away, and I had to meet the king in his

absence. Even our party president, Man Mohan Adhikary said if the monarch desired it, I should see him. The chief palace secretary Revati Raman Khanal informed me about my audience with His Majesty. I do not remember the exact day or dateit's a weakness of mine. I think it was mid-November. I reached the palace around 6pm. I was asked to dress in daura-suruwal, with a coat and Nepali cap. Since it was my first meeting with His Majesty, I was worried about the (formal) language I was to use, in which I was not very proficient.

I was called inside at 6.30. I was taken into a very big room, in the centre was a tea table, on the east of it was a very comfortable-looking black leather sofa, on its west an armless chair, like those we usually keep in dining rooms, and a similar chair exactly south of the table. When I entered, His Majesty was already seated on the sofa, smoking a cigar. As soon as I entered, I did Namaskar. The king acknowledged and asked me to be seated. He signalled to Khanal to be seated too. Khanal, who was carrying a pen and notebook, sat down. I also sat down and the king started speaking. He said, "So tell me, Bam Dev, how have you analysed the political situation?" The king was wearing an old and somewhat dirty topi, a checked shirt, suruwal, a faded and pretty old green sweater and black shoes. He was seated on a sofa and I had to sit on an ordinary chair-I felt that this was a classic case of the working of a feudal mindset. And a psychological way of trying to establish control over the other party at the meeting. On the other hand, I felt he was wearing those old clothes on purpose, to prove an ideological affinity with us communists. Besides, I also thought the king was a real miser.

I then started putting forth my views. We were so engrossed in our dialogue that we did not realise time was flying. We talked for roughly one-and-a-half hours. Earlier they had told me that I would be allowed a maximum of 45 minutes. His Majesty asked

## - Bam Dev Gautam me a lot of questions. As I answered, I realised that Khanal

was also cross-questioning me. I felt the secretary was being rude and crass. I guessed that the whole situation had been decided earlier. His Majesty said, "The constitution did not put in adequate checks and balances, which caused imbalances between government and the monarchy. I don't intend to, but I also can not go to the public and explain to them the work I have done for the benefit of nation and people. The concerned agencies should do this responsibily.

Democracy must be strengthened through practice. People tell me that the UML constitution wants to deal with the monarchy in a different way." He then talked of other issues.

During our interaction I told the king that the UML fully respected the letter and spirit of the constitution. All relations between the monarchy, the legislature, parliament and the judiciary would be abided by in accordance with it, and this was what we believed in. Since we were communists, we could not change our ideological line but would definitely bring about changes in certain aspects. Since I had recently returned from a visit to North Korea, my visit was also a subject of conversation. I then told the king that all monarchs of today had to be like Sihanouk of Cambodia. After this I told him that Nepali communists were nationalists to the core. I stressed the fact that communists treated matters of the nation with more gravity than they treated communist and ideological issues. I congratulated him on his democratic behaviour and the role he played while staying within the parameters of the constitution. I further stated that the situation at the time demanded that the monarch and the communists work together for the benefit of the country. His Majesty did not respond to any of the issues I raised. The chief secretary was now indicating the time. Thrice, the ADC had entered the room because of the time we had spent. Lastly, because it was not possible to meet the head of state frequently, I asked the king for a response to all that I had placed before him. He did not speak. I got up from my chair, did Namaskar and again repeated my request. Still he did not say a word. I again repeated, "Your Majesty, for the sake of the Nepali people and the nation, please reply to my proposal." He then spoke, "Ok, Bam Devji, for the sake of the people and for the nation, I am prepared to work with the communists. I will tell my people to act accordingly. I give you my word."

## Madhav Nepal's flip-flop

Sanghu Vernacular Weekly, **4 June** 

You attended the meeting of the Privy Council. *How did this [massacre] happen?* No one has officially said how. This is the jurisdiction of the investigating committee. The answer will probably

come after the investigation. The interest of the people is in having a probe. The palace and government have not said

anything and people are speculating. The media is airing these speculations. Haven't you pressured the government to make information public? I asked what exactly happened. The prime minister has been asked to present the facts and make a statement. He also said an official inquiry was required and that this was a very difficult matter. It is the responsibility of the country to properly investigate this.

Do you think this was a conspiracy? We have taken this as something very uncommon,

unnatural. Everyone says this was unnatural, but in what sense?

No one can imagine such an incident, it is so unnatural. How do we analyse this, what will happen now, what were the reasons behind this. We have to find clear-cut answers.

## Budhabar Saptahik, 6 June

"In the context of the committee formed by His Majesty to investigate the incident in the royal palace the night of 1 June, our party appeals to everyone that the committee should be formed in accordance with the constitution and pertinent laws of this nation. The committee must work within the laws of this land and provide guidelines and direction. We further humbly state that our party does not agree to the process by which this committee has been constituted."

### Jana Aastha National Weekly, 6 June Nepalis believed all facts relating to the incident would be made public very soon. The treacherous UML has now put a damper on those hopes. [Madhav] Nepal, who agreed when asked by the palace chief secretary Pasupati Bhakta Maharjan to be a member of the investigating committee, has now withdrawn from it. Nepal had earlier repeatedly asked on his and his party's behalf that an investigation be carried out. The committee was formed under the chairmanship of the chief justice, and the opposition leader and speaker of the Lower House were members. Grief-stricken Nepalis hoped for quick answers. Now they are frustrated by Nepal's behaviour. The UML has created more problems for itself and the people. Will the UML have any moral right to comment on the findings of the committee? If it is not satisfied, will it have the right to ask for another probe? People now wonder who really

runs the party. It will be difficult to believe in Madhav Nepal in the future. If a top party leader can change colours in 24 hours, whom should the people believe?

## BBC Radio, 6 June

Madhav Nepal: Look, whatever confusion there is [about his withdrawal from the probe team] that is not confusion, but there are some legal issues that need to be taken into account. On the committee's formation, King Gynendra had held discussions with all sides unofficially, yes. So there is no need to suspect the intentions. But we want to stress that it is also necessary to take into account the legality and processes. Only I do not want to stay on the committee, not my party. Whatever suspicions there are within and outside the country can only be eliminated based on the facts that come out of the investigation. Our party will play a positive, supportive role in quieting down such suspicions.

BBC: Why didn't you stay in, personally? MN: The process is unclear. It is very good the chief justice is on the committee, as well as the speaker of the house. I am a party leader. There could be repercussions if only one party leader was on the team.

BBC: What repercussions?

MN: It isn't that we as a party are not ready to support or remain in the committee, but at the individual level, the person might have problems, or be busy, there might be other circumstances.

BBC: But this is a time of national crisis. How can you think of your personal problems?

MN: We are ready to help in all ways. It is not that I am not on the committee because the king formed it on his own. But it is necessary to think about [the committee] in terms of the constitution and laws.

BBC: When you say the matter needs to be thought about in a legally correct manner, are you trying to say that the wording and the process was wrong? MN: Legal experts have different opinions. There has to be discussion, debate on legal and constitutional matters and processes, although the announcement Monday was made under special circumstances. We also need to understand that.

BBC: Given that the country itself is in a special situation, isn't what you are saying double-edged and couldn't it create more problems? MN: No. The prime minister and concerned people will search for solutions.

BBC: But wasn't this committee discussed even *before it was formed?* 

MN: Yes, I have already said there were discussions. But there is a necessity to fix certain matters in writing.

BBC: So if these matters are put in order, will you stay?

MN: Yes. It is possible someone from our party will participate.

(Interviewed by Rabindra Mishra)

returned from India. Dhir Sumshere, realising Ranadip was weak and kind-hearted, was afraid he would hand over the office of prime minister to Jagat. He hatched a plan to kill Ranadip. Under the

**Prachanda's view Inventive** media Budhabar Saptahik, **6 June aldi**r Pradip Nepal, CPN (UML) MP "The spine-chilling bloodbath on the night of 1 June in Narayanhiti "After the unimaginable incident of 1 serious poet. (Note: On Wednesday, 6 June Pradip Nepal himself was interviewed by Zee News, where he was identified as a "senior journalist".)

including Lakhan Thapa, were killed. Lakhan Thapa was killed for political reasons and so is considered Nepal's first martyr. Kot Parba In 1846 (1903 BS), the palace was

Darbar has created a serious political crisis in our country. Our party is not taking this incident lightly, as a non-political issue or the result of a simple family dispute. We take this to be a serious political conspiracy. We realise that reactionary forces, domestic and international, are trying their best to prove that it was a normal family dispute that exploded. The manner in which the information was made available and the way the last rites were carried out lead us to believe this was a political conspiracy. It would be utter political immaturity to claim King Birendra and his family were not murdered because of the king's liberal political stand and sense of nationalism. His open and far-ranging thoughts had made life difficult for government, the ruling capitalist class that always looks towards India, and domestic and international extremist reactionaries....If anyone thinks there can be a repeat of Kot Parba and Bhandarkhal Parba against politically conscious Nepalis at the start of the 21st century, they are suffering from a delusion ... '

Nepal Jagaran, 4 June

June, people started fabricating stories. They spoke anything they dreamt up. But the foreign media was the most imaginative. Even BBC had before 5am on Saturday morning announced that a massacre had taken place in the palace and stated with conviction that the then crown prince was responsible. Soon after, CNN, Zee News and Star News all began broadcasting similar reports. The Indian media crossed all limits. They often sounded as if they had been present on the scene. The Indian media lost all credibility after the hijacking incident (of an Indian Airlines aircraft in December 1999), but now they have surpassed themselves in irresponsibility. This is why Nepalis don't trust them. And because of the Indian media's behaviour, Nepalis suspect the intentions of the Indian ruling class. For three days the Indian media was bent upon proving the crown prince was the killer. Suddenly, after the third day, they started portraying him as a serious poet. It was laughable. When they realised he was not yet dead, they sang paeans to this

## **Bad blood**

Nepal Jagaran, 4 June

The incident at the Royal Palace has terrified Nepalis. This is the first time in Nepal's history that a ruling monarch has been killed. The murder of a very popular, peaceloving, democratic and caring member of the Shah dynasty has been hard to accept. But such massacres are not unknown in our history.

**Basattiharan** In 1904 (1962 BS) Rana Bahadur Shah, to pay the debts he had accumulated while in Banaras, on the advice of Bhimsen Thapa, captured, confiscated and took over land from Brahmins, temples and religious trusts. Many were killed for refusing to hand over their land. Brahmins and Kirats then rose up in revolt. This was forcefully repressed and thousands were killed or exiled. Lakhan Thapa In 1874 (1932 BS), Lakhan Thapa gathered people in Gorkha in protest against the Ranas, Jang Bahadur in particular. All the

protesters were arrested and most,

steeped in conspiracy and there was great political instability. Queen Rajya Laxmi wanted to make her son Ranendra king, and asked assistance from Gagan Man, who was murdered on 31 Bhadra (mid-September). To find the killer, the queen called a meeting of all major courtiers a few days later on 3 Aswin in the Kot courtyard. Jung Bahadur was smarter, and with his brothers' help, slaughtered all the high-ranking people, including Abhiman Singh Basnyat, Fattejung Chutaria and Khadga Bikram, all opposed to Jung Bahadur. Jung Bahadur then was the undisputed leader. Bhandarkhal Parba Queen Rajya Laxmi, with her confidant Jung Bahadur, wanted to make her son Ranendra king, but she was unsuccessful. She was angry and hatched a plan to murder Jang Bahadur. She got Bir Dhoj Basnyat and Wazir Singh to organise a party at Bhandarkhal. Jung Bahadur learnt about the plan and using the powers vested in him by King Rajendra, had all his opponents killed. In mid-1846 (end-1903 BS), the queen left for Banaras. Jung

Banaras, and he also became a strong opponent of Jung Bahadur. He hid four battalions in a place called Aulo near Birganj to kill Jung Bahadur. But Jung Bahadur's army defeated the royal army and the king was captured. The king died in captivity. 1877 (1938 BS) Parba Jung Bahadur, before he died, had divided the Ranas into different classes. The shrewd Dhir Sumshere. with his sons, defied the order of succession and made Ranadip prime minister. This resulted in major clashes between the families of Jung Bahadur and Dhir Sumshere. King Trilokya Bikram wanted to take advantage of the situation but he died in 1873 (1934 BS). Prince Narendra, Trilokya's brother, sided with Jung Bahadur's family and in 1877 (1938 BS), decided to kill Dhir's kin. The plan failed and Prime Minister Ranadip sentenced more than 20 people to death.

Narendra was either exiled or

imprisoned. Eventually Dhir

1885 (1942 BS) Parba

Sumshere, with Ranadip, was able

to get rid of Jung Bahadur's family.

In 1885, (1942 BS), Jagat Jung

Bahadur established himself as a

very powerful prime minister.

King Rajendra went with his

beloved wife Rajya Laxmi to

Aulo Parba

pretext of sending a battalion to Delhi to take part in an army parade, he sent four battalions under Bir Sumshere towards the plains. At night, under cover of darkness, Ranadip was murdered and Bir Sumshere became prime minister. He then blamed Ranadip's murder on Jagat Jung. Gehendra Sumshere Gehendra Sumshere was a scientist and engineer and always inventing machines. He wanted to show his inventions to his uncle, Chandra Sumshere. While bowing to pay his respects to Chandra Sumshere, a revolver dropped out of his pocket. Chandra Sumshere was a very suspicious man. He thought Gehendra wanted to kill him and so poisoned him. Many accused of helping Gehendra were also killed. Makai Parba In 1920 (1977 BS) Subba Krishna Lal wrote a book titled Makai Ko Kheti (The Cultivation of Corn). He was accused of printing unacceptable words and was arrested. He was imprisoned and died in jail. 999 of the 1,000 copies were confiscated and destroyed.

## **12** FROM THE WORLD PRESS



## **No answers in Nepal**

Japan Times, Tokyo

## A terrible grief, a bleak future

The Times, London

## THE

Ty faces an<br/>y achievedMICHAEL BINYON72 as an<br/>d evenNepal is today convulsed with fear for the future. The royal family's quasi-<br/>divine status as the world's last Hindu monarchy has not saved their<br/>kingdom from a terrible grief and a bleak future. When a family quarrel ends<br/>in such a bloodbath, Nepalis see omens of savage times ahead. With little<br/>but beauty to export, Nepal, a country nestling among the world's highest<br/>peaks, has long been deep in the valleys of world statistics. Social unrest is<br/>growing. Maoists are plotting revolution. And a shaken and divided political<br/>elite is now gripped by rumour, ambition and stupefaction as it tries to<br/>restore calm to a shattered society.

Maoist groups are now the main political challenge to the monarchy and to the ruling establishment. Maoist rebels are consolidating their power in the countryside. And Nepal's many ethnic groups, which lived in harmony for years, threaten now to open up differences and disputes.

The main problem is that Nepal has no clearly sustainable economic future. Political quarrels in developing countries are usually economic. But the weekend massacre of the royal family has overshadowed and compounded any argument about Nepal's development. This may prove a catalyst to revolutionaries who have wanted to overthrow the established order: no time is as favourable as now. Outsiders will be desperate to reinforce stability. Nepal is probably the best example of a buffer state in the world: its neutrality is vital to both India and China. Deciding how to bolster Nepal at such a time will be difficult. The labyrinthine intrigues being revealed within the Narayanhiti Palace have their equivalent in other parts of society. The machinegun bullets have ricocheted beyond the palace walls. Nepalis are waiting to see where else they have hit.

## To play the king

Hindustan Times, **New Delhi** 

COMMENTARY

by MJ AKBAR

15-21 JUNE 2001 NEPALI TIMES



This is a tragedy built into Nepal's compromise, into the imperfect revolution of the Nepali Congress.

•••••••

Conspiracy is easier suggested than done. Conspiracy is cold and rational; malevolence is irrational. Conspiracy has a purpose larger than murder or assassination. Few conspirators are suicidal. They are ambitious, not depressive maniacs; there can even be a psychological case to be made that conspirators are optimists, if desperate ones, justifying murder, even parricide, by the vision of a radically different future in which they play a crucial part. Conspirators are inherently selfish; they want something for themselves in this life. They do not turn a gun on themselves. A useful lesson of history is that no conspiracy can be as bizarre as facts. The senseless mind is far more dangerous than an evil one.

Since being a columnist makes me neither omnipresent nor omnipotent, I make no claim to knowledge of the real events that took place in the palace at Kathmandu in which an apparently denied lover allegedly killed his parents and other relatives at a family dinner before putting a gun to his own head. But enough details have emerged, including from eyewitnesses, to encourage hopefully intelligent comment. Friday night was mania, not conspiracy. Nepalis, understandably, want an explanation, more so because they are still devoted to the institution the family represented, royalty. The truth is difficult to accept because part of the problem lies in the institution, in that anachronism called royalty. The first explanation that went around and still carries momentum, is that Crown Prince Dipendra was not allowed to marry the woman he loved. This may be true. There are other young men across the subcontinent with similar problems. Each individual lives, and occasionally dies, by the culture of his mindspace. Dipendra was a product of a value system and legal principles that placed him above the law of the land. From there it was one psychological step that took him beyond the law of human relationships.

Nepal was not part of the British Empire; its royalty represented its national status and so continued, not without hiccups, into an era at serious discord with the logic of inherited and inevitable power. Nepal's kings would not surrender this power easily. Under pressure, they were forced to cede some ground to nationalist democrats, but they recovered and brutalised their own people. It took another popular revolution, in 1990, to make them see reason. Nepal's royal family lost its power, but not its habits. And royalty is a self-winding trap. The moment they were removed from politics, the royal family began to return to the affections of the people, becoming a symbol and reassurance of national identity. This is why it is difficult for Nepalis to accept that there can be a deranged maverick in the midst of a family they need. Unfortunately, I am seriously underwhelmed by the mystique of royalty.

This false mystique is protected by instruments of state, including coercion. This is why Yubaraj Ghimire, editor of Kantipur, is in jail. His sin was not bad journalism, though I do not agree with what he published. He was indulging in mordant India-baiting fashionable in that section of the Nepali middle class that has gained most from the India connection. India has a great deal to answer for in its relations with Nepal, but massacring the royal family is not in question. Accusing RAW of being a co-conspirator with the CIA and the new king is not particularly intelligent. Ghimire's treason lay in attacking the new monarch. Everything pales before lese majeste. Nepal's monarch is truly monarch of all he surveys, including the press. Democracy has in this respect changed little. This tragedy has lit up the truth of Nepal's monarchy. The thought should make one shudder: if this is what Dipendra could do to his family when denied his will, what havoc would he have wrought on his country if he had been denied a wish? It is difficult to comprehend what would be worse: a spoilt child in total control, or a spoilt child fretting at the restrictions upon monarchy inherent in a system where power must be shared with civilian politicians. The new king's son Paras is also not famous for his maturity. This is not the best time to throw facts at monarchs. But alibis are of little use, even in the guise of heroic journalism. This is not a tragedy created by India or the USA or China. This is a tragedy built into Nepal's compromise, into the imperfect revolution of the Nepali Congress. When the monarchy wanted to throw the late, great BP Koirala and the democratic leadership into prison, it did not blink. When the people overthrew the king's government, the democrats turned sentimental, reinforcing the monarchy. Today this has reached such proportions that people refuse to believe eyewitness accounts of the massacre, and the government and the new monarch find it expedient to feed extravagant assumptions although they know the truth. This diet of fallacy can only feed a moment or two of history. The young men who are shaving their heads in sorrow were, ten years ago, seething at the palace. There is deep grief for the dead. But when the mist evaporates Nepal will have only two options: it will have to believe the crown prince massacred his family in a horrible act of insanity: or that the new king is tainted, like Hamlet's mother. Perhaps, Hamlet-like, doubt is the destiny of this generation. Either way, there is no doubt about who is guilty. There is something spurious in the state of Nepal. ♦ (By agreement with the Asian Age)

## Japan Times

The fact is, whoever is ultimately implicated in the crime, the country faces an uphill battle in maintaining its political stability, let alone its recently achieved and tenuous hold on democracy. Although he began his reign in 1972 as an absolute monarch, King Birendra won the Nepali people's regard and even affection despite—or perhaps because of—having let go of power over the years to the point where he was little more than a figurehead. In a country as poor and politically fractured as Nepal, the king remained an important symbol of unity or at least the possibility of unity.

But symbols are fragile things, easily shattered. When the gunman opened fire in the palace last Friday, he killed more than just those 10 unfortunate people. He may also have killed the one idea that still held Nepalis together, not because a new king could not be found, but because the murder suddenly exposed the ugly reality behind the ceremonial facade of unity that was the royal family's only reason for being. The Shahs, it turned out, were as fractious and divided as their subjects—a perception that will likely hold even if the murderer turns out to be simply a prince gone mad with bitterness. It will take an exceptional king to restore the beneficent illusion, and King Gyanendra has hardly gotten off to a good start.

The danger is that the vacuum of confidence that has ensued will provide an opening for one or other of the extremist groups that have long threatened to reverse Nepal's sluggish transition to democracy, be it Maoist guerrillas on the left, or the army on the right. The best that can be hoped is that the inquiry into the massacre, reconstituted so as to meet all charges of bias, will get back on track as soon as possible. Nepal needs to put its Shakespearean blood bath behind it and return to the more humdrum business of pulling itself up out of poverty and corruption—without reverting to demagogy. Now that would really be worth headlines.

## "No conspiracy"

India Abroad, New York

**Hindustan Times** 

#### AZIZ HANIFFA

Intelligence agencies and senior Bush administration officials say their investigations do not indicate any conspiracy in the massacre of the royals in Nepal. All indications are, intelligence sources say, that "it was a case of one man gone horribly wrong,"—Crown Prince Dipendra, who gunned down his family before shooting himself.

The officials acknowledge that the tragedy could have a negative fallout, in that it could embolden the Maoists and encourage them to exploit it to end Nepal's fledgling democracy. Senior officials say the US is deeply concerned "as is the Nepali government about the Maoists, who have already tried to exploit the situation," pointing to the op-ed article in *Kantipur* by Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai. An official said: "We believe Nepalis need to work on this problem and that the grievances the Maoist insurgency is based on



#### VIR SANGHVI

2010

For all of the last week, the Government of India has been concerned that the Indian press might offend the Nepali monarchy. The government's appeal to the media is always framed in terms that seem eminently reasonable. Look, says the official doing the briefing, we are dealing with a very sensitive situation. There is a lot of anti-Indian feeling in Nepal. The government may like us but the main opposition party, the Communists, hates us. And they've grown massively in influence over the last five years. Then there's the Pakistan angle, the official will usually add. Finally, the official will conclude, our best hope is the monarchy. King Birendra was a reasonable sort of fellow but we believe that King Gyanendra is potentially anti-Indian. So, we've got to move very carefully and make sure that we do nothing to antagonise him. In the midst of all this ISI activity and Maoist political popularity, India's best hope lies in winning over and aligning with the monarchy.

I don't know enough about the current situation in Nepal to disagree with this assessment of India's options. But every time I hear about the Government of India's current position on Nepal, I'm reminded of my first visit to Kathmandu. That was in 1988 and the situation was tense. India had closed most entry points into Nepal (the papers used the term "blockade") and no food or fuel could get through. Everybody I spoke to in the Government of India, either at our embassy in Kathmandu or at South Block in Delhi, argued that this blockade was necessary. The Nepalis, I was told, had to be punished. Only a year later, it began to seem as though the officials had been right all along. The King became a mere constitutional monarch. The Indian officials I spoke to were overjoyed. We did it, they said, we brought democracy to Nepal.

Ten years ago, we were taking credit for downsizing the powers of the monarchy and patting ourselves on our backs for restoring democracy to Nepal. Today, we are deeply suspicious of (if not entirely hostile to) many of the forces that have emerged thanks to that democracy. Far from fondly recalling our role in neutering the Nepali monarchy, we are now saying the absolute opposite: India's best hope lies in the monarchy, not in the democratic system.

#### NATION

# The medium was the message



## **ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY**

t was around 0300 on the morning of Saturday 2 June that Niranjan Neupane, a financial consultant in Kathmandu, was woken up by the phone. He couldn't believe what he heard, and remembers praying it was not true. Too shocked to go back to sleep and unable to confirm what he had heard, he turned to the Internet. And there on the

www.nepalnews.com site was an announcement of "a recent development". The link took him to the website of this paper, which had an account of what had happened at the palace five hours earlier.

Bhola Rana, a former UPI correspondent and now a reporter for nepalnews.com, first filed a report on his news portal at 2300 Friday that the queen's sister, Shanti Singh was dead. His editors pushed that story out with an obituary. But when Rana and his editors started checking rumours that she had been shot, they also started getting reports from Chhauni that the entire royal family was dead. Nepalnews.com updated its report at 0130 saying other members of the royal family may have also died, and that details were sketchy. By 0230 the internet edition of Nepali Times hosted on www.nepalnews.com had the story and the crown prince's reported involvement.

The Nepali diaspora, if they were not called by relatives and friends in Kathmandu, first learnt about the tragedy from the internet sites. The servers of ISPs were saturated with log-ins and because the telephone network was busy, it was difficult for those hungry for correct information in Nepal and abroad to connect. Says Worldlink's Shyam Aggarwal: "We were running at 100 percent capacity all of last week. Usually we run only at 80 percent traffic." By Saturday morning, the story had spread like wildfire through the streets of Kathmandu, and citizens who woke up to hear only mournful music on

Information through the Internet emerged as a credible, alternative source of news from Nepal last week, as millions of people across the world typed "Nepal" into their search engines.

state radio, television and private FM knew something was wrong. Only two of the broadsheet Nepali papers, *Space Time* and *Samacharpatra*, had the story in their Saturday morning editions. Occasional radio announcements calling members of the Royal Privy Council for an emergency meeting was the only indication that the royal family was involved in something big and tragic.

The government's information blackout didn't help matters, it sowed confusion and wild rumours which also found their way back onto the Internet through personal emails and chats. When the official story did come out, blaming "a sudden discharge of an automatic weapon" the cyber-public was convinced of a coverup. This was what fed the rumour mills and led to the public's inability to accept the truth of the original reports that the crown prince was the gunman.

Recalls Neupane: "I checked nepalnews.com and Nepali Times and read the story there. I then checked other sources, and gradually began to convince myself what I heard on telephone was true." Others we spoke to said they had received calls from Washington or Tokyo as early as 2330 on Friday night saying they were trying to confirm what they had heard from calls from Kathmandu. The huge e-mail and chat room traffic in the days after the shootout was the surest sign that the Internet had come of age in one of the world's least-developed countries as a credible source of information—and misinformation, as the numerous websites and mass emails discussing conspiracy theories attest. If official sources were silent or not telling the truth, if the independent print media, television and radio were staying tightlipped, parts of the public now had an alternative source of information.

Most of the 25,000 Nepali email and Internet accounts were active during the week of the tragedy, which means an estimated 125,000 people within Nepal were getting their information from this medium. Nepalnews.com

which used to get 15,000 hits a day, logged 80,000 on Saturday. "Most people getting information from the web were the Nepali diaspora, foreign media, tourists and researchers," says Deepesh Pradhan, director of Yomari Inc. which owns Nepal Home Page. "But it still hasn't proved its effectiveness inside Nepal," he cautions. Nepal Home Page logged 60,000 visits in the three days following the massacre. On Saturday morning, Pradhan's server nearly crashed after an overload of visitors.

Journalists at nepalnews.com worked throughout the night trying to confirm sketchy details from nervous sources, and making sure to post only what they were sure of. Says Bhola Rana: "We only moved out news after we had checked, rechecked and triplechecked the details from multiple sources." The Internet newsportal was running like a full scale wire service with the public and other media also depending on it for the latest. During the week, access to

nepalnews.com started getting difficult

because more than 1,000 readers would be logged on at any given time. Mercantile's servers have 300 ports for connection, and these have been increased to 1,500 to accommodate the traffic. This means 4,500 callers can read and download news from all over the world simultaneously. Internet connections were not just blocked by people visiting Nepali websites and those of news organisations, but also by people seeking background information on royal family. One such site, www.crosswinds.net, even details the formal titles of royalty, their ages, and other biographical details.

In the last two weeks the Internet—and common people subverted attempts at keeping facts and discussion out of public reach. But the government didn't seem to realise that. Digging up a clause in its antiquated pre-Internet press and publications act it warned individuals this week that they couldn't report on the crisis without proper accreditation. ◆







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## by **PRAMOD MISHRA**



sororicide, and, finally, suicide. How can one accept that it has occurred among the royals, whom people looked up to as models of godly behaviour, protectors of dharma? Isn't the eldest son responsible for looking after his parents, here on earth as a caretaker and afterwards, performing annual

Nepalis all over the world find their long-held belief systems and cultural practices radically challenged. Hence the refusal to accept the straightforward truth and the search for conventional, palatable explanations. The traumatised collective psyche of Nepalis will take a while to heal, and open discussion of these matters and transparency are the only way the healing can begin. ♦

Pramod Mishra teaches literature at Duke University and wrote for the Internet magazine Nepal

shradha for their salvation?

Digest from 1994 to 2000.



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Nepalis all over the world find their long-held belief systems and cultural practices radically challenged.

othing in their cultural ideologies and practices prepared Nepalis for the royal massacre of 1 June. Their inability to unpack its enormity has unleashed an unprecedented flood of grief, anger and disbelief. True, examples of regicide can be found in many cultures, in literature as well as history, but such an extreme example does not exist anywhere. How can they accept the fact that their amiable, smiling crown prince gunned down almost his entire family before ending his own life? In the west, when such traumatic events occur, counseling and the "talking cure" provide succour to the affected. How will the collective psyche of the Nepali populace heal?

NATION

COMMENT

Cultural sources-legends, myths, literature, scriptures-have failed to help comprehend and interpret the enormity of the carnage People have refused to attribute it to an act of individual will and agency. Instead, they have sought to rationalise it by looking for a grander conspiracy and geopolitical design that would measure up to the immensity of the event. In keeping with his orthodox Marxism, Baburam Bhattarai, in his Kantipur opinion piece, refuses to entertain a personal intention behind the killings. In trying to find meaning in global and regional geopolitics, he conflates motive with consequence. All events are historical, but some events in history may not neatly fit into an orthodox interpretation of a doctrine. To accept that the immediate motive for the incident was personal challenges the very foundations of Nepali culture and society. As much as the murders in the royal palace will have geopolitical consequences in the region, the personal motive of a crown prince going berserk for unacceptable love has no less cultural significance. In both life and literature, romantic love has almost

always been maligned as the private obsession of an individual. It is dismissed as eccentric, the whim of transient youth, a passing hormonal urge, a mysterious, villainous affliction incomprehensible to family and society, a momentary passion equivalent to madness, the sooner whose storm passes by with minimum damage to caste, clan, race, blood and hierarchy, the better. South Asian society has immortalised love in its lore and legends-Laila-Majnu, Siri-Farhad, Hir-Ranjha-wherelovers suffer in anguished isolation or annihilate themselves. But it also refuses to legitimise romantic love by recognising its humanity and respecting its life-affirming worth. People in Nepal are angry because they cannot accept that the carnage at their revered palace was just such a waste of human lives.

For commentators on culture, however, accepting that the motive behind the killings was personal carries tremendous significance. To say that young people have always fallen in love despite prohibitions is to state the obvious. But to explain that after the advent of parliamentary democracy ten years ago, Nepal sought to legitimise the expression of emotions and ideas, private or public, without restriction, is to indicate the emergence of a new public and cultural ethos in Nepal. A civil society founded on democratic cultural values and principles was gradually taking root in the feudal Nepali soil. Differences of opinion were sought to be resolved through discussion and dialogue instead of silent or violent dictates. Indeed, people insisted on speaking openly about differences in identities and ideas, and living with them. Nepali intellectuals, writers, and activists sought to make discourses about difference a vehicle to comprehend personal and political events. With the telecommunications revolution, chatting about everything

from love to gender to poverty travelled far and wide among Nepalis and played a major role in easing the leap from feudalism to democracy. There was an urgency in the words of writers, artists and intellectuals, as if to spare the nation the trauma of some unforeseen tragedy. Their failure to do so then now fuels the anger.

Similar misfortunes have befallen other societies that have struggled in our postcolonial times through the contradictory desires of tradition and modernity, cultures caught between the feudalism of caste and parental dictates, and the democracy of informed personal choice, commitment to love, equality and happiness, between fanatic adherence to dogma, and commitment to resolving and living with differences. At first glance, Friday night's carnage symbolises the utter cynicism of Nepali urban society—it seems to offer no lessons, yield no meaning. In its confusion between tradition and modernity, the Nepali ruling class has lost its bearing in both. But we need to read this event politically, culturally and morally.

The royalty has irrevocably been stripped of its divinity and made worldly, flesh and blood mortals with virtues and failings. Opening the palace to investigation by outsiders has further demystified the divine aura that hung around it for centuries. From now, Nepalis themselves will have to ensure the safety of their royal family, rather than letting the palace live in its complacent divinity charted by astrology. It appears that even the Maoists need the monarchy—unlike the majority Han in China, or Slav dominance in the former Soviet Union, Nepal is perhaps too diverse, geopolitically too complex, to hold its own. This new vulnerability of the palace has also placed greater responsibility on Nepali civil society, which cannot afford any more to be complacent and dependant in the sphere of governance. To leave the nation's fate to the survival of the monarchy is to play with the nation's existence. Nepali civil society needs to take on a more active role in consolidating democratic culture

a democratic polity while remaining culturally feudal. Families need to start resolving differences through dialogue — and learn to live with disagree-ment. Had the process of the crown prince's marriage been made public, perhaps this tragedy could have been avoided. The airing of diverse opinions would have illuminated knotty issues. The emerging public culture would have made it clear that caste and clan systems have outlived their time and that Nepal can no longer afford sacrifices in the name of caste and

adults empowered by, and

accountable to, the people.

clan purity. Caste and clan were never unadulterated in the first place-they were constructed,

and polity, and tell politicians they need invented to specific ends.

to behave not like the unruly children of The royal massacre has a divine father, but like responsible triggered an unprecedented moral crisis among Nepalis. Yes, the susceptibility to rumours and The incident also shows conspiracy theories regarding that a society cannot have anything royal had their origin in the total ban on information from the palace to the populace, which seems to have reached its high point on 1 June. In the past, constant intrigue among Nepal's courtiers to advance factional political ambitions fuelled the bazaar of rumours. Rumours and conspiracy theories were the only way common people could make sense of their total helplessness as political subjects. But the current insistence on conspiracy theories is rooted in something much more serious and fundamental. Friday night's events represent a radical negation of family values-the eldest son of a family committing regicide, parricide, matricide, fratricide,

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## Godavari

Tue

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28-17

## NATION

# All the king's businesses



## **BINOD BHATTARAI**

. . . . . . ing Gyanendra was a reclusive behind-thescenes prince busy with his conservation work and business dealings in the 30 years that his brother was king. His shadowy presence during the Panchayat years earned him a reputation as a powerful business contact.

Since 1982, Gyanendra became more involved with the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMNTC) and garnered international attention during the annual meeting of the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Kathmandu last November.

But his substantial business interests in tourism, hydropower, tobacco and other industries have drawn the attention of foreign media in the past weeks. Some have argued that as king he should not be in business, while others say it is better to have an enterprising king, especially one who understands business management.

The royal family has investments in some companies of the Soaltee Group, but neither the king nor members of the royal family own shares directly, according to group chairman, Prabhakar Rana. The three companies are Soaltee Hotel, Himalaya Goodricke (formerly Himalaya Tea Estate) and Surya Tobacco.

The hotel and the tea estate date back to the time when Prince Himalaya and Princep Shah set up the businesses 40 years ago. King Birendra, his brothers and other royal family members inherited the property. The tea company is a joint venture now, and the hotel is a publicly listed company.

The Soaltee Group has two investment companies: Soaltee Enterprises (P) Limited and Surya Enterprises (P) Ltd. The other companies in the group are in hydropower, agriculture (tea and tobacco), transport, market research and shipping. On average the companies under the group pay 12-14 percent of the government's total tax revenue, and all tax obligations are said to be "up-to-date".

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The royal family investments are made through Surya Enterprises, which has investments in three companies: Himalaya Tea Estate, Soaltee Hotel and Surya Tobacco. The investment are handled by professionals and Rana told us the royal family "did not interfere" in the company. The family does not have interests in trade, export and import.

Company sources told us that except for Himalaya Goodricke, the royal family does not own a majority stake in any of the companies they have invested in. King Gyanendra chairs the Himalaya-Goodricke board, which his associates told us he may give up as soon as he gets over the present crisis and settles down to take up his new role as monarch.

The King is expected to keep up with his conservation interests, and by law would become patron of the KMNTC. One source told us: "He is already too much into it, and it is an environmental chairty."







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We extend our hearty felicitations to His Majesty King Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev on His Majesty's enthronement and wish for progress and prosperity in the country through His Majesty's dynamic constitutional leadership.

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**B** 



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- \* The Club, Bhatbhateni Latest Hindi movie and latest top-ten English movie, 7pm, free.
- Nepali and Hindi movies online ticket booking at www.nepalshop.com

## **EATING OUT**

Sekuwa (BBQ) Night Dwarika's Hotel. Starters, meats, vegetarian selections, dessert, complementary drink. Traditional dance in lamp lit Newari courtyard. Rs 699. Friday nights. 479488

✤ La'Soon Restaurant and Vinotheque Lunch, tea and dinner with European and American food, fine wines. Pulchowk. 535290

Brunch with swimming Shangri La Kathmandu's award-winning garden. Rs 700 + tax. 412999

Wet & Wild Summer Swimming in a cool pool and a buffet lunch. Saturdays at Godavari Village Resort. Adults Rs 600, children Rs 350. Taxes extra. 560675, 560775

✤ Mango Tango Exotic mangoes desserts Hotel de l' Annapurna. All day, all food and beverage outlets.

Movenpick Exotic desserts at the ice-cream lounge, Darbar Marg.

## MUSIC

✤ 2:001 For the Love of Rock Vibes Entertainment presents the third annual rock festival with Robin and Looza, Flower Generation, Axata, Albatross, and Hybrid Pressurize. Scout Headquarters, Lainchour. Rs 200. 2 June. Win free tickets online at www.vibes.com.np

 Cadenza Jazz at the Upstairs Bar, Lazimpat, Wednesday, Friday 7.30pm. Rs 200

## DANCE

Sounds from the Underground Dance party at Simply Shutters Bistro, Baber Mahal Revisited. 1 June, 8pm onwards. Rs 300.

## **EVENTS**

• **Fanta Grand Fun Fair** Live music, games and food. Godavari Alumni Association and Cohort 1,2,3 June. Jawalakhel Grounds.

Stress Free Weekends Overnight stay at the Hyatt, dinner for two at the Rox Restaurant, use of pool, health club, spa and outdoor jacuzzi, ayurvedic massage for two, weekend brunch, late check out Sunday. Rs 9000 plus tax. Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 491234

Pheri Jaun Hai Pokhara Free airfare, room, breakfast, airport transport, use of health club and lots more. Rs 1500 for Nepalis, \$45 for expats. Shangri La Hotel & Resort; sales@hotelshangrila.com, 412999

Spiny Babbler Museum Readings and presentations of contemporary Nepali literature and art, Sundays 5-6pm Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel; Tuesdays 4-5pm Kathmandu Environment Education Project, Thamel; Thursdays 7-8pm Bamboo Club Restaurant, Thamel, Saturdays 5-6pm New Orleans Café, Thamel. spinybabbler@mos.com.np. 542810, 546725

Poetry, Meditation, Music Learn practical techniques of meditation to find peace for positive livingLive meditative music, poetry, short lecture on spirituality. Sri Chinmoy Centre and Budhanilkantha School. Buhanilkantha School Assembly Hall. 2 June, 9am-11am. Free.

 Discourse Swami Subodhananda, Jain Mandir, Kamalpokhari. Chinmaya Sangh Nepal, in Hindi. 1-7 June, 7.30am-8.30am (Driga Drishya Vivek), 5.30pm- 7pm (Ram Charitra Manas). 521379

The Club, Bhatbhateni Rusty Nails play Friday nights, 7pm, free. Saturday poolside BBQ, bingo, music. Rafting, 2 June. Includes one night at the Riverside Spring Resort, BBQ, breakfast. theclub@ntc.net.np. 426238, 416430

## **EXHIBITION**

If Bodies have Voices From the Street: Kathmandu 1985-1995. Photographs by Wayne Amtzis. 25 May-11 June. Amtzis reads from his collection City on His Back. 3 June, 4pm. Siddhartha Art Gallery. 411122

✤ Mani: Jewelled Words of Tibetan-Buddhism on Flags, Wheels, and Stones Fulbright Scholar Katherine Anne Paul's research on the popular use and manufacture of Tibetan religious artefacts in Nepal. Until 2 June. Bamboo Gallery, Panipokhari. 412507

### **MARTIN CHAUTARI**

Mon-Fri

Sat

\* Formal and Informal Judicial System and VDC's Judicial Rights Pundits: Advocate DN

## BOOKWORM



Mahâmudrâ: The Quintessence of Mind and Meditation Takpo Tashi Namgyal, trans. Lobsang P Lhalungpa

Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1993/2001

The first English translation of a major Buddhist manual detailing the various stages and practices for training the advanced student of Mahayana and Vajrayana meditation. The original Tibetan text was composed by Namgyal (1512-1587), a great lama and scholar of the Kagyu Buddhist sect.

The Concealed Essence of the Hevaja Tantra GW Farrow, I Menon Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1992/2001



The Hevaja Tantra is a non-dual Yogini tantra of the late Mantrayana Buddhist tradition composed in north-east India in the late eighth century. This text constitutes the essence of sophisticated, but controversial, tantric methods and is an authoritative account of the classic tantric period of India in religious history (5-13 century).



Great Eastern Sun: The Wisdom of the Shambhala Chögyam Trungpa Shambhala Publications, Boston, 1999 Rs 1,875

The follow-up to Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior. Trungpa addresses our deepest fears: the alienation of modern life, depression, materialism, aggression, anger, anxiety, and lack of self-worth. He says we are all powerful and genuine individuals who need to ignite the warrior within.

Teachings from the Vajrasattva Retreat: Land of Medicine Buddha, February-April 1999 Lama Zopa Rinpoche Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, Weston, Mass., 2000



"Doing Vajrasattva retreat is not simply about reciting the mantra and saying some prayers. It is about making the practice effective for your mind, making it the quickest, most powerful way to transform your mind." Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath

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## For insertions ring NT Marketing at 543333-36.



Sun

2

29-19

Parajuli, Dinesh Prasai CVICT. Unless otherwise noted all discussion are in Nepali. 5 June, 5.30pm Martin Chautari. Thapathali.

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com

**BBC** on FM

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## **NEPALI WEATHER**

KATHMANDU

Fri

2

30-19



Sat

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29-18

This satellite picture shows a fine series of southwesterly trade winds building up from the southern Arabian sea right up to the east coast of Thailand—indicating that the monsoon is off to a healthy start. These winds will in the next weeks head towards Bangladesh and take a sharp left turn to be over eastern Nepal by 10 June. Till then, we will see a series of weather cells moving from west to east bringing thunderstorms and occasional heavy bursts of rain characteristic of pre-monsoon showers. Finally, monsoon winds will chase the westerlies away and that is when the rainy season will officially start. (See "Monsoon moods" p. 10-11). So far, the onset of the monsoon is right on schedule. Long-term forecasts also show a healthy advance of the monsoon over June and July.

Mon

2

30-18

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Tue

2

30-19

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### ART REVIEW

# If bodies have voices





oet Wayne Amtzis' photographic exhibition currently on display at the Siddhartha Art Gallery compels its viewers to acknowledge the difficult socio-economic circumstances experienced by Kathmandu Valley child laborers, abandoned women, petty traders and porters. The collection of 43 black and white photographs is an uncompromisingly harsh portrayal of the vicissitudes of modern urban life. It depicts the drudgery of physical labor, moments of hopeless respite from work, solitary mad women, dejected street vendors, and

HAPPENINGS



DAY ONE: Tourism entrepreneurs fielded Volkswagen Vans with "Tourist" banners to ferry tourist groups to and from the airport as the strike got underway on 27 May. For individual travellers, rickshaws were the best (and most expensive) way to get to town. The cheapest way was to walk.

elders whose furrowed brows bear testament to their struggles to earn a daily wage.

by NINA BHATT

What is remarkable about this ten year retrospective is the intimate engagement between the artist and his subjects. Those photographed are aware they are objects of the camera's gaze, yet there is an unusual degree of consent, albeit momentary, to allow Amtzis to penetrate their lives. Both parties tacitly acknowledge that a kind of intrusion is occurring, but somehow appear to recognize that this intrusion, on this occasion, with the sympathetic nature of this camera lens, must happen. Thus do the subjects engage directly with the viewer, unapologetically offering a piece of their troubled lives. This frankness reveals itself more the longer one spends on each photograph.

Take for instance, the Youth at Indrachowk (#9). This handsome boy is seated for a brief respite from his work as a porter. At any moment, his name will be called out to haul a load probably beyond his capacity. His facial expression is one of explicit engagement. He seems fresh, still innocent, but his eyes have begun to ask "why me?" As viewers, we can weave a narrative as we move on to the young man in National Refrigerator, Gairidhara (#12). He seems to designate the future of the boy from #9. Yet a sense of determination still emerges in his face and eyes. This young man knows his life is hard, but he hasn't succumbed to resignation and despair.

The people whose portraits appear in this exhibit are cornered by the walls and streets of Kathmandu. The barbed wire they hang to, the ropes looped around their bodies and hands tell us how bound and limited are their lives. Representing "everyman"—they symbolize the drudgery carried out daily by millions of Nepalis. In a wider sense Amtzis' photographs provide a global commentary of on-the-edge urban workers and denizens of the street. Giving themselves the time these portraits deserve, the viewers can move beyond cursory impressions and appreciate the exhibition's complexity and subtlety. With patient scrutiny, what emerges are highly personalized "voices" which convey narratives specific to each individual. The serendipitous timing of the taking of these photographs (1985-1995) makes for disheartening political commentary. In today's Kathmandu "democracy" has arrived. Civil sector groups and NGOs flourish; politicians wax eloquent while expatriate and local development wallahs continually reproduce new 'agendas.' Meanwhile, life for those depicted here remains unchanged.

## KIRAN'S WINDHORSE

Kiran Manandhar, a prolific and versatile painter known for his celebratory use of color and stroke, has taken a new departure. A recent stay in Tibet, traveling and leading workshops in painting has introduced a collage-like element to his work. His current exhibit at the Contemporary Art

Gallery in Thamel incorporates in each painting a Tibetan prayer flag with a windhorse and a wish-fulfilling jewel rising from its back.

At first glance, much like many western artists, he seems to be utilizing an artifact from a culture even more "exotic" than his own. A more thorough viewing indicates the boldness of his attempt. The dominant image, whether it is integrated into Kiran's vocabulary of evocative color and energetic stroke or not, makes itself known throughout the exhibit. So close to Tibet's borders, a flag of Tibetan origin is raised in the landscape of Kiran's work.

These paintings are more contained than Kiran's previous endeavors. Though drawn from the openness and power of the Tibetan landscape, there is a sense of enclosure that even Kiran's color-rich palette and free flowing



dimension. In #6 and in # 26 we see these figures with the prayer flags. In one, a woman turns towards the flag and the viewer senses encounter; in the other, two figures, mutually engaged, seem not to notice the flag's presence. Interest and indifference, an emotional opening towards commitment and a troubled emotional entanglement, set the parameters of engagement with a wider world.

Kiran is persistent in his use of the Tibetan prayer flags. Whether the windhorse flies above, or lies submerged, or even fails to enter into or modify Kiran's abstract landscapes, their presence must be accounted for in whatever aesthetic conclusions the viewer may draw from his work. •

Kiran Manandhar, Everest Contemporary Art Gallery, Arcadia Building, Thamel.





DAY TWO: Bhaktapur shops wear a deserted look as tourists stay away on the second day of the strike.



DAY THREE: No one is left out of this public meeting organised by the organisers of the bandh. Ratna Park on 29 May.

As a complement to this exhibit, Amtzis will read at the gallery from his poetry collection, "City on his Back" at 4 PM on Sunday, June 3. ♦

From the Street: Kathmandu 1985-1995 Photos by Wayne Amtzis Siddhartha Art Gallery May 25-June 11,2001 Babar Mahal Revisited



001 <b>NEPALI 1</b>



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