Waves of NGO led agitation and protests of political nature have not only come as a headache for the Government, but emerged as an entirely new issue for the international donors.

Gradual transformation of social, ethnic and caste based organisations into political outfits is at the root of the problem which the donors are considering to review, a western diplomat told newsfront. This was in reaction to the violence that took place during protests called by some NGOs that have been receiving support from donors.

"The international community and donors will support programmes of social awareness and emancipation. But extending financial support to these NGOs once they expand activities beyond that framework becomes difficult," the diplomat said.

The Government, although dependent on donors for its political legitimacy and survival, has not yet mustered enough courage to take up the issue with the donors, but is said to have had several rounds of informal discussions on the theme if such assistance would continue.

The issue got prominence after the Madheshi Jan działik Forum (MJF), and the National Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NFIN), both registered as NGOs led demonstrations and strikes demanding more political autonomy.

"The violence in Gaur by the MJF has not only forced the Government to examine their financial sources, but also to take up the issue with donors, if any," a Shital Niwas source told newsfront. NFIN has been active in creating awareness of rights and empowerment among ethnic nationalities, but its growing profile at the moment and recent protests in which some cases of violence were reported, is something the donors are said to be monitoring.

Nepal has the largest number of NGOs in South Asia with donors generously helping them. A senior Government official said that a large number of consultants suddenly transformed their consultancy into NGOs, some of them with family domination and the same circle is now influencing, if not controlling, the civil society. Official sources said that while the political parties do not directly take money from international donors, there are many instances of political activists and leaders founding NGOs, and in some cases, even channeling such funds for the parties they belong to, exploiting legal vacuum or loopholes. "Yes, human rights, rule of law, good-governance and poverty alleviation have been our major focus. The credentials of the NGOs and the people behind them would certainly count when donors choose their partners," the diplomat, who wanting to remain anonymous said. And the challenge before the mass based social organisations and NGOs remain simple – where to draw a line of demarcation between their declared objectives and political activities.
**Feet on two boats**

Maoists displayed its alternate scheme of having someone else in G P Koirala’s place.

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**Belling the cat**

Former Prime Minister and Congress (O) president, Sher Bahadur Deuba finally did it, even at the risk of being labeled an ally of the king. He spoke his mind that elections in June did not look possible and that the eight parties should realize this.

Deuba suggested that the Maoists and the ruling seven party coalition should decide on the next course, since having election in the existing law and order scenario did not look possible. His clear stance came in during an all party meeting called by the Election Commission last week.

“Maoists extortion and abduction has not stopped. And the time for electoral preparation is not enough. It’s time that we looked at these factors and took a collective decision,” Deuba told newfront.

His suggestion to reconsider the time schedule for election comes in the wake of Chief Election Commissioner, Bishwajit Pokharel expressing doubts over the credibility of the electoral process in the existing law and order situation, in the absence of laws defining role, responsibility and rights of the Commission. Two and half months, the available time for the June deadline does not appear enough to complete the necessary formalities.

While U ML Secretary General Madhav Kumar Nepal and Maoist Chief Prachanda have often said that any move to have the election postponed should be seen as a design of the palace, Prime Minister Koirala still insists that the Commission must hold election within the stipulated time frame as “It is a national commitment.”

Deuba, with Congress(O) behind him however chose to dissent, though not formally.

There is however, an overwhelming majority in the Working Committee of the Congress party led by the PM who are against the Maoists joining the Interim Cabinet, without their initiating the process of returning forcibly captured and occupied private, institutional and Governmental property.

But no one from the party has directly demanded postponing the election 6 date.

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**Credibility-the buzz word**

An election with its credibility questioned has all the risks of being rejected at home and abroad. This was the subtle but clear message that three dignitaries delivered to the Government recently.

Neena Gill who heads European Union Parliamentary delegation conveyed that though not being able to conduct election on time would invite questions on Government’s competence; an election under a veil of fear and intimidation cannot reflect people’s mandate in its true sense. Her frustration arose from a series of incidents of extortion and intimidation by the Maoists delaying their entry into the Interim Cabinet.

Dr M G Gill, a former Chief Election Commissioner of India, who was here in connection with a seminar last week held similar views. Dr Gill during his interaction with Chief Election Commissioner, Bishow Parajel and other commissioners, was clear that given the short time span left for election and the prevailing law and order, election looked difficult indeed.

And Ian Martin, Special Representative of the U N Secretary General Ban-Ki-Moon, said pretty much the same to Koirala, a day before he left for New York on Thursday. The day he called on Koirala coincided with the bloodbath that Gaur witnessed following the long-drawn rally between Madheshi Janadhikar Forum and the Maoists. “Election should not only happen in a credible manner but needs to be seen as credible,” a source in the PM’s office quoted Martin as saying.

Martin, during his meeting with other political leaders, believed to have advised to contemplate on the cost of holding an election lacking credibility and held in an atmosphere of violence and intimidation.

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**Threat to Peace**

A series of confrontation and clashes that began in Lahan almost two months ago, culminated in a gory blood-bath in Rautahat’s Gaur area on March 21 in which at least 30 Maoists lost their lives, and forty were wounded, some seriously.

The Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) whose cadre went into mayhem as Maoists tried to obstruct their public meeting by organising a parallel one, has since expressed regret, but it is yet to be forgiven.

Maoists are pressuring the Government to outlaw the MJF and at the same time using the incident in support of their argument why they need to head the Home Ministry.

Maoist parliamentarians created a pandemonium, stalled proceedings in the House, boycotted a probe ordered by the Home Minister and demanded that the Government resign. But till date, the party which indulged in killing political rivals, ordinary people and security personnel in the past, showed utmost restraint when the bodies of the victims were brought to Kathmandu. Political parties cutting across party lines paid homage to the slain Maoists, most of them supposed to be combatants from Nuwakot and Makwanpur area who had gone to Gaur on command of the regional leadership of the party. Most of those killed are said to belong to the recently formed Youth Communist League (YCL).

But as Government began rounding up the MJF activists, its leader Upendra Yadav has gone underground. He issued a statement expressing regret for the massacre, but political parties are not willing to consider it more than mere formality.

However, MJF continues to blame the Maoists for having provoked the backlash.

“Central committee member, Upanendra Jha said, “we had announced the venue of the meeting a week in advance but Maoists came solely with the intention of disturbing us leaving with limited options to qull or go ahead with the meeting”.

But the pressure on the Government from Maoists is mounting. “We are considering all options, and the law has to take its course,” Minister for culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Pradeep Guwali told newfront, adding, “Maoists should not get provoked by this act and should also stop disrupting meetings of rival political groups “Following the Gaur incident, Maoists cadre have disrupted the MJF meetings at least in five different Terai districts with the administration clamping curfew of varied duration. On March 24, YCL destroyed the labs built by the MJF for a public meeting in Cool Bazaar area of Siraha district.

Despite widespread condemnation of the MJF both by different political parties and the international community, Government seems moving cautiously on the demand of the Maoists to outlaw the MJF. Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Chitrakatiya Yadav, warned that such a move would create further violence and wedge divisions among various political parties. But the last is yet to be heard on the politics of intolerance.
Thriving hotspots

The disease continues to carry the social stigma

Nichita Karki

Despite worldwide efforts to eradicate leprosy, Nepal, Congo, Tanzania, Mozambique and Brazil are the five countries that have not yet succeeded in meeting the target. Less than one patient per 10,000 people qualifies a country to be listed in the leprosy free category. There are no signs that Nepal is anywhere near joining that category.

The Government however, has always announced that it is committed to meet the WHO target—elimination of the disease by 2010; but no significant steps have been taken so far. According to the officials in the ministry, it would be impossible to achieve the goal with this level of indifference or inaction.

In 1991, WHO declared commitment to reduce the rate of prevalence of leprosy to less than 1 case per 10,000 population at the national level. Indicators of Nepal’s leprosy control program reveals that the prevalence rate here is 1.65 per 10,000 people. Around 80 per cent of this disease has been found in the Terai region. In Parsa prevalence rate increased from 3 to 3.4 and in Bara from 1.2 to 2, compared to the previous year.

Department of Health is the nodal agency for containing the disease in collaboration with Asia’s three largest herbivores—Asian elephant, greater one-horned rhinoceros, and water buffalo. Iger, as well as several large birds such as vultures, storks and hawks, is elevated. The number of people infected by leprosy was roughly over a lakh in year 1966. Forty years down the line, there was phenomenal decrease in the number with 4213 cases detected in 2006. Multi drug therapy service that started in Nepal 25 years ago has now expanded throughout the country, but the disease continues to carry the social stigma.

Yohei Sasakawa, the WHO goodwill ambassador for elimination of leprosy, said during his visit here a couple of months ago that poverty remains the major barrier as the most affected also are the ones who are poverty stricken. In his opinion, the eradication programme has to meet the dual challenges of eliminating leprosy as soon as possible and ensuring quality service delivery as long as needed in the country, by involving other institutions of health care delivery such as medical colleges and hospitals.

Sasakawa has been providing medical support to leprosy affected people in Nepal for three decades. He said he worried most about social stigma and discrimination in the country, “Leprosy cannot be eradicated as long as the social stigma and discrimination continues.”

The leprosy affected people and their family members also face obstacles in the way of education, employment and marriage and are denied basic human rights. Sasakawa had approached the UN Commission on Human Rights regarding this issue way back in 2003. After approving the report by the human rights council, the UN General Assembly adopted principles and guidelines on discrimination against people affected by leprosy and their families.

Eleven top leading personalities of the world including former US President Jimmy Carter, Nobel Peace prize laureate Dalai Lama and former Indian president, R. Venkataraman joined in the first Global Appeal, released in New Delhi, January 2006. The tradition was carried further with 11 people from various countries, all affected by leprosy, re-endorsing the appeal from Manila towards the end of January. It only comes as a challenge for Nepal—the only country in South Asia with leprosy—to listen to the appeal and act.

institutionalisation of local people. Ilam Conservation Council (ICC) is working in Jogmai, Jamura, Mabu, & Maimi which are major parts of upper Mai watershed, Bisnu Kafle of ICC said, “Community forest statutes will incorporate biodiversity issues and access and control will be strengthened on forest resources.”

As part of the conservation programme, Ethno-botanical Society of Nepal (ESON) is planning to make a plant biodiversity inventory which envisages identifying hotspots and formulating conservation strategies for threatened species and habitats in Kangchenjunga-Singaliga ridge. It also aims at inventoring plant bio-diversity of Kangchenjunga—Singaliga Ridge and documenting their associated habitats. Dr. Sarala Khatling, Regional Coordinator of CEPF/WWF is hopeful that these initiatives will help to conserve the habitat.

Bird Conservation Nepal plans to develop civil society networks to conserve Key Biodiversity Areas in Nepal (KBA), and focus on the Kangchenjunga-Singaliga region. The job of conservation is not an easy one. Half of Nepal’s KBAs lie outside protected areas and even those inside the protected area need management intervention. And this brings a real challenge:
Violence hurts

The massacre in Gaur. Result of that at least 28 lives is downright outrageous. The heinous act is no way justified to secure any legitimate demand —political or otherwise. On the Madheji Janadithak Forum (MJF) that forcefully raised political demands on behalf of the Terai, risks losing its credibility and identity as a legitimate representative outfit by its shocking acts of violence. Killing of citizens cannot be accepted as a way of politics but only puts the perpetrators of the act in the bracket of militants or terrorists.

The people of this country who have suffered enough in the past 11 years will not accept any form of violence, be it in any guise. By indulging in the massacre of the Maoists, both armed and unarmed, MJF has only tried to derail the peace process and emerged as a force that people would soon begin to abhor. This is also a tremendous setback for the international community including the US, UK, India and EU who had in a way recognized MJF as a political outfit and had advised the government of Nepal to fulfill their legitimate demands. It is therefore in the interest of the Terai as a whole that MJF unconditionally apologizes for the crime that resulted in the loss of precious human lives; and takes initiatives to bring the culprits to justice. MJF otherwise will be discarded by the very people who created and stood by it for their legitimate rights through legitimate means.

While MJF deserves condemnation for this, this needs more soul searching as well. The root cause behind this retaliation is the Maoists' intolerance towards political rivals. Disturbing Rashtriya Prajatantra Party meetings in Lamjung and Jhapa and murdering Ramesh Mahato, a MJF supporter in Lahan in January triggered off a chain of hostilities between the two groups in different parts of the country. These were clear acts of provocation but it doesn’t justify in any way the cold-blooded attack on Maoists in Gaur. It ought to be taken as a costly lesson by the Maoists and they should realise that they have shed enough blood in the country and also accept that politics of guns does not bring peace and prosperity. Nor it guarantees safety and security of those still with guns. They should now not lose the opportunity to create history by renouncing violence altogether in words and actions and inspiring others as well. That would also be a tribute to the Maoists who fell victim to the cowardly attack by the 'political rivals' in Gaur.

More humour please

I and my friends have been watching the growth of Newfront with keen interest. It is creating an example of what journalism should be like. It is balanced, neutral with no political leaning and independent of funding from any people or organisation. It is indeed a weekly with substance. Please keep it up. But my only complaint is that you need to inject more humour, black or white, in your write ups. The readers would like to laugh sometimes you know, especially during these depressing times.

Urgyen Sherpa

Gwarko, Patan

Answers our questions

The clarity of pictures your pictures are very good and the language straightforward. Whoever reads newfront appreciates the quality of the magazine for its sharpness in coverage. I will circulate newfront to many of my friends the day you gave me the web link.

Your paper answers many questions that many of us have. Still I’d like to ask how you through your paper are encouraging young, literate, able people to enter politics in Nepal? You can generate this debate in the public through your weekly.

Why don’t you also cover the success and failure stories of Nepali economic migrants and job-seekers, who with their blood and sweat are helping to run the nation in these depressed times. Their sad stories will help future job-seekers to be more cautious when they go aboard to work, especially the uneeducated ones.

Anuj Khanal

London

Letters

Unclear Foreign Policy

As depicted by Yubraj Ghimire in the 8th issue of newfront, the foreign policy of Nepal is not clear, independent and strong enough to deal with its neighbours’ concerns about social, political and economical affairs of Nepal.

The negative trend of political appointments in the government results in the country’s foreign affair policy being determined by the politician’s ambition to build relationships to gain support for personal gain and development. As a result no attention is paid to what would benefit the country. Political leaders pay scant attention to sovereignty and national policy.

To save our country and its people, we need people with who are determined by the politician’s ambition to build relationships to gain support for personal gain and development. As a result no attention is paid to what would benefit the country. Political leaders pay scant attention to sovereignty and national policy.

To save our country and its people, we need people with character to lead our country.

Suresh Bhandari

London

Spot on

I really enjoyed reading Ms. Amatya’s article titled “Not Beyond Redemption”. It was spot on. When I was studying in Scotland, people frequently questioned me if I were a soldier referring to the tag of the son of a often hit driver and cultured Scots would subsidise bills as a gesture of compassion for the Nepali Gurkhas.

However, some were rather ignorant and like the writer said, were quick to ridicule Nepalis. One thing though which must be covered is the rash behavior of foreign diplomats often ridiculing Nepalis. And to my astonishment, most Nepalis in these hi-fi parties often turn a blind eye to such treatment.

Suresh Bhandari

London

Spiritual Corner

Liberation from self

Albert Einstein (1879 – 1955) was one of the greatest physicists of all time, best known for the theory of relativity and specifically mass – energy equivalence, E=mc². He was awarded the 1921 Nobel Prize in physics.

Einstein on Gandhi

I believe that Gandhi’s views were the most enlightened of all the political men in our time. We should strive to do things in his spirit: to not use violence in fighting for our cause, but by non-participation in anything you believe is evil.

- A human being is part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. The true value of a human being is determined by the measure and the sense in which they have obtained liberation from the self. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive. (1954)
On Wednesday March 21st, Nepal witnessed yet another gruesome mass murder in recent history. The killings marked the single largest event of political murder since the end of active insurgency in April 2006. Despite this horrendous event that portends a specter of ethnic flares all over Nepal; the political forces, civil society and in Nepal’s case the all powerful international community still maintain the decidedly myopic perspective on ethno-populism.

The politics of identity gained much currency in Nepal after the Maoists, in their drive to rapidly shore up support against the Nepali state, raised the issue of social exclusion based on caste, ethnicity and language. Nepali state was uniformly portrayed as predatory, that it had repressed and sought to homogenise the various ethnic, regional and linguistic identities into a singular Nepali identity.

Nepali state was indeed predatory but it was the predation of an exclusive clan that had the whole nation in its hold in a medieval feudal society in the governance as opposed to the exclusive nature of undemocratic system. In Nepal, the primary area of social inclusion ought to focus on providing equal and equitable access of education and health care to all regardless of their ethnic or caste background.

In this scenario the espousal of ethnic nationalism only stokes the fire of hatred as the Gaur carnage gives a clear indication of.

Ironically, the Maoists schooled in the Marxist tradition of class conflict have instead given greater priority to the caste/ethnic conflict.

The more radical the movement the more opportunity cost of stoking ethnic tension and reaping high profit from the consequential sectarian sway of popular support is capable of catapulting a non-entity to national prominence as illustrated by the publicity generated by the Madhesia People’s Rights’ Forum (MPRF).

In politics devoid of any credible and viable economic agenda of national development, the political opportunism of ethno-linguistic grievances has gained a high currency. The cheap political opportunity cost of stoking ethnic tension and reaping high profit from the consequent sectarian sway of popular support is capable of catapulting a non-entity to national prominence as illustrated by the publicity generated by the Madhesia People’s Rights’ Forum (MPRF).

Then in other areas, the inclusionary practice ought to focus on lifting the economic status of the poor, regardless of their ethnic, caste, regional or linguistic identity. However, the straightforward policy of positive discrimination based on caste or ethnic identity which in itself is contested and not settled in many respect, will lead to even more schism based on caste and ethnicity. We have the ghastly Gaur to remind us.
The Silent Kiln

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) – the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome) was first identified in Nepal in 1985. In the ten years that followed, the country found itself facing a “concentrated epidemic,” among certain sub-populations. These included injecting drug users and migrant labourers whose HIV prevalence rates consistently increased by five percent year after year. (National Centre for AIDS and STD Control (NCASC), Ministry of Health and Population, Nepal Government, May 2006)

HIV infections recorded in November 2005 by NCASC shows a cumulative total of 5,647 people affected with HIV, of who 929 developed AIDS. Altogether, 273 AIDS related deaths were also recorded. Out of the infected population, 53 percent were clients of Female Sex Workers, 45 percent were drug users, and 14 percent housewives and seven percent adolescents (NCASC, 2006).

In the absence of community based HIV prevalence data, these figures were obtained from sentinel surveillance and voluntary counseling and testing centres, and are gross underestimates of community prevalence. In absence of effective health interventions, some reports predict a generalised epidemic occurring by the end of the decade, with an estimated sero prevalence of 1 to 2 percent among the age group 15 to 49 (Chin, 2000).

Mobility and migration are not direct risk for HIV but create conditions that can increase people’s vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. The employment-oriented seasonal and short-term migration of Nepalis to urban areas of Nepal, India and other countries has emerged as a major factor in driving the HIV epidemic (Furber et al, 2002; Pokharel, 2000; Seddon, 1998; Puri et al, 2004).

With over 70,000 people living with HIV/AIDS now, one fifth of which are women, this issue needs to be highlighted urgently and brought to attention of the general public. With the intention of creating awareness, newsfront spoke with two HIV positive women and decided to publish their account (translated from Nepali) exactly as they said it.
I was married in 15 years ago when I was studying in class 11 in Jhapa. The mediator said he was a good man working in Kathmandu, from a good family. One day he announced that he was going to Delhi with his friends to earn money and asked me to stay back with my child. He disappeared for four years. There was no news of him. In the meantime, I met my brother with whom I shared my woes. He took me back to my village, to my parent's home and I stayed there. You know how difficult it is for married daughters to come back in their parents' bad times. How difficult the community makes it for her.

The villagers began to gossip that my husband had left me. When he returned after four years, I looked very thin and darker. He said it was due to hot weather and didn't say more. I went to live with him in his parent's home. After four months he went back to India again. My in-laws then gave me tough time. I was in a situation where I used to wonder what it would be like to buy bangles worth ten rupees. It would hurt me the most when my daughter would ask me to buy bangles worth ten rupees. She used to want new clothes. I was not able to provide anything for her.

One day my daughter followed a child who was going to school. I went to fetch her and met the principal of the school. He asked me why I hadn't sent my daughter to school. When I told him a bit of my problem, he asked me if I would like to teach in the school. Encouraged by him, I agreed to teach Nepal and was offered 2000 rupees a month. When my husband came back again, he looked very sick. I asked him to rest at home. He began to borrow money and drink. I'd come back tired from school and find the house reeking of alcohol and find him lying on the floor. I used to ask him why he was drinking when he was suffering from continuous diarrhea. His response would be, "let me die in peace. You also won't live for long." That used to confuse me a bit but it never struck me to ask him what he meant. He got worse and died in a hospital where they announced that he had died of kidney failure.

After a year, I began to suffer from frequent fever and started losing weight. I used to feel unwell most of the time but I continued to go to school. Life at home began to get worse. My in-laws would call me a bad omen and a bad omens. After two years, I left the house and went back to my parent's home. My brother who had suspected that my husband might have had AIDS asked me to go with him to Kathmandu for a check up. He asked me to leave my daughter behind since there'd be nobody to look after her in the city.

In Kathmandu, in Patan hospital, the sisters asked me many questions. I told them everything about myself and my husband. They told me they'd be doing HIV test on me. I didn't know what they meant but assumed it must be something like typhoid. The result showed positive. We got it rechecked and the result was the same. My brother explained everything to me and advised me not to tell anybody. In the hospital, I was advised to start a medication which I'd have to take regularly. I didn't have any money and my brother didn't say anything about this matter. I didn't pay any attention to it. Later, I realised the mistake I had made. I told my brother, had he advised me two years ago, I'd have been spared much trouble. He replied that he himself didn't know enough to be able to give me right directions. Two years later, when I was feeling very sick, I was brought to Teku hospital and was hospitalised for about two months. I was so ill, I couldn't lift my head. Thinking that I was dying, my family...

Awareness protects

I'm a HIV positive woman. Most women I've met have been infected by their husbands but the irony is that the family of the husband tries to blame it on the woman, not the man, and the woman ends up getting discriminated. I was infected by my husband who studied abroad. My husband didn't tell me that he had been infected. I found it out from a nurse who was handling his case after he fell sick.

Soon after he was diagnosed with HIV, AIDS, his family began his treatment, importing medicines from India. But later when I too was diagnosed as positive, I was devastated. I was ignored and looked upon with suspicion. My husband was protected by his family but I was an outsider and so they did not care.

I think it's very important to spread awareness of HIV/AIDS – how it gets transmitted, how one can protect oneself and how important it is to treat HIV positive people with respect. A young unmarried girl has the right to know if her prospective partner, boyfriend is free from infection. A housewife needs to know how to protect herself. They should be aware of it all so that they do not face the same fate as we have. Awareness protects.

Before I was infected, I had little or no interest in any news regarding HIV/AIDS. After I got infected, my interest grew. I wish I had the basic knowledge to protect myself before I got infected. I divorced my first husband and later got married to a HIV positive person. We marry so that you have somebody of your own. If something hurts me, I should hurt him too. But that wasn't the case in my marriage. I looked after him a lot but when I fell sick, there was nobody to look after me.

I sought help of a shelter that looked after me. Had it not been for that shelter, I wouldn't have been alive today. I established this shelter, Sneha, in 2004, as an organised support center (supported by FHA and UNDP) for HIV positive women and to make their voices heard. A positive woman, if she tells the truth about her health status cannot get a room at rent. Are we not citizens of this country, aren't we members of this society that we are denied right to live our life? We have a branch in Asahm. Most of the women who come to our shelters seek anonymity and a source of support to sustain their life, as their last hope. Due to the discriminating attitude of society, most HIV positive people prefer to keep their status hidden. Sneha not only works to help infected and affected, who come and go. Most of them are from outside the valley. I think that along with spreading awareness to stop spread of HIV/AIDS, it is equally important to look after the already infected group, so that their frustration and anger do not harm others.

Women don't get infected by choice. They don't get trafficked or become prostitutes out of choice. There is always a story of desperation, helplessness or exploitation hidden behind such cases. Some families who know that their sons are positive get married to girls who are kept in dark. Most men do not support their infected daughters and daughter in laws.

By getting involved in this work, by keeping my attitude positive and looking after myself, I feel I can live happily and can contribute something to the society.
If India goes to war...

War manual being reworked after 15 yrs to factor in private players in infrastructure and technological advances

Shubhajit Roy

The Government is rewriting the Union Warbook, its manual for war, to keep pace with reforms, technology and new threats. The Warbook was last updated in 1992, when mail was what the postman brought, telephones were immobile and when the fortress of licence raj was just beginning to let in the first wave of reforms.

Fifteen years later, while private players dominate crucial infrastructure sectors such as telecom and aviation, an inter-ministerial group is working on a set of sweeping changes in the Warbook. The changes will give the government overriding powers over private players if and when the country goes to war.

• The Civil Aviation ministry has been asked to prepare a contingency plan—keeping in mind the private power plants and distributors, to "control private sector to divert electricity to public sector/contribution" in case of a war.
• The Home ministry has been asked to involve private security agencies in providing security to various vital/sensitive installations/establishments, both in the government and private sectors.
• With the Metro emerging as the new face of transport in cities like Delhi and Kolkata already and Mumbai and Bangalore soon, the government has moved in to include them in the list of vital installations where security will be stepped up in the event of a war.
• The government, aware of the threat of bio-chemical warfare, has, for the first time, roped in the Animal Husbandry department to prepare a plan to combat the impact of nuclear, biological and chemicals attack on animals.
• The Water Resources ministry has been asked to prepare a plan to tackle biological and chemical pollution.
• And as if that’s not enough, the government, realising the potential of fake currency’s ability to wreck the country’s economy, has asked the Finance ministry to prepare contingency plans to print currency and introduce secure currency notes during war.
• The Communication and IT ministry has been asked to work out "counter electronic warfare measures," it should replace the word "telephone" by "voice, data and fax." It has been told to add "Information technology" after telecom, and the new command would read as, "Postal, telecom and Information technology censorship will always be imposed together whether censorship is to be complete or partial." Telecommunication censorship will now cover all forms of telecommunication.

The Union Warbook review committee, headed by secretary (security) in the Cabinet Secretariat N C Padhi, has Air Vice Marshal S K Gahlaut as its vice-chairman and Brig Sanjiv Laumas as secretary, both belonging to the Integrated Defence Staff. The committee has members from all key ministries who share their inputs.

(The Indian Express)
Heart on Wheels

After being in coma for about eight months, Amar Thapa woke up to the painful reality that the tall handsome body that used to be in his command now refused to respond in any way.

Amar Thapa is grateful to his wheelchair, which he said is the reason he has been able to serve others. “Had I been normal, the way I was before I met with this spinal cord injury, I’d have been busy earning money and stuck in material trappings without any feeling for others who are suffering or any will to do anything about it.” Amar, now 37, was paralysed neck down when he hit his head while diving when he was 20. After being in coma for about eight months, he woke up to the painful reality that the tall handsome body that used to be in his command now refused to respond in any way.

Amar Thapa is grateful to his wheelchair, which he said is the reason he has been able to serve others. “Had I been normal the way I was before I met with this spinal cord injury, I’d have been busy earning money and stuck in material trappings without any feeling for others who are suffering or any will to do anything about it.” Amar, now 37, was paralysed neck down when he hit his head while diving when he was 20. After being in coma for about eight months, he woke up to the painful reality that the tall handsome body that used to be in his command now refused to respond in any way.

Learning to accept what happened to him, finding the will to live and finding a purpose in life has been a long and arduous journey for Amar.

He was inspired to snap out of his sorrow and disenchantment with life by a sister in the hospital in Vellore where he was recuperating. “She drilled this in my head that though my body was disabled, my mind was not and I could use it for some greater purpose”, recalled Amar. Indebted to her kindness, he resolved to pay it back by serving other women whose plight he had observed in his young life.

A unique feature of the school is that it provides free classes to mothers of the children. Classes are held for the women three times a day, one hour in the morning when they come to drop their children, an hour in the afternoon when they come to deliver food and an hour in the evening when they come to pick up the children. In all, 175 women take advantage of these classes and some have succeeded in studying up to the level of class 6 and aspire to pass the SLC exams. “They have fun competing with their children and it gives me a tremendous sense of satisfaction when I see the transformation in their personalities. They look cheerful and a lot more confident now”, said Amar.

Amar has been successful in inspiring other young accident victims, those with spinal injuries and other physically incapacitating diseases. He recalled the incident when a group of alcoholic teenagers approached him after his televised talk in Germany and vowed to give up drinks and start helping others. "Somehow, my counseling seems to work for those who are in a similar condition as I am or disabled in a different form. I can connect with them well. I make it a point to tell them and others that life is so uncertain and what happened to me could happen to anyone, anytime. And so one needs all the courage and wisdom to live through whatever life presents,” said Amar. He admitted that to give continuity to his dreams, finding funds and garnering government support posed tremendous challenges.

He attributes all that he’s been able to achieve to his father figure, Devi Ghimire, who encouraged him to take on the responsibility of the school after his mother’s demise; his wife Deepa, a nurse by profession who looks after him all the time and Dr. Chakra Raj Pandey whom he visits at regular intervals for check up.

“Without their continuous help and support, I would not have been here today. And above all, I’m thankful to God who is still keeping me alive. Given the severity of my injury, it’s a miracle”, concluded Amar. It was indeed a miracle, blessing him with the will to serve the needy.
Building Peace

Civil society’s roles in peace building have not been adequately discussed in policy analysis in Nepal

The imperative of peace in Nepal is competing with other claims, such as power, liberation, social justice, basic needs and identity of various political and social actors. Negotiation of these competitive claims into a legitimate social contract is a precondition to fulfill the ardent desire of public for peace in Nepal articulated through Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The central responsibility of Nepalese desire of peace in Nepal articulated with other claims, such as power, liberation, is adequately discussed in policy analysis in Nepal. Dev Raj Dahal (Dahal is a political analyst.)

Dev Raj Dahal

A number of them working in such covert intelligence collection campaigns are engaged in many areas of work with approval from the Nepalese government and line ministries. Many of them not only collect information from the Nepalese government sector but also carry out espionage activities directed at counterpart foreign installations and their interests. This was revealed in one of the seminars recently held in an undisclosed location of the capital

Unveiling the foreign agents

Nepal has never paid attention to strengthening its national security institutions and law enforcement agencies particularly the intelligence apparatus. Many expatriates working in non-governmental agencies and elsewhere in Nepal are believed to be involved in strategic intelligence gathering operations. There are several expatriate professionals in various disciplines working as agents for several foreign intelligence organisations.

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Rajan Wasti (Wasti is a security analyst.)

The government has not been able to agree on the priority this issue deserves. Yes, Nepal is going through a transitional phase and restructuring of the state is the main thrust of the government today but political influence and interference in all the national institutions is rampant. The police comparatively seem to have been cultivated by these foreign agents.

The Police comparatively seem to have more effective intelligence mechanism in place. However the officials in this department seem to be aware of the fact that their political masters are not to be trusted with any such vital information as they are not likely to take any action.

The participating officers, guided by sense of patriotism and national duty, are highly trained professionals from different countries. Though they have collected a good amount of reliable intelligence of massive infiltration of foreign agents in Nepal, they have not revealed their identities. A paper presented by one of the veteran officers revealed that Prime Minister’s office is one of the main foci of intelligence collection of these foreign agents. The other vital target is the Army Headquarters, Royal palace and the activities of royals is another major area under scrutiny. A three-member team had been focusing on the aftermath of the massacre of the late king and his family over the last couple of years. Other vital targets of such operation are all the parties and major political parties. A significant number of party workers are believed to have been cultivated by these agents for first hand information.

One of the presenters tactfully revealed that these agents pay regularly the concerned government officials to get information, which includes many key position holders—bureaucrats and politicians as well. These agents even manage to infiltrate the Maoists camp. They apparently concentrate more on soliciting information on military and weaponry as well as future strategies of Maoists and their connections with the foreign entities.

In the light of such development, Nepal government needs to work out a crucial plan to stop such dangerous moves by the foreign elements by strengthening national intelligence and security agencies. It is perhaps high time that Political parties developed a code of conduct for leaders and cadres to prevent such activities. Corrupt bureaucrats and politicians, the two major problems of the country today need to be brought to book. National Investigation Department needs to be overhauled. A high profile and better-trained intelligence agency should be established to protect the national interest and guard the country against such rampant operations from foreign intelligence agents. A country in transition can ignore such issues only at its peril.

Kudos to those alert intelligence professionals for the initiative taken to educate policy makers on this very crucial issue.

(Raj Wasti is a security analyst.)
Jane Austen painting on sale

What many believe to be the only painting of Jane Austen will be auctioned in New York in April by Christie’s, a relation of the English author and owner of the picture said.

But Henry Rice, a “sixth generation descendant” of the writer of classics “Emma,” “Sense and Sensibility” and “Pride and Prejudice,” believes the sale of a picture that has divided experts will not be without controversy.

In 1948, a leading Austen scholar dismissed the authenticity of the portrait, saying the style of costume the subject wears does not match the date. Rice and his family never doubted it was their ancestor. The painting is thought to have been made in 1788 or 1789 when Austen would have been about 14.

So he had the painting examined by Christie’s, and they decided to take up the challenge and dismissed the original attribution and subject matter.

“The painting had rather fallen into the abyss,” Rice told Reuters. “So I decided to take upon the challenge and found that many of the arguments against the painting (being of Austen) were extremely weak.

Effective they were calling us liars. Then we really started a bit of a crusade,” he added in a telephone interview.

Only painting of Jane Austen

“We were lucky in the people we met, including quite a lot of Americans, and the thing gathered strength, but there was fierce resistance and there probably still will be.”

He offered the painting to the National Portrait Gallery in London several times, but they turned it down because of doubts over the authenticity of its subject.

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"We didn't deserve it"

Smarting under the humiliating loss against Sri Lanka that has all but put them out of the World Cup, captain Rahul Dravid said the Indian team "has not delivered" on its promises and did not deserve to win the trophy.

"It is too early to collect my thoughts. We will not make a big issue of it and they are now concentrating on the Bangladesh game. Perhaps too passionate", he said. ä

Dravid also said it was up to the selectors to decide on his future as captain. "I am not a name and shame guy, just the honest facts. Let the punter make up his mind etc", he said.

The Daily Telegraph quoted from an e-mail in which Woolmer wrote, "I am going to write a book on my tenure as Pakistan coach. I shall only start after the World Cup. I believe, regardless of the money, the story is worth telling, has to be told and in the correct way."

"I am not a name and shame guy, just the honest facts. Let the punter make up his mind etc", he said.

Woolmer's family and a co-author had denied that the proposed book was to include a chapter on match-fixing. Earlier, Woolmer's family and a co-author had denied that they had been told by a friend about 'suspicious movements' in betting markets a month before Pakistan's match against Ireland which led to his murder by a betting syndicate. Woolmer had sent the mail to a Pakistani journalist, seeking his help to complete the book.

Barry Richards, best man at Mr Woolmer's wedding, said, "There was a feeling around that Bob was going to expose something. There is a dark side to cricket. The game got on top of it for a while but it has never really been stamped out. Bob was passionate about the game. Perhaps too passionate", according to the report, "We definitely do take the menace of match-fixing, according to a media report."

Incidently, former Pakistan pace Sarfraz Nawaz has also claimed that Woolmer was about to spill the beans in the book.

"Bob wanted to write"

Deceased Pakistan cricket coach Bob Woolmer was indeed planning to come up with a book in which he wanted to shed light on the menace of match-fixing, according to a media report. "I am going to write a book on my tenure as Pakistan coach. I shall only start after the World Cup. I believe, regardless of the money, the story is worth telling, has to be told and in the correct way."

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