



Courage & Conviction

newsfront

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Security personnel offer a protective umbrella to King Gyanendra after his motorcade was attacked. He was on his way back after offering Pooja at Pashupatinath Temple on the Maha Shivaratri day. See report on Page 2

Bhaswar Ojha

King speaks

Accepts moral responsibility and people's supremacy

■ Yubaraj Ghimire

King Gyanendra today owned moral responsibility for everything that happened during his 15-month direct rule beginning Feb 1, 2005 but not without making a point.

"We are also morally responsible for any failure or success during the 15th month effort", he said, and accepted without reservation, the supremacy of the people in Nepal's future politics. "While upholding the people's wish as supreme, may this day inspire all to remain dedicated, through multiparty democracy, to the greater welfare of Nepal and her people by ensuring their concurrence and active participation".

In a customary message to the nation on the

be installed, taking into account the grievances, aspirations and sentiments of all the Nepalese to the satisfaction of all", he said, clearly hinting, but not mentioning the ongoing agitation in the country for more devolution of power.

"Nepal is a kaleidoscope of diverse peoples—be they indigenous, Dalits or those living in villages, cities, terai, hills or mountainous regions. It will do well to remember that Nepal's sovereignty and integrity remains safeguarded only because all have accepted and abided by this reality. The Nepalese people alone are the arbiters of their own destiny and they wish to build a prosperous Nepal through a meaningful exercise in multiparty democracy. The self respecting Nepalese people have an unshakable belief that one's unique identity can be upheld only by respecting one's history."

Giving an account of how an elected Prime Minister recommended dissolution of the House after he failed to hold elections within the time frame that

the constitution stipulated, he said that his takeover was under a compelling situation as even the successive governments failed to complete the task of holding elections.

"Various obstacles thwarted our resolve to install elected representative bodies", the address said, and added, "as our sole wish is that the people should govern themselves through their own elected representatives, it is well known that we reinstated the House of Representatives on April 24, 2006 with the confidence that the nation would forge ahead on the path to national unity and prosperity, while ensuring permanent peace and safeguarding multiparty democracy". ■

"Various obstacles thwarted our resolve to install elected representative bodies", King Gyanendra said

57th National Democracy Day, the king not only acknowledged the people as the source of sovereignty, but also hoped that the changed scenario would lead the country to national unity, prosperity, peace and multi-party democracy.

"Nepal's glorious history is guided by the fact that Monarchy has always abided by the aspirations of the Nepalese people, on whom sovereignty is vested", King Gyanendra said, but put on record his own assessment which tallies with general feeling in the country about the political parties.

But he also came with a forward looking agenda. "In order to consolidate multi-party democracy, elected representatives bodies must

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Hitch over Interim Government

Management of arms is the pre-condition - PM Koirala



Bhaswar Ojha

Badu (Communication) stated publicly. "Interim Government with Maoists in it will be in place within a week," they said.

The U N team headed by Ian Martin has completed the process of registration of arms and armies of the Maoists lodged in seven cantonments, but the process of arms management, experts say, has much wider implication. It includes other phases like verification of the combatants and arms, and installation of monitoring, alarm and CCTV devices in the cantonment and sub-cantonment as stated in the agreement between the United Nations, Government and the Maoists. This is expected to take some time, although the U N has not yet said how long it is going to take. Besides, the Nepal army is also to deposit matching

The U N team has completed the process of registration of arms and armies of the Maoists, but the process of arms management, experts say, has much wider implication

number of arms under the U N supervision.

Maoists' victim groups and some coalition partners are now insisting for management of arms as the precondition for Maoists joining the Government especially after two of its cadres entered Parliament with arms last week.

Prime Minister's assertion for arms management coming close to series of statements from senior Maoist leaders including Prachanda put the two sides at loggerheads. Although the formation of the interim Government has already been delayed almost by two months, the latest hitch, especially because of the Maoists wanting to join the Government without 'arms management' has created a situation of confrontation.

"Despite all these hitches, the Prime Minister and Prachanda have discussed cabinet formation and the portfolios that the Maoist ministers will be getting", a senior cabinet minister told newsfront. ■

■ Newsfront Correspondent

Interim Government will be formed only after the process of the arms management is over, Prime Minister G P Koirala told a visiting German parliamentary delegation on Sunday. If Koirala sticks to what he said, that almost certainly delays formation of the interim Government within a week, the latest pre-condition set by the Maoist Chief Prachanda to holding election to the Constituent Assembly scheduled in Mid-June.

Koirala told the delegation that while he was eager to welcome Maoists in the interim Government at the earliest, Maoists' arms management process alone will qualify them to be the part of the Government. "Yes, that's what the Prime Minister said", confirmed Dr Suresh Chalise, Foreign Affairs Advisor to the Prime Minister.

Koirala's latest assertion contradicted what his two ministers—K P Sitaula (Home) and Dilendra Prasad

Axe falls on defaulters

World Bank Managing Director made it very clear that action against the defaulters was one of the main conditions for World Bank's continued support to Nepal.



Bhaswar Ojha

In a belated act that was apparently taken under pressure from the World Bank, the Government has seized passports of 80 bank defaulters representing 17 business houses.

The move meets the conditions set by World Bank for Nepal to qualify more assistance which the meeting of the Board of Directors, scheduled to take place on February 22 in Washington D C is to finalise.

World Bank Managing Director, Graeme Wheeler, who visited Kathmandu last week made it very clear to Prime Minister G P Koirala and Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat that action against the defaulters was one of the main conditions for World Bank's continued support to Nepal. The 17 business houses

account for 12 billion Rupees out of the total default of 30 billion Rupees. The people against whom action has been taken in the first phase include people who have borrowed more than 50 million Rupees each from the bank.

Other conditions which the Government at the highest level has promised to fulfill is to increase petroleum price, amendment to the labour law to create conducive climate for industrial and economic activities and good governance.

Apart from seizure of the passport, the action under the Bank and Financial Institutions Act disqualify them for holding public posts, receiving any honour, decoration from the State, and also puts a blanket ban on sale of any property without the State's consent.

Official information said those whose passports have been seized include seven members of Amatya Group accounting for default of Rs 3 billion. Others include Sahani Group, Mangatu Ram Group, Sarraf Group, NECON Air, Mittal Group, Rohit Group, Annapurna Textile, Pashupati Textile, Cross Country Hotels and Mahalakshmi Sugar mills. Birendra Kumar Kanaudia, a member of the Ruling Congress party, is the lone politician on the list.

■ Madhusudan Poudyal

Flexing secular muscles?

The faceless 'Home Ministry' expressed 'regret' in a routine manner over the attack on the king

As Nepal becoming 'secular' has not gone down well with a sizeable section of the populace, state's behavior and management towards 'Hindu devotees and pilgrims' coming to Pashupatinath seems likely to trigger a debate on what secularism means—a state that is anti-religion or one which treats all faith and religions equally.

Strict control on the movement of the Sadhus and devotees from India and the state's failure to prevent the attack on King Gyanendra in the temple area have drawn condemnation of the Government. A Senior Police official told newsfront that Police Headquarter had information about the possible attack on the king, "but there was no seriousness regarding its prevention".

The faceless 'Home Ministry' expressed 'regret' in a routine manner over the attack on the king

and announced a three member inquiry committee headed by its Joint Secretary which has been asked to submit its report within a week. "We had the information that Maoist cadres had been living in a forcibly occupied house in the temple area for the past several days and that some youths might cause trouble during the king's visit, there was no political instruction to foil it," police sources said.

"Prachanda-Girija Zindabad and Gyanendra leave Nepal", were the slogans that demonstrators raised as they continued pelting stones on the king's motorcade. His security rescued the king who drove the car himself. Security of the king and the royal family are the full responsibility of the Government especially after it changed the previous arrangement of the palace handling the security affairs.

The Vishwa Hindu Mahasangh which protested against the incident, mobilized its supporters the following

day and took out a rally demanding that Nepal should continue to remain a "Hindu state" and that "cow slaughter should not be allowed" and "call for referendum if necessary", they challenged.

The attack on the king in Pashupati came in the wake of the Government's expressed fear that "Hindu fundamentalists from India" in alliance with the pro-king elements in Nepal would be using the occasion of the Shivaratri festival to create problems for the Government. The daylong Kathmandu Bandh called by the Federation of the Indigenous Nationalities on the eve of Shivaratri also obstructed the devotees coming to Kathmandu.

According to the official sources, around 250,000 devotees offered their prayer at the Pashupatinath temple this year.

■ Newsfront correspondent

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VIR	VIRGO	PIS	PISCES

HOR HELP for Horoscope Help

FOREX	
Keyword	Result
FOREX currency code*	List the buying and selling rate for the currency code
FOREX BUY	List all the buying rates of all the currency code
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City of filth

Bhaswar Ojha

Besides causing pollution, the ugly sight is sure to have an adverse impact on the flow of tourists, hampering the positive indicators after the end of decade long conflict in the country.

■ Kiran Bhandari

Garbage has become an issue of politics instead of a subject of public health concern Kathmandu stinking with mountains of garbage all around has given rise to fear that hepatitis might take an epidemic form. It has already taken its toll on the 84-year old Prime Minister G P Koirala and more than half a dozen of his cabinet colleagues, and the number of similarly affected non-VIPs is expected to be larger.

Doctors say garbage leaking into water supply pipe is a possible cause behind this. Despite the repelling stink spreading everywhere, the Government's move to dispose garbage has been facing resistance one after another.

Besides causing pollution, the ugly sight is sure to have an adverse impact on the flow of tourists, hampering the positive indicators after the end of decade long conflict in the country.

The people of the landfill site located at Nuwakot's Sisdoles area under the Okharpauwa village Development Council are reacting to the pollution caused by the dumping site and have stopped garbage from coming in from Kathmandu for the past one month. "The local people are agitated because the Government has not fulfilled what it promised in lieu of our providing them the site for dumping garbage," Arjun Neupane, a Congress Democratic activist who belongs to Okharpauwa village told newsfront. Health of residents of six VDCs around the dumping site is believed to be adversely affected.

The Government had assured them that it would consider local demands for providing a hospital, drinking water facilities, irrigation projects, schools, ambulance and provisions for agriculture and livestock in the area once they agreed to allow the dumping there.

The Government says it has already pumped a huge sum of money in the area. "We promised to fulfill all these demands during a meeting with the locals on February 5, but they breached the understanding and did not let the work continue," Surya Silwal, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Local Development told newsfront. Now even the residents of Dhading, the adjoining district, are up in arms to stop the transfer of garbage from Kathmandu to Nuwakot. They said that crows, vultures and rats which come to the dumping site have caused a menace to "our crops and so we want compensation from the Government," said people of Chhatre Deuralia area of Dhading who enjoy Maoists' backing.

Maoists have their eyes on future politics and want to embarrass Rajendra Pandey, currently the Minister for Local Development. Pandey incidentally belongs to Nuwakot and if Maoists

succeed in mobilizing the people of Nuwakot and adjacent Dhading to block the garbage movement, it will be a victory for the Maoists.

Data available from the Government also expose the intent of the local resistance. The Government and the KMC have spent nearly 350 million rupees in garbage management, out of which eight million Rupees was given to Sisdoles area at the beginning of the current fiscal year but local body could not utilize the amount for any agreed project during the first

INSIGHT

six months. Non-implementation of the projects has created more headaches for the Government. Kathmandu Municipal Corporation with its office filled with increasing number of complaints daily about garbage and the epidemic it might cause, seems more frustrated with the political parties. "We have solicited support from the political parties to solve this problem immediately after the people of Sisdoles started resisting, but to no avail", says Dinesh

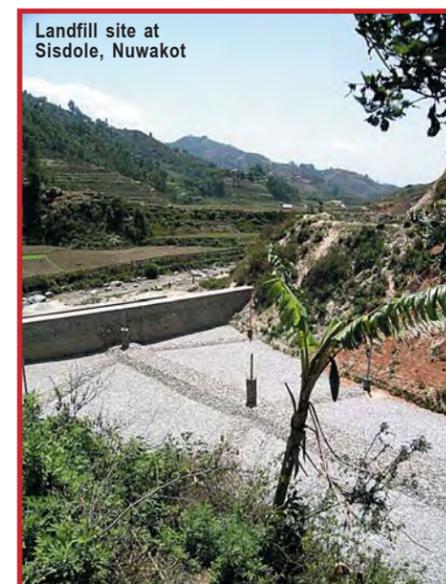
Thapaliya, Chief Executive Officer of the KMC.

This is the second occasion that the locals have resisted and violated the agreement about garbage disposal, first in Gokarna and now in Nuwakot. On all such occasions, ad hoc formula adopted to meet resistance seems to have only encouraged repeated violations. Those who vocally resist it are being rewarded with jobs or some other benefits to silence them and 'that's killing us' a KMC source told newsfront.

The capital valley consisting of Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur districts began looking for garbage disposal sites after mid 70s. The Gokarna landfill site was built in 1980 with donors' assistance, the German project GTZ taking the lead role. Local protests after 15 years forced the Government to look for an alternate site. Sisdoles was developed as the site with assistance of JICA once the Government and the local people finalized the terms and conditions for its operation and management. In little less than three years, the site has been closed for about a year because of the local resistance for some reason or the other.

While the current crisis in Sisdoles is in the

process of being resolved, there are serious problems looming large, mainly contributed by the quantity and nature of the wastes that the capital produces every day. It accounts for 400 tonnes of solid wastes a day, with no culture of recycling industries being initiated. ■



Landfill site at Sisdoles, Nuwakot

Rajesh Ghimire

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Ruling Garbage

Nepal's transition to peace and Democracy is not an easy task. It requires a clarity in policy, action and a Government under an effective leadership to implement it. Unfortunately, there are ominous signs visible already. Despite G P Koirala's best intentions, his failing health and total indifference even when the state apparatus is fast falling apart, the country's journey towards the promised path now looks difficult, if not impossible.

Transfer of power by the king to the eight parties in May and Maoists' pledge to join the parliamentary system has made the Government so complacent that its' movement forward has come to a halt. Breakdown of constitutional machinery, daily eight hour power cuts badly affecting industrial and economic activities and garbage piled across the roads, making Kathmandu perhaps the world's only capital of filth are not the only instances of growing pessimism.

There has been a fast erosion in parliamentary norms and values. We have private security guards of the parliamentarians who enter the House with arms, and the matter is settled through a secret deal between the Home Minister and certain MPs without the Speaker or parliament secretariat informing the House or nation anything about it.

We have a Home Minister who one day justifies killing of more than 30 people in Terai by the State and apologises the next day in the House. He owns moral responsibility for it but makes it clear that he has mortgaged his conscience to the Prime Minister. Challenging parliamentary norms and rules of accountability, the minister simply declared he will quit only if the Prime Minister asks him. And worst of all, the parliament keeps mum thereby failing to enforce that norm of accountability without which parliamentary system is reduced to a farce.

Koirala's relevance for nation at the moment does not lie in his past. It lies in his ability, honesty and efforts in proving through action that success of the parliamentary system lies in providing effective, transparent and fully accountable governance. Despite the eight parties' determined effort to have an apex court as servile as the parliament, it recently defeated Government's agenda of political vendetta when a former Home Minister and a political opponent was arrested thrice after this Government came to power, and all for no valid reasons.

A Government cannot be called a democratic one if it persecutes its rivals, out of vendetta and selectively. A Head of the Government can not be absolved of the blame. He will be defeating and disappointing the country if he allows all these deliberate drifts and aberrations. There are honourable ways for him to opt for than presiding over the rot.



Letters

Save rivers

Dear Editor,

Public apathy and utter civic irresponsibility are the main causes for Bagmati's degradation. As a resident of Asia's 'most polluted city', it is hideous to live amidst uncollected garbage, sewage-laden rivers, and encroachment on public space.

The costs to health, civic order and tourism are incalculable. Air and water pollution will raise mortality rates among children, congestion will lead to conflicts and visitors will avoid Nepal like the plague. Kathmandu's natural heritage will disappear if the trend continues.

Citizens have a right to live in a clean and safe environment. I urge the Kathmandu Metropolitan Corporation, Ministry of Local Development, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Health, Department of Roads, and civil society groups to act urgently to resolve the situation. I cannot envisage political actors building a 'new Nepal' when they cannot revive a dying city.

Please continue to raise such issues so as to influence public opinion.

Shyamal Shrestha
Jhochhen Tole
Kathmandu

Science & technology

Newsfront would be a great achievement of Samay team in journalism if it can raise issues concerning democracy, New Nepal, backward society & grassroot people. Newsfront has to provide space for different sectors like science, technology, agriculture, sports which I have rarely seen in the Newspaper.

I liked the news story by Kiran Bhandari (#4) in which he has clearly mentioned that It is not possible to conduct the election of constituent assembly in June. It has been clear that

the main disturbance for the election is political parties including Maoists as they are not making the situation to conduct the election.

Dilli Acharya
Dang

Miracle steps

Newsfront is proving itself frontier among the english weeklies in Nepal, in a short span of time. It is amazing to have lots of stuffs on politics, society, art and celebrities in a 12- pages tabloid and Newsfront is doing the miracle.

For an instance, your obituary on Chogyo Trichen Rinpoche on 12 Feb-18 feb issue of Newsfront was awesome as I have never heard about such *Mahatma* living in our neighbourhood. The piece on him delighted me and I couldn't stop myself paying tribute to that great personality.

Mamta Rawal
Chabahil

Interesting item

I was interested in your item in the 5-11 February edition of Newsfront, about the international conference on monitoring child adoption in Nepal, in March.

I am currently doing volunteer work with VSO Nepal, but in my home country (UK), one of my jobs was involved with overseas adoptions. I have a lot of experience & expertise in that area. So I would be very interested in attending.

Roz Roberts
VSO Nepal

Letters to the Editor should be addressed to:
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Spiritual Corner

What laws shall you fear?

Poet, philosopher and artist Gibran (1883-1931) was born in Lebanon. His poetry has been translated into more than twenty languages. He lived in the US during the last twenty years of his life where he began to write in English. **The Prophet** and his other books of poetry, illustrated with his mystical drawings, are known and loved by those who find in them an expression of the deepest impulses of man's heart and mind. An extract from the book:

On Laws
Then a lawyer said, "But what of our Laws, master?"

And he answered:
You delight in laying down laws,
Yet you delight more in breaking them.
Like children playing by the ocean who build sand-towers with constancy and then destroy them with laughter.

But while you build your sand-towers the ocean brings more sand to the shore,
And when you destroy them, the ocean laughs with you.

Verily the ocean laughs always with the innocent.

But what of those to whom life is not an ocean, and man-made laws are not sand-towers,

But to whom life is a rock, and the law a chisel with which they would carve it in their own likeness?

What of the cripple who hates dancers?

What of the ox who loves his yoke and deems the elk and deer of the forest stray and vagrant things?

What of the old serpent who cannot shed his skin, and calls all others naked and shameless?
And of him who comes early to the wedding-feast, and when over-fed and tired goes his way saying that all feasts are violation and all feasters law-breakers?

What shall I say of these save that they too stand in the sunlight, but with their backs to the sun?

They see only their shadows, and their shadows are their laws.

And what is the sun to them but a caster of shadows?

And what is it to acknowledge the laws but to stoop down and trace their shadows upon the earth?

But you who walk facing the sun, what images drawn on the earth can hold you?

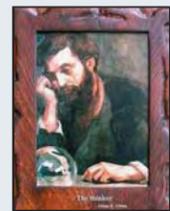
You who travel with the wind, what weathervane shall direct your course?

What man's law shall bind you if you break your yoke but upon no man's prison door?

What laws shall you fear if you dance but stumble against no man's iron chains?

And who is he that shall bring you to judgment if you tear off your garment yet leave it in no man's path?

People of Orphalese, you can muffle the drum, and you can loosen the strings of the lyre, but who shall command the skylark not to sing?



■ Khalil Gibran



Maoist law makers in the interim parliament

Reg Basnet

Intimidation Vs Democracy

Election should take place in a situation free from intimidation



Prachanda's public address on February 13 clearly was 'intimidation' of the masses and an endorsement of the extortion drive that his cadres have not yet stopped.

Maoists will soon be part of the Interim Government now that arms registration process is over. That will also be the commitment on the part of the Maoists to accept parliamentary system—a synonym of collective responsibility and individual accountability. It will also mean that they accept the principle that law and order, taxation will be solely under the Government domain and that judiciary, kangaroo or committed types have no legal existence.

During the past eight months, Maoists have not only behaved like tough bargainers but have got away with a share larger than what they deserved at this stage. G P Koirala was quite generous, although very unfair towards the Communist party of Nepal—United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), in granting 83 seats to the Maoists in parliament, exactly at par with the UML.

That will also ensure that Maoists' number in the cabinet will match with that of the UML, the former already promised number two position. In the event of Koirala's health failing him, Maoists will have natural claim over the succession, both as Head of the Government as well as Head of the state. This will be a strange thing to happen in the name of Democracy without the 'sovereign' people involved at any stage of the creation of the Government. It's a possibility that cannot be ruled out in Nepal's context.

But will that model of 'Democracy' be acceptable to Nepali as well as the world outside? As election is the expression of people's will through ballot, and the most crucial

ingredient of a functioning democracy, that process cannot be circumvented at any cost. And such an exercise should take place in a situation free from intimidation.

Prachanda's public address on February 13 clearly was 'intimidation' of the masses and an endorsement of the extortion drive that his cadres have not yet stopped. His insistence for election to the Constituent Assembly by mid-June, under the prevailing conditions and without any pledge that the code of conduct would be followed is only an extension of the politics of coercion and terror, an anti-thesis of democracy. An election without democratized Maoists in a spirit of 'agree to disagree' will

During the past eight months, Maoists have not only behaved like tough bargainers but have got away with a share larger than what they deserved at this stage. G P Koirala was quite generous in granting 83 seats to the Maoists in parliament

only be a sham.

Next couple of months will also bring Maoists under close scrutiny of the international community as a whole, and not just the United States of America alone. Indian official sources are once again investigating suspected links between Maoists and Lashkar-E-Toiba following arrest of Pasang Sherpa, allegedly a Maoist representative. Sherpa was allegedly trying to procure arms for 'Nepal's revolution' from

Lashkar-E-Toiba in Kashmir. And this arrest read with C P Gajurel's clear announcement that Maoists have only suspended the 'armed evolution and can be resumed any time' sounds ominous for the peace process.

On the other hand, if proven, the nexus would also thoroughly discredit Maoist leadership, especially Prachanda. In November, he not only claimed in Delhi that he had turned down ISI offer to help Maoists movement, but he also assured India that Maoists would not go against the southern neighbour's security interest. The Kashmir episode now will raise serious concern—whether Maoist assurance to India is as tactical as its declara-

tion that suspension of armed struggle is only 'tactical'. In politics, every party or leader has a right to formulate its 'political tactics' but in parliamentary democracy, rule of accountability is the cardinal principle.

The British Embassy in Kathmandu has lodged a protest with the Government after a British Council employee was threatened by one of the Maoist parliamentarians of 'physical harm'. But the Home Minister has not even tried

to ascertain facts despite the Prime Minister having asked him to seriously look into the matter. Series of lapses might have element of innocence and absence of deliberate attitude. But too many exceptions will be seen and analysed with the language of intimidation that Maoists, its senior leaders included, never stopped using.

All these instances, make the job of Ian Martin team more formidable. Registration of arms and cadres have to be certified, but if management of arms and armies and formation of the Interim Government with Maoists in it are meant to facilitate credible elections, then the process of verification needs to be accurate. Maoists have already increased the number of their combatants in the cantonment to 37,000, against the officially estimated number of 10,000.

A senior minister even claimed recently that the additional guerrillas are being trained at the cost of the State expense. Presence of child soldiers in the cantonment and segregating those who do not qualify to be combatants is a responsibility that Martin's team has to carry for two very crucial reasons: One for retaining people's faith in the UN system, and two for the purpose of creating minimum conditions for a credible election to the Constituent Assembly.

Maoists sincerity to the peace process will not be judged by how soon they join the Government, but how they contribute to creating an atmosphere conducive enough for the election. ■

The social change brought by civil society groups in thousands of villages and towns of Nepal has provided the political parties and the general citizens' vital social energy for them to express and re-shape the power relationships in society. The ongoing discourse in Nepal between popular sovereignty embedded in individual liberty and representative democracy legitimized by majority rule has caught the imagination of various civil society groups.

This discourse has divided the Nepali public into those who defend absolute popular sovereignty rooted in human rights and the accountability of power to those affected by its exercise and those who accord primacy to the essence of representative democracy. Can civil society represent a unifying symbol of popular will and be capable of bridging two camps?

Can the civil society help satisfy the aspirations of multiple social eruptions against the political class they themselves have fanned? In this critical juncture of the nation's history, Nepalese civil society groups need to redefine what is possible for them to do, what is legitimate for them to do and what they should not do. Given their anti-state disposition, they should definitely not excite widespread distrust against democratic institutions of the state. The political challenges for Nepalese civil society groups, however, are varied and complex. To put them into proper perspective requires one to see their relationships with other actors of governance.

Nepalese civil society reflects not only diverse and asymmetric life-forms of the nation's class, caste, gender, region and religion but also an essential aspect of a democratic society. These groups draw sustenance from a mixture of social contexts and historical spirit of citizens' community-mindedness and public-spiritedness entrenched into the political culture of duty-bound behavior and its liberating ideal of emancipation of all.

A decade-long insurgency and counter-

Create space

Nepalese civil society reflects not only diverse and asymmetric life-forms of the nation's class, caste, gender, region and religion but also an essential aspect of a democratic society



■ Dev Raj Dahal

insurgency operations have eroded the state's authority and capacity to perform basic state functions and release the potential for system integration. It is the duty-based civil society groups which are complementing the development functions of the state and providing the resiliency to citizens' initiatives to cope with their problems at the grassroots level. The vision of civil society groups based on freedom, social justice, solidarity and peace-building will continue to hold relevance for Nepal as universal reference points to improve the condition of Nepalese citizens caught in structural injustice.

The task ahead for political parties is to establish a synergy between the sectoral social action of civil society groups and national action of the state and make both sets of actors inclusive, visible, representative and accountable to larger public action. The peace accord has offered an opportunity to political parties to build strong networks of association and reengage with the bottom of society. This can lead to enhanced faith of ordinary citizens in the possibilities of modern politics.

Real democratization can occur if Nepalese civil society groups can overcome their partisan character, develop autonomy from the interest groups, build coalitions across the various civic groups and enable socially legitimate collective

action on matters of public good. Participatory democracy driven by information revolution does not become functional if civil society groups do not generate the habits of debate and offer political leadership effective opposition and competition on matters of public and national importance. It is imperative for the Nepalese civil society to ensure that the questions of common good such as security, peace, democracy, livelihood and identity are not neglected even for the marginalized. These are preconditions for the evolution of a rule-governed conception of public order.

Globalization has also expanded civil society's reach into the regional and global discourse and ignited fresh hope from a sort of global political renaissance articulated through the emerging social movements and world social forums. But, political sovereignty would be meaningless if there is no policy sovereignty, to enable the Nepalese decide the type of political, economic and social system they prefer for themselves and their children. The competitive spirit of the Nepalese citizens, civil society groups, markets and the political parties equally requires a strong coordinating role of the state to beef up the economic and social foundation of politics.

Nepalese civil society groups can help the leadership to articulate the policy sovereignty of

politics in economic matters and help to define national priorities for action, seek the support of international community and achieve the economy of scale through market efficiency and social integration. There is also an imperative to build trust and seek the synergy of civil society-private sector partnership to enable the torn state to assume basic governance functions—security, rule of law, voice and participation, delivery of public goods and conflict resolution.

In a phase of difficult democratic transition the responsibilities of Nepalese civil society groups are monumental in scope. First, democracy building in Nepal requires a political consensus on social contract and establishing the legitimacy of the state action. Second, modernization of the infrastructure of democracy—political parties, NGOs, CBOs, public interest groups, media, educational institutions and the other agencies of socialization—is a precondition to democracy consolidation and developing their compliance to the rule of law. Third, capturing the sovereignty of policy domain is another area to enforce the accountability of governance to public and push for conflict-sensitive programs.

In a governance regime, however, a sound mechanism of mutual accountability of internal and external stakeholders must be built so that scarce resources can be concerted into civic and voters' education for broadening awareness of the citizens as well as multi-track peace-building efforts. The suffering of the losers can easily pose risks to the order of society. Fourth, development of the linkages of micro and macro institutions of civil society is essential to enable their efficacy in the realization of the vision of good governance based on human rationality. A positive peace requires the framework of social justice where civil society groups with other stakeholders can enter into cooperative action for a sustainable democratic peace. ■

(Dahal is a political commentator)

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's commitment that "All marginalized groups would be included in all the organs of state machinery on a proportional basis." However, translating a political speech into viable affirmative action programs that will ensure the actual empowerment of marginalized groups through proper representation may not be as easy as it seems. The challenge ahead is to construct just affirmative action policies that can adequately and efficiently administer compensatory and distributive justice, but at the same time have very little room for abuse by free riders.

One of the most important roles of a state that strives towards inclusive democracy is to reach out to marginalized groups that have been bypassed either by choice or by default. This will ensure that public service system is inclusive and representative.

We, as a nation, will be better off by ensuring inclusion of marginalized groups rather than exclusion, which in itself is undemocratic. Thus, inclusion of all marginalized groups bypassed so far, in all of the organs of state machinery on a proportional basis, is necessary to inculcate a feeling of belonging and to make state machineries more responsive to the needs of everyone's need.

One of the ways adopted to correct past mistakes is through affirmative action policies to ensure empowerment of the marginalized groups. However, there is a fine line between effective administra-

Inclusion with vision

The only option that remains is the private sector. Is the private sector capable of investing almost nine billion rupees a year so that the rising



■ Hari Bansha Dulal

tion of compensatory and distributive justice through affirmative action policies that ensures empowerment of marginalized groups and the reverse discrimination.

In South Africa, after the African National Congress took power in the early 1990s, they tried correcting past indecencies by offering a severance package to white civil servants did not serve as a good omen as a majority of the experienced white civil servants left government service. This had a tremendous negative affect on bureaucracy and the overall development of the nation.

Thus, the burden lies on the government to ensure that the group that was privileged in the past does not become a victim of reverse discrimination and withdraw its contribution to the society. An abrupt withdrawal and flight of this section of society that is well-educated, relatively wealthy, and politically enlightened could prove to be disastrous for development of the nation.

For empowerment of members of a marginalized group to take place, it is important to identify the individuals within the marginalized groups that are actually deprived and in need of the state's intervention. Thus, preference should be given to only those castes within the officially

declared marginalized groups for their upliftment, enhancement, and subsequently empowerment.

For example, the members of backward caste Madhesi and Madhesi Dalits such as Lohar, Sonar, Dom, Chamars, Musahars and others who actually face discrimination on a daily basis, are at the bottom of the economic ladder and do not have access to social goods and opportunity should be the ones to benefit from the affirmative action policies, but not to the whole "Madhesi group" which they are part of.

This is mainly so because some members of the "Madhesi group" such as those belonging to upper castes- Brahmins, Rajputs, and Bhumiya- are actually more successful and financially well off than the lower caste Madhesi, Dalit Madhesi and even lower caste and Dalit Pahades. If they, along with lower caste and Dalit Madhesi, are made entitled to affirmative actions, the well-educated upper caste Madhesi that are better educated and financially well-off will quickly learn to hop opportunities and reduce affirmative action policies to "affirmative auction."

So, instead of blindly allocating opportunities to the people within the certain group, a combination of

factors like wealth, education level, income, occupation, and geographical disparities should be used to identify truly needy people among the officially classified marginalized groups. The resources and opportunities thus saved can be distributed among those who are that are needy but are born in the upper castes by default, not by choice.

The government should learn from the Indian experience. Despite having the public policy of affirmative action in India in some form or the other for more than five decades now, approximately 25 percent of total population is still languishing below the poverty line. The people that make up this 25 percent are mostly backward castes and Dalits. So, merely having policies in place does not ensure empowerment and emancipation. For real empowerment and emancipation to occur, policies should be able to deliver to those who need the most. In addition, affirmative action policies should be auditable. It should be audited from time to time to see if it is really addressing the issue that it is suppose to address or just enhancing dependency and the sense of entitlement among the recipients.

Our success lies in devising affirmative action policies that are unique, workable in the sociocultural

context of Nepal and which reach those who deserve it the most. The policies should be time-bound rather than open ended. Failure to do so would result in a situation like in India, whereby the hope that reservation would be abolished after the catching-up by the marginalized groups, has not yet been realised.

In the absence of a strict time frame, the very notion of catch-up will be defined to suit the political needs and will be subjected to political manipulation. As in India, there will be a consistent and concerted effort to extend reservation to cover more and more groups. It will be impossible to get rid of politically expedient policies of reservation in the absence of a time frame, even if it is a generation or two later.

Thus, having a timeline in place is extremely important to prevent preference from turning out to be an entitlement. Failure to do so will eventually constrict opportunities for upper castes and ignite social tension. The formation of upper-class militia such as Ranvir Sena in Bihar in future cannot be ruled out altogether.

The overall goal of affirmative action policies that are to be implemented in Nepal should be to make discriminated and bypassed members of marginalized group become more competent and help them to emerge as natural competitors rather than enhance intergenerational dependency.

(Dulal is a lecturer of Environmental Science and Public Policy at George Mason University, Virginia, US)



Janjati protesting on the street of Kathmandu

Bhaswor Ojha

New Nepal in making



■ Maj Gen Kumar Fudong (Retd)

Janajatis and Dalits have lost faith in the Government, and the people of Terai are not ready to comply with the Government's decisions.

The Madheshi rebellion and simultaneous Limbuwan Bandh recently forced the Prime Minister to make two statements conceding to their demand of amending article 63 of the interim constitution, related to the formation of the Constituent Assembly. This has not satisfied the aspirations and sentiments of the marginalized communities which comprises of Janajatis, Madheshis and Dalits. The dialogue that is likely to be held between the Government and the Movement leaders, most probably will fail to produce any workable solution to the basic issue of ensuring participation of diverse social groups in the Constituent Assembly.

The root cause of such violence and political protests lies in the Government's policy of not being articulate in the process of forming the constituent assembly election. The policy makers failed to realize that Maoists' social mobilization has aroused a sense of mistrust in the Janajatis, Madheshis and Dalits towards the traditional political elites. The general public sees that process of electing the members of the assembly as provided in the interim constitution is nothing but a means of retaining the traditional elites' political domination in the new constitution.

Politically, a serious conflict between the marginalised communities and the traditional elites has begun. This has led to uncertainty of the CA elections taking place as scheduled in May. If the citizens have truly become

sovereign, the constitution should be written by the representatives belonging to all segments of our society. Proportional representation based on the census could guarantee equal political rights to the marginalized groups and communities. Even in the House of Representatives, we hear support for their justified demand by most of the members of the Seven Party Alliance. Such political actions and counter actions indicate that the Government stands isolated with its political authority undermined.

On the other hand, CPN (Maoists) leaders must be satisfied to see their political ideology vindicated much before the election to the CA. The state has conceded to a federal system, a political agenda of the Maoists. The demand of autonomy and the right to self-determination put forward by the Madheshi and Janajatis would increase internal threats to the current regime. The Maoist leaders apparently know that the Government can neither positively respond to nor contain these threats. Such increasing crisis of political legitimacy must have prompted Prachanda to launch a final movement for federal republican set-up in April. His declaration in the mass rally in Kathmandu that if circumstances indicate that elections to the Constituent Assembly would be postponed, the only option would be to declare a Republic by April was a clear expression of that intent.

The Madheshi rebellion has virtually exposed the Government's policy and its' paralysed state. Janajatis and Dalits have lost faith in the Government, and the people of Terai are not ready to comply with the Government's decisions. The Government failed to enforce its authority causing high losses in human and material terms. The Government still does trust Nepal army in which there is a fatigue syndrome at functional level. And there is unease and confusion at the concept level of management after the command of the army was switched over from the traditional supreme commander to a civilian Government. The general public too feels insecure after going through the trauma of Maoists' 10 years insurgency. The civilians have lost faith in the police and the army.

If the elites still try to keep out the sidelined communities in the emerging politics, expecting peace and stability in the country will be like chasing a mirage. The fundamental problem lies in the structural rigidity of the current regime, which consists of old mindset that has so far sustained its legitimacy by appealing to traditional values and norms. And it is obvious that the Nepali Congress party wants to keep the ceremonial monarchy in Nepal, a symbol of traditional values without which the current regime would have no political influence in the country. Adoption of the proportional

representation system would reduce traditional political elites to minority in the CA.. The majority comprising almost 70 per cent of our population representing Janajatis, Madheshis and Dalits and their values and interests will remain pro-ethnic and for regional autonomy.

There is already a beginning of New Nepal, a secular state which means the society will be liberated from the domination of Hindu religious and cultural discrimination. The federal system would guarantee a shift of political power. Regional values and interests would give a new national identity to the state. The ideology propagated by CPN (Maoists) which is gaining more acceptability now would give a new face to Nepal.

Political elites need to understand that any effort to contain the marginalized groups and communities will not work now. Only a secure political system that guarantees a balanced social structure can ensure progress in the country. Regional and ethnic autonomy with a wider sense of identity are the best guarantees. That will be the beginning of the process to end political and social discrimination practiced for centuries. It will ensure that the sidelined citizens would start making their own decisions, articulate and enforce them. They would enjoy owning political power of mobilization and control over natural resources. And the obvious outcome would be permanent peace and stability in the country. ■

(Author is a parliamentarian and belongs to CPN-Maoist)

No time for politics

■ Subhash Devkota in Guangzhou

Notwithstanding China's meteoric rise as an economic power, it is still considered a country that is not so open and one with all pervasive culture of hero-worship of Mao-Dze-Tung. However, the founder of the Communist China did not have a monopoly over the ever-expanding list of its heroes and builders. An outsider and a first time visitor would be highly curious as to whose pictures and posters were displayed on the walls in the city. Would it be Mao? Or Deng-Xiao-Ping, the person who introduced economic liberalisation or Hu Jintao, the incumbent president, who represents the younger aspirations of the Asian giant? A recent visit to Guangzhou, which is fast developing as a modern city in the southern China, showed how off the mark were our imaginations about today's China.

Guangzhou walls no doubt had posters all over it but Bruce Lee, the Kung Fu hero topped the number followed by Brazilian footballer Ronaldo and that of Chinese film actors. However, some stationary shops still sold books and photographs of Mao and Deng's hoardings adorned some crossroads along major business centers. Former President Ziang Zemin and Hu Jintao, the most powerful youthful president found space only in very few walls and roofs of buses.

This clearly indicates that today's China is no different from the contemporary world that has prospered with consumerism. For Chinese youths, politics is almost a hated word. They are more concerned about how to earn more and buy the best consumer items. Chinese youths are into the race of affluence, its' pace increasing after China's open economic policy began dictating its developmental policies.

China's politics is still under the control of the Communist Party, but Chinese seem to have left politics exclusively to the politicians. Political rallies are some thing very uncommon but there

For Chinese youths, politics is almost a hated word. They are more concerned about how to earn more and buy the best consumer items



Chinese youth

will almost always be crowds on the streets and business centers to advertise and promote new commercial products. "Openness" is the word Chinese often mention while talking about their country's progress, but its' Architect Deng's name does not figure as frequently. Their names are mentioned only during discussions on politics. Surprisingly, their opinion on Chinese leaders San Yat Sen, Mao, Deng and Hu Jintao are similar. They call San Yat Sen, the Father of modern China and Mao the founder of modern China as well as the leader of the Revolution. Hu Jintao is simply called the president and the credit to economic liberalization and modernization is given to Deng.

It is hard for a first time visitor to notice any kind of political discontent as often stated by the western world. The Chinese adore the commitment for development that their Government has been able to realize. Despite facts proving that there is growing attraction to the West among the Chinese, common responses we met with were, "What does U S have that we do not have, why should one go there?"

Wide roads, high-rise buildings in planned cities and fast changing life style make a sense to the Chinese claim. The Asian giant with double-digit economic growth rate is expected to be the biggest economic power in the coming couple of years, and the west has acknowl-

edged it. With modernization and west's arrival in industries, Chinese are feeling a bit uncomfortable with their language constraints. Chinese language no more seems sufficient and Chinese youths are now fascinated to learn English.

All this openness has also contributed to 'westernisation' of the lifestyle in China. Dating in public places, abundance of pubs are examples of it. Owning and visiting discotheques and massage parlors is no more considered 'indecent' and subjected to punishment as it did in the pre-80s. Prostitution is an accepted part of the liberalised China. Perhaps openness in all sectors makes political control a much easier job. That is the impression the short trip gave us. ■

Nepali Diaspora



■ Neeva M. Pradhan

The big day had finally arrived. The parking lot of the DC Nepali School in Vienna Virginia filled up as cars pulled into the compound. The students walked with pizzazz escorted by their parents into the auditorium. Some students were already in their Pahari, Tamang and Newari costumes ready for the year-end cultural performance. Sahara, a seven year old ran up to her mother in excitement and asked in broken Nepali, "Maile kun song gaunchu?" In her Level II class at the school she was still learning how to pronounce words.

The suburban neighborhood with typical American rambler homes along the main street provided no hint of ethnic programs signifying cultural phenomena occurring right in its backyard. The DC Nepali School in Washington Metro area, catering to the Nepali Diaspora population of twenty five thousand Nepali immigrants, is a volunteer run organization that holds classes for couple hours on weekends. Now three years later and after six successful semesters, the school attendance had increased to 45 students, starting from four year olds to adults, fifteen core volunteers, and four class sections focusing on basic reading, writing, communication and verbal skills.

The DC Nepali School holds classes for couple hours on weekends.

The Turning Point

The volunteers were required to stretch beyond their comfort zone, assume a new role as teachers, trainers, and coordinators and make a commitment to create a haven for the youth to learn their heritage. They learned to overcome personal anxieties treading on new territory of teaching Nepali grammar, vocabulary and diction. Managing individual time constraints to fulfill the demands of volunteer hours meant forgoing certain weekend respite whether it be going to the movie theatres, visiting friends, preparing Nepali cuisine for their family for the entire week or watching the Super Bowl game on TV. This was the turning point where the volunteers reshuffled their priorities and values to embrace an alien concept to make a paradigm shift.

They learned that the prime challenge was to create a curriculum appropriate and exciting for an American born Nepalese youth in order to capture their enthusiasm and interest. Apart from ensuring a facility for language, the school's objective was also to help students understand cultural values and find a balance between the eastern and western cultures. They aimed at helping youth cultivate roots and make them multifaceted. However this feat was weighed against several conflicting realities of balancing a fast paced life and demands of work and home and lack of extended family support. For the volunteers, communicating this effort and selling the idea was equally exigent.

Considering all the odds, it was then nothing short of a miracle to see the school flourish and grow in a short time span. Apart from teaching language skills the school had a vision to provide a forum for the Nepali American youth to share the challenges they faced of growing up in dual cultures. Parents were not always aware that their children growing up in a new culture would not absorb their ethnic values naturally. Rather it took partnership, proficiency and special effort to inculcate the right set of values in the children. The year-end school program provided one such platform for communicating these conflicting values and a means to comprehend this complexity.

The skit "Asian Parenting" aimed at addressing subtleties of cultural orientation, its ambiguities and contradictions through a discourse between a Nepali father and his Americanized teenage son. The typical Asian father was over zealous about his son's school grades and insisted on him pulling his B+ to an A in the finals. The teenage son retorted back, "Dad do you realize how ridiculous you sound and that too on a Friday evening when kids are supposed to hang out? Any American parent would do hand stands to see a B+ on a report card and all you can do is lecture me about studying more?" At that point all the youth in the audience nodded in complete approval and flashed a cathartic grin at their own parents.

One of the biggest lessons that Nepalese youth have learned to accept is Asian parents can be banal about education and can display a fixation for A's in all subjects and nothing less. While imparting weighty messages, the skit provided a good dose of humor and relief through cross cultural innuendo interspersed with thick Americanized accents from the young performers.

The message from the skit provided a sense of how the dichotomy between cultural upbringings may make it hard for parents to understand children and vice-versa. Parents are most effective in preserving their children's allegiance to their own values if they negotiate compromises, which acknowledge and respect both cultures. We have to reconcile to the fact that children will acquire some degree of "mainstream" U.S. culture that is not necessarily evil since this skill is essential for them to succeed. The school's philosophy incorporated these dual values to mitigate the conflicts already prevalent in a multicultural set up.

The applause from the audience after the performance could not drown the popular slogan that the younger students had concocted as they shouted in unison, 'Nepali School is cool'.

(Neeva is the chairperson of DC Nepali school)

Joy in creating perfection

■ Sushma Amatya

Shakya brothers busy carving. Attached to their work, they are concerned more about quality than quantity



Photo by Bhaskar Ojha

Working six to seven days a week in the backbreaking occupation, these artists' story is a representation of the problems and challenges being faced by a large section of those involved in sculpting, carving trade in Kathmandu valley.

Raj Bhai Shakya shows his finished work



Raj Bhai Shakya, 30 and his brother Rabin Shakya, 25 are artisans with a difference in that they are striving to keep the spirit of love for their work above the fast encroaching trend of mass production and mediocre standards of work.

Raj Bhai has devoted his life to carving and adding details to statues of Buddha and deities of all kinds. His foray into chiseling began when he was ten. "My father, Juju Bhai Shakya, used to make Karuwas (water vessels). I think that sparked my interest." He apprenticed for two years under the well-known artisan, Siddhi Raj Shakya, a friend of his grandfather, and did a course from Hasta Kala training institute in Patan.

"It may sound idealistic but I really do not do this for money only. I am happiest when I create a perfectly crafted piece. I am content with what I have been earning and would not trade this for anything else. I would never want to go commercial. We mostly get orders but also keep a few pieces for sale," he said, pointing at deities of Green Tara, Aparamita, Ganesh and Shakyamuni Buddha.

Reluctance and often refusal to teach by those versed in the art was a major hurdle he faced. Relatives engaged in similar trade were unwilling to teach for fear of competition. However, he now expressed his readiness to teach if anybody would want to learn from him. "I'd be happy to share what I know", said Raj Bhai. Despite increasing competition, he said he has been faring well and attributed it to their extra attention to quality and details.

Rabin began working when he was 12. Today he is a full time artist and holds a BBS degree. He said he has seen a marked difference in how his father used to work and how they work today. "My father used to stick to old designs only and was satisfied with what he knew but we explored and picked up new patterns, new tools to work with and also learned the tradition in which particular deities are made."

Rabin expressed his dissatisfaction with the way the business was going and said most buyers these days only look at the price and not the quality or the finishing of a statue. "Some don't seem to notice if an eye is smaller than the other or if one hand is thicker than the other. They just come with a fixed idea of the size of the statue and the price. They seem to have no appreciation for details. Only a few seem to care about quality."

Rabin added, "I'm very attached to this work. I am proud to be an artist and feel happy when others praise my work but sometimes, practical problems overshadow everything." He said he was willing to explore other options of working in other fields since his brother could handle this business on his own. Asked if he would continue to work as an artist if the returns were better, he

said, "Of course, then I'd have no reason to leave what I enjoy doing. After our father passed away, we have been managing fine but sometimes it gets difficult. Our younger brother Amit is learning wax technology and that would add a new dimension to our work." His eyes wandered away dreaming of new possibilities.

Making sure they give nothing but the best to their customers, both the brothers spend anywhere between three weeks to two months before they complete an image. They do not get a stream of customers since they are not into mass production but as Rabin explained, "Our clients, especially from France and Germany are connoisseurs of art. They know what they want and are not willing to settle for second best. So, though our rates are slightly higher than the

market, our customers remain faithful to us".

When a metal statue comes to them, it is only a rough representation of its final form. They work on details like muscular structure, shape of body and expression on the face. Both agreed that carving a face is the most difficult part and the challenge was always to get the right expression. Learning through experience, they have only their hands and memory to guide them; and when they receive orders for a particular deity, they use photos to guide them.

Working six to seven days a week in the backbreaking occupation, these artists' story is a representation of the problems and challenges being faced by a large section of those involved in sculpting, carving trade in Kathmandu valley. ■

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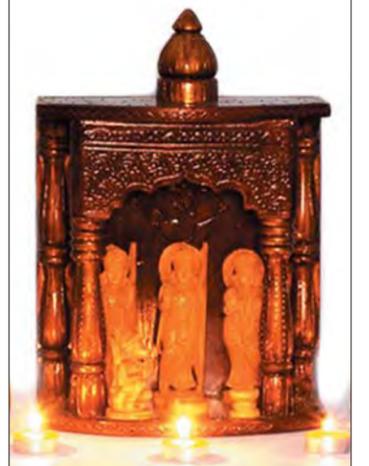




Bangladeshi living on the streets of Dhaka

There is an emergency in Bangladesh today, but there is no army rule. And at least for the time being, that is worth all the difference.

A Ram Temple



VHP's vision

Construction of 10 lakh Ram Temples within a year

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) said it would construct ten lakh Ram Temples in the country in a year's time to check alleged conversion.

The work of construction of the temples would begin from Ram Navmi, VHP media incharge Sharad Sharma said.

In the first phase, one lakh temples would be built in one lakh villages, he said adding that similarly more temples would be constructed in nine lakh villages in a phased manner.

VHP would launch a Hindu 'ekta yatra' for setting up of 'Hindu Rashtra' from November 20 and prepare a votebank of the community, he said.

(Expressindia)

On a knife's edge

Dhaka: When Dhaka's combative media recently ran reports about army excesses in both Bengali and English — soon after emergency was declared in Bangladesh on January 11 — newly installed chief adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed's advisory council reportedly debated what kind of preventive action should be taken to still the democratic clamour from other, copycat journalists.

Soon, though, the US and British embassies in Dhaka had issued stern statements in favour of freedom of the press.

The new government, sensitive to what the international community would have to say about overt censorship, let the matter go.

So when Indian foreign minister Pranab Mukherjee comes visiting on Monday to invite President Iajuddin to the Saarc summit in Delhi in April, he will find this robust city on a knife-edge,

straddling both truth and speculation.

On one hand, both journalists and political activists are treading a fine line between caution and irreverence for authority. Many refused to come on record on the matter of the media stories, though all of Dhaka ostensibly "knows" exactly what happened.

On the other, even a short walk around the city centre brings you face to face with another incredible truth. The people, among the poorest in the world, with first-hand experience of martial law even in independent Bangladesh, seem to be rooting for the emergency imposed by army chief Lt. Gen. Moyeen U. Ahmed.

For a start, the army is wielding a determined broom to cleanse public life from the criminalised cesspool of politics, into which Bangladesh had almost been willing itself for the last few years.

At last count, 19 ministers from the major parties, the BNP and the Awami League, have been arrested on charges of massive corruption.

Another 60,000 people have also been detained so far, among them bureaucrats, tax evaders, smaller activists, and it is said even doctors and teachers, all because they were stealing public funds.

Soldiers are all over Bangladesh these days, inspecting factories and godowns for such evidence. Relief material donated by foreign governments, such as blankets, tin for construction roofs and sheds, medicines — and even sports goods — have been forcibly removed by these soldiers from homes of the rich and powerful.

So far, the people are applauding with both hands.

"The army performed a minor miracle in January when it dismissed

the Khaleda Zia government and took matters in hand," said a salesman in a big Dhaka store.

For example, when the all-powerful Tariq Zia, son and heir of former Prime Minister Khaleda, was recently put under house arrest because he was ostensibly planning not one but three coups against the army in the short month since his mother was divested from power, even Dhaka's intelligentsia was fully on board.

So far, the clamour against human rights abuses hasn't begun. Major countries like the US, Britain, India, Pakistan and China have largely held their peace because the army has preferred to work behind the scenes.

There is an emergency in Bangladesh today, but there is no army rule. And at least for the time being, that is worth all the difference.

(The Telegraph)

No grooms

Wait for marriageable women to find suitable grooms in Kashmir is getting longer, with the 17-year-old insurgency creating a dearth of bachelors.

The wait for marriageable women to find suitable grooms in the Kashmir Valley is getting longer, with the 17-year-old insurgency in the region creating a dearth of bachelors.

Until some years ago, most parents ensured their daughters were married off by 25. Now, this has stretched to as late as 35 years and the women, who are also usually the breadwinners of their families, are becoming an increasingly visible group.

Aneesa Shafi, head of the department of sociology at the University of Kashmir, says, "The valley has lost thousands of its young men, all of marriageable age, in the last 17 years. This has created a dearth of suitable grooms. The institutions of family

and marriage are the worst hit.

"With many youth getting involved in militancy and their future becoming uncertain, it is difficult for parents to marry their daughters to them," she points out.

What was earlier a social stigma, having an unmarried girl at home, seems to have become a norm in the valley.

With traditional society seeing rapid changes, not just in its politics, but also its social and cultural fabric, these women have learnt to accept their new roles.

Ghazala Gul, a postgraduate student at University of Kashmir, says, "For girls in the valley, 30 to 35 is the normal age of marriage. I will marry only after my future is secure."

(The Times of India)



Kashmiri girls



Bhaswar Ojha

Rocking Kathmandu

Ozomatli set an example of youth initiative channelising its energy positively

Teenagers of Kathmandu were captivated by two-time Grammy award winning band from Los Angeles, Ozomatli that performed in Khula Manch, Ratna Park, Kathmandu, Feb 17. It was a free concert held to convey social messages relevant to the Nepali youth today. The 9-member American band known for its multi-ethnic, multi-racial Latin hip-hop band held rapt the attention of Nepali audience. The trip of the 9-member-

team was sponsored by USAID/Nepal and American Centres in Kathmandu and N.Delhi.

"It is beautiful to be with Nepali people", vocalist Tenor Sax said to the audience. The message of the band was, "different instruments but one rhythm, together we can make a prosperous Nepal." "We believe that diversity is a strong foundation on which peace and understanding may build," Asdrú Sierra, lead vocalist said.

Nepali rock band Robin and the New Revolution opened the concert and sang about patriotism and current social issues. Both Robin and the New Revolution and Ozomatli believe that diversity is a strong foundation on which to build peace and understanding.

Ozomatli set a fine example of youth initiative channelising its energy positively and created an impact on many young minds in the audience.

■ Jyoti Devkota

Revelation

Crushing faith

■ Sushma Amatya



A place of worship in any faith, in any country is a sacred area. There are unspoken rules of conducting oneself with discipline, dignity and respect for others to be followed scrupulously. Be it a Gurudwara, temple, mosque, church, monastery or anything else, once we choose to enter the premises, it becomes imperative that we abide by its norms and not desecrate the sanctity of the place by conducting unwholesome acts of aggression. Disgraceful acts committed in a holy place, violence against devotees of any particular faith reflects on the whole society and casts a shadow of shame on all.

It was with a sense of premonition that I approached the cremation area of Pashupati Nath temple on the Shiva Ratri evening. Shiva Ratri, one of the major Hindu festivals held in the hallowed grounds of Pashupati Nath temple for centuries, is awaited eagerly by devotees of Lord Shiva to pay homage to the deity. Over the years, it had been a familiar sight to see crowds of devotees from India and ascetics of all kinds travel to Nepal for this event. This year, however, the number of pilgrims was visibly less. The insecurity arising out of fear of unknown, questions regarding the issue of tolerance to others' faith, in a country recently declared secular appeared to have deterred many prospective travelers from India.

The gaiety and festivity witnessed in earlier years was missing this year. It was a pretty toned down affair, perhaps compounded by the chilliest winter.

As we walked over the bridge across the river, watching people lined up on the left side towards the temple and the burning Ghats on the left, our senses were jolted by sudden shrill loud cries shouting, Bam Bhole (Hail to the Lord). Suddenly out of the crowd, a huge group of young men appeared, reeking with smell of marijuana smoke, their eyes blood shot, arms flaying in all directions, shouting hysterically, some out to grab whatever they fancied. They pushed their way down the steps from the forest above and merged in with the crowd moving towards them. It was a sudden, uncontrolled onslaught. Senses numbed, I just focused on moving away from the centre of the bridge towards the side, hoping I wouldn't be pushed down the river. The stampede was such.

I could vaguely make out the form of a terrified young girl hunched up squatting on the floor in front of me, her arms protecting her head. In a blur I saw rows of inflamed eyes and obvious ill intent in them. The air was suffused by irrationality and a kind of mob madness. Intoxicated men venting out their frustration supported by masses of their kind was indeed a

risky situation to be caught in. Amidst the crazed cries, a stoned man reached out his hand as if to grab somebody and luckily I found myself out of its reach.

The crowd surged past and there was some breathing space that I used quickly to move away from the bridge and go towards the other side of the Ghats. The sense of having made it through the momentary hell was overwhelming.

I learned later that never before had Marijuana been sold so cheap and in plentitude in the Pashupati area. For mere five rupees for a Bhang (marijuana) laden piece of sweet, it must have sold very fast.

Away from harm's way, I could just imagine the terror women, children and the elderly caught in the darkness must have felt, surrounded by such groups of intoxicated and irreverent men as I had encountered. About twenty minutes later, the news of stoning and shouts of abuse targeted at king Gyanendra came on the radio. A fellow devotee indeed he was, no matter his status or history, who had come to worship the deity. This was no time or place to regurgitate one's animosity.

Shiva Ratri holds special meaning and is of significance to a large number of population in the country. The shocking incident brings home the fact that even a place of worship isn't safe anymore and is not spared of violence—a form of sacrilege. This spells a big change in the way of life of women in this society.

Most women in traditional societies get to go out, socialise and feel free for a few hours only during occasions like this. Will they now be forced to stay indoors on those days just because festivals like this end up being exploited by those who hold no value for others' faith? Will lawlessness continue to dominate so much that people don't feel safe anymore in any mass gathering? Who will take the responsibility for the evening of irresponsibility replete with aggression and ill intent?

In retrospect, when comparing the conduct of a people of another faith in a similar context, there stands marked difference in attitude towards another fellow human being, respect shown towards the faith, discipline in conducting oneself and above all the intention behind being present in such a place in the first place. A place of worship needs to be respected, not denigrated. A radio commentator who said that the Lord Shiva may have been very sad that day, is not out of place. Anybody who supports human values and dignity truly would be extremely disappointed and disturbed by the mayhem that holy night. I came back feeling deeply ashamed. ■



Smoking sucks

Ragina Shah's counseling on impact of drug and smoking

Is it true when people who take drugs say they remember better and get more creative under influence of drugs?

Rahin Shrestha
Bhimsensthan

It is absolutely false. We all possess minds that are capable of a lot of creativity and remembering without using any drugs. The fact is when people use drugs, their creativity gets stunted, they tend to remain happy with what they have at the moment and stop striving for better ideas, output. When addicted, they are under the misconception that their ideas are very unique when the reality is that they are suffering from drug induced illusions. When the effect of drugs wear out, so does all their so called creativity. Drugs actually numbs our minds and makes it slow and prevents us from being in the present.

A drug addict feels better under the effect of drugs but as it wears off they end up feeling worse since the temporary 'high' wears off fast leaving a user feeling 'flat'. All that they felt when 'high' are in reality just illusions. For real creativity and memory power, drugs are definitely not the solution. They are just the opposite as they create more problems for your mind and body.

How does smoking lead to drugs?

Jaya Shah
Handigaun

A person usually starts smoking trying to imitate their

parents, to 'belong' with their peers or to copy their screen 'heroes' or 'heroines' that could be film stars, pop stars or anybody. Curiosity also leads a young person to try out smoking. Curiosity soon turns into a habit and the person becomes unable to get rid of the habit. Cigarette contains nicotine that reaches the brain quickly through the blood stream and makes a person dependent on it before he/she knows it. Now, dependent on doses of nicotine, body sends signals out to the person as soon as it's deprived of it and the person reaches out for 'just one more ciggie'.

Usually, we've seen that children who are drawn towards smoking take their first puff when they are in class four or five. After a few years of smoking, they get curious about marijuana or 'Ganja' and try it out in the same manner and find out that this too is a substitute for nicotine. The numb feeling and the temporary 'high' hooks them. Gradually their bodies get accustomed to the daily dose and it starts to crave for larger doses of those substances. In this way, the dose and frequency begins to increase. After prolonged use, when marijuana ceases to 'satisfy' them, they tend to reach out for harder drugs, such as brown sugar. This way, a person gets sucked into the dangerous cycle and most of the time such a person doesn't know he's already courting big time trouble causing his mental, physical, emotional health to break down rapidly.

Queries related to addiction of any kind can be addressed to: newsfront@bhrikuti.com. Outstanding issues will be short listed and dealt with by Ragina.

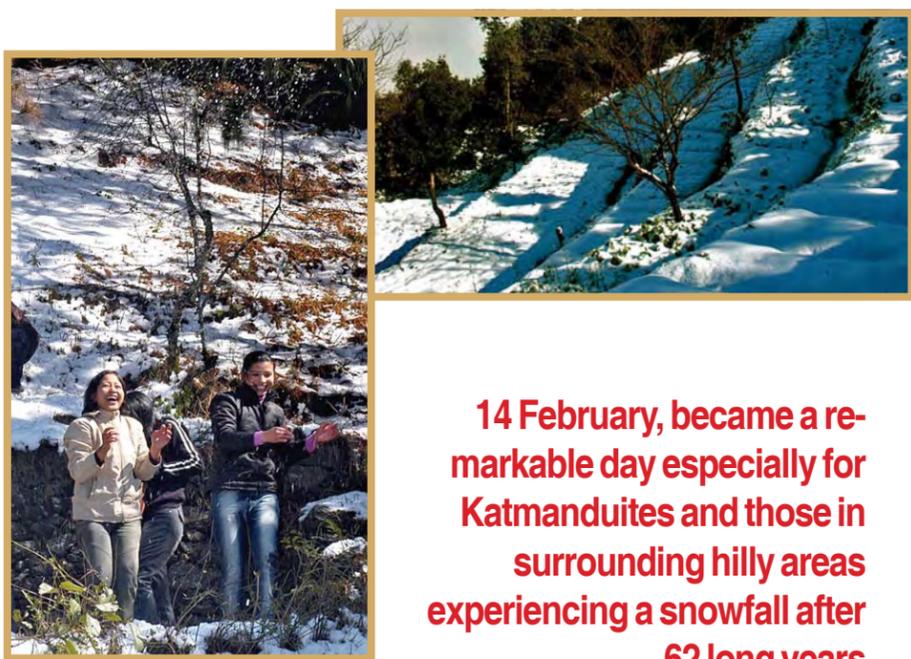


SNOWY Valentine

in the weather patterns in the Western parts of Nepal. Initially it was in December and secondly on 11 February, when there was precipitation in Nepalgunj. The third wave arrived on 13 February and precipitated the whole country, which resulted in the snow in the valley. Normal rainfall in February in the valley is only 17.5 millimeter but this year the rainfall recorded stood at 69.2 millimeter until the 2nd week of February.

Senior meteorologist, Krishna Bhakta Manandhar said, "It is an interesting phenomenon that snow fell up to 1400 meters above the

sea level in February." He informed that the Meteorological Department had forecasted partial rainfall throughout the country and snowfall in the high hills. Manandhar added, "Snowfall in Kathmandu valley is unexpected. We had forecast it only in the high mountains." Snowfall above 2500 meters from the sea level is taken as a normal phenomenon. Another Senior Meteorologist, Keshab Das Shrestha, said that the snowfall in the valley was remarkable and not expected. With the unexpected happening, Valentine's Day took on a special meaning that day. ■



14 February, became a remarkable day especially for Katmanduites and those in surrounding hilly areas experiencing a snowfall after 62 long years

■ **Bishwa Mani Pokharel**

It was a romantic Valentine's Day for the young people of Kathmandu when they had the opportunity to express their love on a rainy day complete with a smattering of snow. 14 February, became a remarkable day especially for Katmanduites and those in surrounding hilly areas experiencing a snowfall after 62 long years. An event that took place after so many years is in itself a history and what more could the lovebirds ask for!

It was an interesting phenomenon in that instead of the mercury rising, snow poured down in the heart of the capital that lies almost 1350 meter above the sea level. Second week

of February heralds the end of winter and beginning of spring and definitely not a favourable condition for snowfall. This pattern was challenged by cold waves originating from Europe, traveling through Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and North West of India and entering Nepal from the Western part. This snowfall in Kathmandu city is more significant compared to the one 62 years ago since the latter occurred on the first week of January.

According to meteorologists, the snowfall occurred due to temperature of above the ground reaching zero degree centigrade. When that happens, the rainfall at the time gets converted into ice.

This year there were disturbances observed

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