Army in election

In what appeared like a deviation from the eight-party understanding, PM G P Koirala has asked the Chief of Army, Gen. Rukmangat Katwal, to gear up his institution for a possible role in the election.

The meeting, described as routine from the PM’s office, lasted for nearly an hour and half. But it attaches more political significance now as the meeting has taken place against the backdrop of criticism of the law and order situation, with the former US President, Jimmy Carter endorsing that assessment. Sources in the PM’s office said that Koirala told Katwal that the army might have to assist civilian authorities in conducting free and fair polls, as well as in containing criminal activities that may vitiate the atmosphere needed for polls in November.

The peace agreement minimises and nullifies army’s role in election. Near collapse of the law and order situation, and Maoists and YCL continuously vilifying the army, has triggered visible unease in the institution that is left without a political boss. The army’s statement last week said it is not going to withdraw any camps set up during the years of conflict under the prevailing situation. But Maoists are insisting that all military personnel and offices deployed in forest areas, national parks and the one in Chyangthapu in Panchthar, along the border with Sikkim be immediately withdrawn. Koirala’s ‘routine meeting’ on Sunday, sources said, was meant to assure the army that he would support the army in light of the, ‘unjust demands’ of the Maoists.
Rescuing Melamchi
We honour our commitment - government to ADB

The government has finally approached the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to not abandon the multi-million dollar Melamchi drinking project. Reaffirming its commitment to reform and encourage private stakes in it.

A letter is being dispatched to ADB in this regard following an understanding reached between the finance ministry and the physical planning and housing ministry. As a result, Hishila Yami who had opposed the project earlier, agreed to approach the ADB saying it should refrain from withdrawing from the project.

The repeated violation of the code of conduct as well as human rights go unaddressed in absence of the committee which should have been in place right from the day peace accord was signed. An earlier committee headed by former Election Commissioner, Birendra Prasad Mishra, resigned saying its terms and conditions as well as jurisdiction had not been defined clearly.

Finance Minister, Ram Sharan Mahat told newsfront that with the clarity on the part of the government now, Melamchi would now be safe. Experts however say the fresh bidding process of the water management would take some more time, and would also fuel hike in the cost. ADB had been insisting for handing over the management of the supply in the valley to a private company since government controlled KUKL, in the past one decade, could not act efficiently in spite of more than 100 million dollars of external assistance for the purpose.

The last is yet to be heard from ADB, there are indications that the new proposal of the government would be acceptable to it, after senior officials of the two ministries concerned had a detailed discussion about it with the ADB headquarters in Manila recently.

As a sop, the government assured ADB that it stands by its commitment for reforms in the sector and was willing to involve private sector in KUKL, which is likely to be bifurcated soon for administrative reasons, official sources said.

In the offing
Committee to monitor human rights, code of conduct next week.

The much awaited high-powered committee that will assess the violation of code of conduct by the Maoists and other parties, during the conflict is likely to see the light of day very soon.

According to high-placed official sources, the Peace and Reconstruction Ministry headed by Ram Chandra Poudel has been asked to make the committee effective. It is believed that Poudel has discussed possible names for the committee with Janak Joshi, Representative of the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon.

Martin is believed to have suggested Poudel to make the committee broader with prominent people from all spheres of society included.

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In fact, both UNMIN headed by Martin and the OHCHR are supposed to be assisting the official committee in monitoring human rights abuses during the peace process, but they have failed to do so in absence of a monitoring committee. “Minister Poudel, and Secretary Janak Joshi are giving final touches to the committee and it should be in place by this week,” an official said.

Indian apathy
Bhutani refugees’ right to go back home

The lure for settling in the United States or other western countries would continue to attract more Bhutanis in the refugee camps in Nepal, said Teknath Rizal, Bhutan’s prominent pro-democracy and human rights activist. “There have been all kinds of luring factors. Some of the refugees were told each of them opting for a third country settlement would be paid 70,000 US dollars.” This bait would only help the Bhutani authorities of the two ministries to have every person of Nepali origin sent out.

Rizal was venting his anger at representatives of the South Asia Human Rights (SAHR) which has prepared a 34-page report suggesting that creating an atmosphere for their return to Bhutan was the best option available. The report was released by IK. Goyal, former Prime Minister of India, in Delhi. Goyal heads SAHR.

A three-member team headed by the noted journalist and parliamentarian Kuldip Nayar was here, coinciding with the release of the report, to interact with Bhutani refugees opposed to the third country settlement. Rizal and others complained that while the government of India was still not willing to mediate in the refugee issue, it has gone to the extent of asking the UNHCR office not provide medical treatment to those who were injured as a result of Indian security personnel using force on them when the refugees were marching towards Bhutan.

The report admitted that while Indian media did not give due prominence to the Bhutani refugee issue, it said it in time, the government of India took up the issue with the King of Bhutan so that the refugees could go back to their country with their rights and honour intact, instead of forcing them abroad.

Minister Ram Chandra Poudel

Bhutani Refugees at Kakarbitta

Pix by newsfront
Election must for democracy – Carter

Election can take place in free and fearless atmosphere only.

Former US President Jimmy Carter did not reveal all that he had. Instead he collected what appeared like a plethora of demands from the Nepali side. He knew he had not in a position to give anything to anyone, so he kept quiet about most of what he heard.

Apparently some demanded that they intervene for more inclusion or representation of Dalits and ethnic groups in the constituent assembly as the proposed model of electoral system would not do justice to 102 ethnic groups in the country. Carter, a quiet listener, nodded his head without making any comment – as indicated by the reports gathered from various people who he met. At least one of those who met him also-complained about Home Minister, K P Siwula, holding him responsible for the poor law and order situation and narrated how Siwula has been helping young communist league and Maoist cadres in all kind of activities, clearly in violation of the peace process. Carter was also told that in several cases, Chief District Officers have been stopped by the Home Minister to initiate cases against ‘criminals’ because of their political leanings. But as he appeared before the press on Saturday, Carter was cool, composed and measured in his expression. There was no element of criticism of the US policy about Maoists as he said, “it is better (for the US government) to have communication at some level with everyone who participates legally within the political framework of Nepal.”

He said he was still concerned with activities of Young Communist League (YCL) such as demanding money from merchants and beating them. He said Carter Center would be monitoring activities of the YCL in the light of assurances Prachanda gave him that they would be controlled. “We will be monitoring the YCL closely to ensure that their future behaviour is in line with the promises,” he warned, “This is not an arrangement that is nearly consistent with what the US government has been saying about the Maoists that their action must match their words. Without referring to the complaints he received about the Home Minister, Carter said he was concerned that the absence of law and order was complete. “I think the police do not feel they have adequate political support. My hope is that the Prime Minister and other leaders will give such support.” The CDOs should be given unequivocal and clear authorisation to maintain law and order.

Almost endorsing the international opinion, Carter hoped that constituent assembly elections will be held in “open, transparent, honest, fair and peaceful manner. And based on his briefing and the policy that Carter Center pursues, the former US President stood in support of inclusive policy and politics. “For the first time in Nepal’s history, marginalised people are exercising their democratic right to be heard and to participate fully and equally in Nepali society. Their concerns are legitimate and I support them.”

Criminal activities in Nepal from India. Officials said Mukherjee assured the PM that India would not allow its territory to be used against Nepal.

Yadav to travel

Madheshi Janadikhat Forum leader Uppendra Yadav is likely to visit the United States very soon. Yadav has been invited to the US by the Association of Nepalis in America (ANA).

“Yes, I have been invited and will go there if I am given visa by the embassy here.”

Yadav told newsmfront. “This will be a good opportunity for me to explain our views to Nepalis abroad,” he added. He is scheduled to address the ANA in Washington DC and New York on June 27.

Yadav whom Maoists accuse of being a pro-palace and pro-Hindutva element of India, had recently met the left and Congress party leaders in Delhi. He explained that the Madhesi movement represented the mandate of the people for appropriate representation of Terai in parliament and political as well as administrative institutions. “I will do the same thing in the US. Those who are accusing me and the forum of being guided by other elements are insulting the people of Madhesh, ” Yadav said.

Taming Goit, Jwala Singh

Prime Minister G P Koirala has started a new parliamentary practice. Although he is the leader of parliament, he has begun the practice of sending congratulatory messages to parliamentarians from home if some major legislation is passed.

That is what he did last week when the parliament adopted amendments bringing the King under the ambit of impeachment laws and legalising constituent assembly elections from mid-June to November. In all likelihood, the election is now to take place on November 26 as indicated by Koirala to House Speaker, Subrash Nembwang.

But even in his failure to conduct election by mid-June as mentioned in the interim constitution, Koirala only emerged as a hero since no one raised the issue of accountability for the missed deadline while setting the new date for election. Instead, Koirala who was absent from the parliament when the amendment bills were carried out, chose to shout congratulatory notes which only mean patting his own back.

Yadav irks PM

Prime Minister Koirala has patched up with Maoist leaders Prachanda and Baburam at the moment but he still seems miffed with the Forest Minister, Matrika Prasad Yadav.

This was clear since Koirala extracted an assurance from Prachanda last week that he would talk to Yadav and ask him to adopt a spirit and attitude of cooperation towards the PM. Yadav criticised Koirala in the cabinet meeting about three weeks ago for PM defending army what Yadav termed as, “army of the king”, and continued his tirade against the PM publicly.

Koirala is believed to have told Prachanda that it would be difficult to work with a minister who, “does not adhere to the basic norms of parliamentary democracy.” Yadav, of late has not taken it any more.”

Party sources say Chand, party’s chief whip in parliament, had been assured by Koirala few weeks ago that he should be ready to take over as the new home minister in place of K P Siwula. What seems to have triggered the outburst of Chand was Koirala’s inability to get his land returned from the Maoists.

Blessed failure

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Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius and a lot of courage to move in the opposite direction.

- Albert Einstein

Say no to violence

Any form of violence in politics must not be condoned. There should be no space for violence in politics. Any political change that is realised through people’s consent is more durable and worth fighting for, peacefully. Temporary power seized by use of arms and other forceful means will remain vulnerable and can be easily overthrown by other instances of violence. Positive changes that are backed by people work better and can be more lasting.

However remarkable the success of the people’s movement last year, many have been certain factors that played a part it cannot be ignored. OHCHR has said in one of its reports that provocative actions from the crowd during various political protests incited reactions from the security forces deployed; whereas in other places there were excesses committed by the security forces. The UN body also said that many children were used by the organisers of the demonstrations.

The culture of destroying private and public property and attacking people who are not part of demonstrations by the organisers is a highly deplorable act. Examples of this are visible frequently these days, and the people’s movement last year was no exception. German Ambassador, Franz Ring, has revealed that he was targeted by the crowd during last year’s Jana-andoolan.

What YCL did at Damak to Moriarty was just a continuation of that culture. That Loktantra or democracy does not give license to disrupt, destroy lives and property appears not to have been understood by many Nepal’s. When the Maoists declared to renounce arms it was taken as a welcome sign by the people who hoped that they would now start contributing to political and social transformation in the country. But after witnessing its legacy of violence still at large, especially by the YCL activists; disillusionment looms large over the common people’s psyche that is gradually changing into anger. This proves that short term gains can be made through tactical attacks but to fight for, peacefully. Temporary power seized by use of arms is realised through people’s consent is more durable and worth fighting for, peacefully. Temporary power seized by use of arms and other forceful means will remain vulnerable and can be easily overthrown by other instances of violence. Positive changes that are backed by people work better and can be more lasting.

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It is a shame that Kathmandu most probably will be deprived of drinking water for some more years to come. Melamchi may meet the fate of Arun Three. But the nation and its people have a right to know from why the people deserve this fate.

Hishita Yami, as Minister for Physical Planning and a politician with an alternative political view, is justifiably in putting forward a new way of attracting donors’ support for new water projects. But that needs to be backed by formulation of sound policies on such issues and their implementation. This would need a wider debate among political parties.

Let Yami initiate the move but Melamchi should not be sacrificed before such a policy is formulated through consensus.

Dilli Acharya

Blessed source of love

St Francis of Assissi (1182 - 1226)

His experiences of his illness and military service were instrumental in leading him to reflect on the purpose of life. One day, in the church of San Damiano, he seemed to hear Christ saying to him, “Francis, repair my falling house.” He took the words literally, and sold a bale of silk from his father’s warehouse to pay for repairs of the church. His father was outraged, and there was a public confrontation at which his father disowned and disinherited him, and he in turn renounced his father’s wealth. One account says that he not only handed over his father’s purse, but also took off his expensive clothes, laid them at his father’s feet, and walked away naked. He declared himself “wounded to Lady Poverty”, renounced all material possessions, and devoted himself to serving the poor.

Poems of St. Francis

He asked for charity

God came to my house and asked for charity. And I fell on my knees and cried, “Beloved, what may I give?” “Just love,” he said. “Just love.”

Not to Hurt

Not to hurt our humble brethren (the animals)

is our first duty to them, but to stop there is not enough. We have a higher mission:

To be of service to them whenever they require it.

The Tree of Love

The tree of love its roots hath spread Deep in my heart, andparse its leaf; Rich are its fruits: they joy dispense; Transport the heart, and ravish sense. In love’s sweet season to thee I cleave, Bless’d source of love . . . .

Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light, and Where there is sadness, joy.
Carter and conflict

Carter’s assessment at the end of his visit was a mixture of hope and despair.

Carter did not exactly criticise Bush or the US policy or its current approach towards the Maoists during his 4-day visit here, but as someone who has devoted almost a quarter of a century to promotion of human rights and mitigation of conflict, he would naturally encourage dialogues between rival sides and settle the issue peacefully.

Carter himself, Carter raised questions about YCL activities, which no doubt, contained his disappointment. In fact, Carter did succeed in securing Prachanda’s promise that he would stop objectionable activities of the league. Secondly, his clear emphasis was on the need to hold election in the constituent assembly in a free and fair manner. He was equally emphatic that the prevailing law and order was not conducive enough to hold elections.

Dr Bhekh Bahadur Thapa and his wife Dr Rita Thapa had the honour of being invited by Carter for a dinner at a restaurant in Thamel during his first visit to Nepal in November 1985. Twenty-two years down the line, Kathmandu having lost that Sangrila image, Carter could not imagine going to Thamel this time given the law and order situation; when the prime concern is how to save the country from ruining itself. “We have come to this stage after a combination of multiple failures from all sides - state and non-state actors, and may be internal and external causes,” Dr Thapa told Carter during his brief meeting this time.

Carter’s assessment at the end of his visit, as reflected in his press conference, was a mixture of hope and despair. But the hope was purely a conditional one; that the leaders including the Maoists would behave, that they work together to make the election a success, and above all that violence would be a thing of the past. He was also clear that the issues of inclusive politics, devolution of power and restructuring of the state needed much more intense debate so that a wider national understanding, if not consensus, could be built before the country went to the polls.

Yes, he might have gone a bit overboard, especially in eulogising G P Koirala as his “hero” and praising him for his “integrity.” Koirala, no doubt, was the choice of history and at 82, he stood determined to fight back and get democracy back which the king had compromised. But he is showing signs of failing even if he personally believed that Maoists do not deserve to be there any more. On that matter, the official channel of the US government, with Moriarty still here as ambassador or with him gone, would have a far more influential say.

For the terrorist tag to be taken off, violence, extortion, abduction and violation of human rights have to be done away with which would then convince the international community that they are changing as per their declared commitment to establish peace, democracy and prosperity in the country. Carter, at 84, perhaps might feel sorrier than the rest, if the peace process suffered or failed, since he has always said he is friend of Nepal and that he would be happy to have his Carter Center playing a role in it.
All Nepali people suffer from the lack of security.

The German ambassador Franz Ring is known for making frank comments on issues he holds dear even if it is not palatable for the diplomatic corps that he belongs to. Newsfront talked to him in detail about the ongoing peace process, possibility of holding election to the constituent assembly and issues of bilateral cooperation.

How do you view this peace process and what are the challenges you see?

My assessment is that this peace process is formally on track although it has been delayed for some months. The deadline set for June was by far too ambitious. It was not only difficult but simply impossible. But when you take into account developments from last April to this year the process has made tremendous progress. Interim government and parliament were formed, interim constitution was finalised and arms management was agreed upon. I think Nepal should be very happy that after a certain phase of stagnation, the process has gained momentum again with the meeting of eight parties and the decision on the new time frame for the election to the constitutional assembly in Nov-Dec by the parliament is good news.

Election does not look that impossible now?

There are still many challenges. I want to single out two major problems. It is very important that law and order is restored in the country in order to allow free and fair elections to take place in a secure environment. It would be catastrophic for Nepal if elections cannot be held in a free and fair manner.

Regarding the law and order situation, it is the responsibility of the state to restore law and order and security. It is also an appeal to the Maoists, especially the Young Communist League (YCL) to abide by the agreements they have signed and not to disturb, intimidate and cause problems in the country.

Does that mean you are still doubtful about free and fair election taking place in the prevailing situation?

I would agree with other observers that under prevailing conditions it would be impossible to have free and fair elections. This atmosphere has to change in order to allow free and fair elections to take place.

We missed mid June election deadline, a constitutional commitment. How do you view the election being postponed?

It was also a commitment to have the new government in place on the 1st of December last year which was not realistic. There were technical and legislative problems and the problems of the environment. It takes time to reverse the condition of violence, intimidation, extortion. This was a more important reason for the elections to be postponed.

Is Germany assisting the election commission?

The embassy already sent papers, a month
Human rights abuses should be dealt impartially with. There should be no exception to the rule. Human rights violation issues should be addressed and culprits brought to justice.

How does your assessment of the situation as it prevails today affect country’s climate for industrial and economic growth vis a vis Germany’s possible contribution to that?

Yes, it should not affect much on what we have promised. We want to continue with that. In general, I would say it is possible for us to continue with our projects. I am happy to tell you that since the beginning of the peace process last year, we have been able to make certain constructions like access roads and other facilities in the cantonment sites. We are very happy that we are involved in providing direct and immediate help in this peace mission ever since it began.

Some of the diplomats have been criticised in the media as well as in the political circles for commenting on what essentially constitutes Nepal’s internal matter. Your comments?

I can only explain it from my position as a German Ambassador. We have no intentions of interfering with internal affairs of Nepal. As a friend of Nepal and partner in its development, we are in favour of democracy, upholding human rights and supporting the peace process. So in this regard, we voice our support and our concerns. Democracy and human rights are worldwide issues, not specific to any country and we do raise our concerns regarding it. I do not think that can be called interfering. We firmly believe that it is for Nepali people to decide on its destiny and deal with its political questions.

Is there any position that Germany has taken on the issue of monarchy in Nepal?

It’s only for Nepali people to decide on that. That is my short and clear answer.

What would you say regarding the delay in formation of the Truth Commission as mentioned in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement; as also about the speculations that international community including the UN who have got certain stake in the peace process; is insisting on probe into excesses committed by the security agencies of the state, and not so much from the other sides?

I think human rights abuses should be dealt impartially with. There should be no exception to the rule. Human rights violation issues should be addressed and culprits brought to justice. But it is again for Nepali people to decide how much of the reconciliation process would offer solutions to such violations. This is just a theoretical opinion.
Mysterious environment, bogey elections

It is now becoming increasingly apparent that the government will miss the election deadline for December yet again. Political parties need to urgently assess the law and order situation and consequently chalk out a realistic time table to conduct free and fair elections. As the political deadlock ossifies due to the failure of the Koirala government to conduct timely elections in June, new sets of political challenges now dwarf the interphase, hamstringing a smooth transition towards permanent peace and a functioning liberal democracy. Quintessentially, the political parties need to urgently elaborate and clear any lingering ambiguities with the term “environment”. Although senior leaders belonging to all parties keep thundering that a “conducive environment” is a prerequisite to polls, they fail to clarify their definition of this mysterious environment. On the other hand, the Maoists are adamantly regarding holding early elections. However, increased YCL violence and their bullish attitude have proved to go well beyond the influence of the party leadership and as a result, the indifference will ultimately lead to a political crisis.

The recent attack on the American ambassador and the stoning of the German ambassador’s car in Kathmandu, demonstrate the inability of the government to protect diplomats. These unfortunate events clearly reflect the actual state of the law and order situation of the country. Early this week, a Kantiapur, the media house met with a crisis as the Maoists established yet another trade union within the parameters of a political entity. Consequently, senior journalists and media houses fearing similar repercussions have concluded that the independence of the press is at stake, and are contemplating that it may be prudent to relocate south of the border, as a consequence elections are postponed; the Maoists might opt to launch a second urban based agitational campaign.

If Koirala fails to take concrete measures in improving the situation of the country, and as a consequence elections are postponed; the Maoists might opt to launch an armed urban based agitation. Maoists’ indifference will ultimately lead to a political crisis.

While growth in the number of radio stations is a healthy sign in dissemination of information, it is equally important that they are clear about the issues they raise and the quality they maintain.

A community radio is a system of institutionalised mass communication system for community, operated by community efforts. Community radio is distinguished from other media as it emphasises on the maximum benefit to the local community with their participation in management and program production. The main purpose of community radio is to promote language, culture, literature, art and traditional indigenous knowledge and skills. It empowers marginalised groups and addresses social issues at community level, issues such as poverty, social exclusion, and unemployment. It helps to speed up the process of informing the community and therefore acts as a catalyst of change in the society. It encourages mobilising a both private and collective resource for personal and community needs to promote national industries and markets. Historically, the movement of community radio has seen more active and effective people in South America and Africa.

Radio for the people

Community radio acts as a catalyst of change in the society.

Pasang Dolma Sherpa

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Community radio station is a catalyst of change in the society.

The Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB Nepal) was established in 2002 to address these issues. It is an umbrella organisation of the radios to promote and protect community radios for dissemination of information and linking communication with development. It is involved in imparting training facilities, building the capacities of community radios and advocating for pro-community radio policies. It has more than 85 community radios across Nepal as members of ACORAB Nepal, out of which 30 have gone on air.

ACORAB Nepal has already implemented various trainings on radio journalism, management, technician and production. It has plans to develop capacity building programs that help strengthen, promote and sustain radios in Nepal. It covers more than 90% of country’s geographies as well as the population and is emerging as an effective vehicle of social transformation and development. In less than a decade, it has reached out to the grass root levels of marginalised communities, raising their awareness on issues like education, health, environment, local tradition, culture as well as relevant international issues. They have served as effective platform for communicating events of social relevance.

Nagma Pakhrin, the chairperson of the Community Radio Council (CRC) says it has had tremendous impact on the education sector. Parents started realising their children who dropped out, village folks have started talking about issues and more remarkably husbands have started listening to their wives on household decisions. Its impact on poverty reduction has directly benefited the people and has also promoted local technology to a large extent.

If Koirala fails to take concrete measures in improving the situation of the country, and as a consequence elections are postponed; the Maoists might opt to launch an armed urban based agitation.

The Maoist Chief Prachanda meeting with Jimmy Carter

Maosists’ indifference will ultimately lead to a political crisis.

While growth in the number of radio stations is a healthy sign in dissemination of information, it is equally important that they are clear about the issues they raise and the quality they maintain.
Two Patils, one Rashtrapati

Pratibha Patil’s career and character have been such that she has no enemies, no rivals, no competitors, a good way to be away from the media glare.

If she’s a believer, Pratibha Patil could consult an astrologer just to comprehend what hit her on Thursday, June 14. Only the stars appear to explain her surprise elevation as the UP-LPF candidate for the president’s post. An astrologer pontificating on a TV channel said that the reason her name appeared all of a sudden was that her stars were very strong in her kundali. The stars were so configured that Sonia Gandhi, UPA and the Left had no option but to recommend her name unanimously! I am sure some other astrologer is consoling Shivraj Patil and blaming that Red Star. After all, communist class always operate as extraconstitutional—or extra-celestial—centres of power.

Pratibha Patil’s career and character have been such that she has no enemies, no rivals, no competitors, a good way to be away from the media glare. No wonder, most mediapersons were clueless about her profile when her name was announced on Thursday. They just knew that she was the governor of Rajasthan, hardly anyone knew that she was married to Devshinh Shekhawat and therefore even to Pratibha Shekhawat. Born in Jalgaon, the cotton-growing Khandesh region of north Maharashtra, she was just 27 and unmarried. Her mentor was Chavan’s godson as he was termed, had left the Indira Gandhi meant inviting political ridicule. It was a difficult decision also because her mentor had frozen more than $1.6 billion in for election law violations and his Thai Rak Thai party dissolved.

But Chavan’s stars were in ascendance and, as his protege, she too grew in stature in Maharashtra.

All this while, Chavan’s stars were in ascendance and, as his protege, she too grew in stature in Maharashtra.

But she chose to remain with Indira Gandhi when the Congress was split following the 1977 defeat. In those days, to remain loyal to Indira Gandhi meant inviting political ridicule. It was a difficult decision also because her mentor had left Indira Gandhi. Even Sharad Pawar, Chavan’s godson as he was termed, had left the Congress. Pratibhatiya (as she’s known in Maharashtra) chose to become leader of the opposition in the assembly, positioning herself against Pawar’s ruling front.

Loyalty matters. Mrs Gandhi came back to power in 1980. The Janata Party had disintegrated and the Pawar government was dismissed. Today, the Left may be extolling its political virtues, but then the CPI and later even the CPI, were totally opposed to Indira and therefore even to Pratibhatiya’s politics. The Left has gone out of its way to describe her as “steadfast”, but at that time it meant support to Indira and even to the Janata Party. Her being “Patil” has confused many. In Maharashtra, “Patil” does not necessarily mean a Maratha. Shivraj Patil, for instance, is a Lingayat, and Pratibhatiya is a Rajput-Maratha.

That was way back in 1962, when Pratibha Patil was the youngest member of the legislative assembly. That was right after the Emergency was lifted and even Dalits. And besides the last name, there is really nothing Shivraj Patil and Pratibha Patil have in common.

Pratibhatiya is a private, media-shy person but is open and communicative when in conversation. She is confident and restrained. Shivraj Patil is like a wax statue. He has a very symbolic smile and well-tailored clothes to match that artifically. It is difficult to hold a conversation with him because he neither expresses an opinion nor challenges anyone. He is reliable because he is like a sponge which absorbs water.

He has no primary group, no circle of friends, no personal following, no party network which he can call his own, no active media lobby and no comrades or colleagues in the Congress. He is a loner and has generally remained loyal to Indira-Rajiv-Sonia. Perhaps that is another attribute common between him and Pratibhatiya. When Shivraj jilted his seat in Lalub, nobody had any sympathy for him. But there was shock in his constituency when he was chosen as one of the top cabinet ministers. It is truly a mystery how he rose to the level he has.

But that is a bit like the famous Peter Sellers’ film, Being There. In it a gardener, serving in a millionaire’s estate, having no knowledge of the world outside that estate, inherits the whole estate. Suddenly finding himself a rich man, he starts getting importance and a point comes when he gets nominated as a candidate for the presidency. He even goes on to become president of the US. He is clueless about how he came into power, or what to do with it. The last line in the film, which is also on Sellers’ tomb, is, “Life is a State of Mind”. For Shivraj, Life is a Virtual Reality. In this reality there is no contradiction between being a candidate and not being a candidate.

You just cannot have a conversation with him. He has been like this for well over the three decades and the media and the political class have known him. Nobody can quarrel with him. He never raises his voice. If a reporter asks him a question or if a local Congress neta asks for a favour, he shrinks back a little, firey wrinkles appearing on his face. But within a few seconds he recovers and becomes a wax statue again. He then turns to the reporter and says, “That’s an interesting question. ‘He promises to look into it. To the local neta, he says, ‘I cannot handle that issue.’ He also explains that he is busy with some nationally important policy matters. Both the reporter and the neta are neither impressed nor dejected. For a while, they too feel that life is a virtual reality.

If Shivraj had indeed occupied Rashtrapati Bhavan, it would at least have been a great tribute to Peter Sellers.

(The Indian Express)

From exile in London, Thaksin denounced the decision in a video message broadcast to 13,000 supporters demonstrating at a Bangkok park Friday. “I will fight for my honor to prove my innocence,” Thaksin said. About 10,000 Thaksin loyalists protested again at the park. Saturday with huge posters of Thaksin and signs demanding the military-installed government step down. The anti-government protests, while slowly growing, have so far failed to have a significant impact on political affairs. But they have sparked worries of a confrontation between Thaksin backers and those who overthrew him for alleged corruption and abuse of power.

Noppadol Pattama, a lawyer and defacto spokesman for Thaksin, has said the asset freeze would not affect Thaksin’s decision to step down from leadership for the time being. Thaksin was arrested ahead of the September coup and never returned home. He has been splitting his time between London and traveling around Asia.

Last month, a court ordered his Thai Rak Thai party dissolved for election law violations and barred its entire leadership of 111 people, including Thaksin, from public office for five years. “I already said that I’m retiring from politics, but I am just asking that my family and I live with dignity,” Thaksin said.

Thaksin made his fortune largely from a government- granted cell phone operating concession. His net worth is estimated fortune of $2.2 billion. his Thai Rak Thai party dissolved. and traveling around Asia.

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Police Bus Bombing

Kills 35 in Kabul

A bomb ripped through a police bus in a crowded civilian area in Kabul on Sunday, killing more than 35 people, officials said, in what appears to be the deadliest attack in the capital since the fall of the Taliban.

The police academy bus was carrying several recruits when the bomb went off in front of it, leaving several dead, said Zalmi Khan, the deputy police chief of Kabul province. At least 35 people were also wounded.

The explosion was heard throughout central Kabul at about 8:10 a.m. local time.

Ali Shah Pakizai, a Kabul police director of criminal investigation, said more than 35 people were killed, including policemen and civilians. He said dozens were wounded and sent to nearby hospitals.

Fazil Rahim, a doctor from a nearby hospital, said 18 dead bodies lay in the hospital courtyard, while more than 35 wounded were being treated inside the building.

"Most of the wounded are in serious condition," said Rahim, whose hands and white coat were covered in blood. The body of the bus was blown off and officers were pulling a number of bodies from the wreckage, according to an Associated Press correspondent at the scene.

The explosion twisted the bus into a charred skeleton, and bloody unidentifiable body parts littered the area as far as 30 yards from the bus. Hundreds of police and investigators were inspecting the scene.

The explosion appears to have happened in the front of the bus, which was more badly damaged than the rest of vehicle. Officials were trying to determine if it was a suicide attack or a bomb planted on the bus.

Wali Mohammady, an eyewitness who was driving his car just behind the bus, said "there were a lot killed and wounded, both police and civilian."

Mohammady said that he "saw a big fire and dust in front of the bus. The blast happened at a crowded bus station, used by both police and civilians, near the Kabul governor’s house. Police and other Afghan security officials are commonly targeted by insurgents, who consider them tools of the U.S.-backed government of President Hamid Karzai."

The attack appears to be the deadliest attack in Kabul since the fall of the Taliban. Last September, a suicide bomb attack killed 16 people, including two American soldiers close to the U.S. embassy in the capital. Today, a suicide attack near the Interior Ministry left 12 people dead and over 40 others wounded.
“You have decided to walk the path we chose decades ago,” Upendra Shrestha, a senior Nepali writer, addresses a young, upcoming Nepali writer and wheezes, “victory be yours!” Without fail, Upendra Dai visits Kavi Kuna, the poets’ corner every evening, sharp at 5 o’clock, where a seat is reserved for him. To us, Upendra is the last link to our literary past. In spite of his candid words and invectives, he remains our wandering book of wisdom. The history of Nepali literature speaks through him. Obsessive and abusive, he is the unacknowledged Guru narrating the forgotten chapters of Nepali history and culture. He is the last book we can read to learn all that happened in the past when the poets walked the formidable path which saint poet Kabir refers to as: ‘If you can burn your hut, come with me and be a poet…’

The editor of Nepali journal Tanneri, Bidur Gautam enters with a bagful of copies of his just published journal. Free of charge, he distributes copies of the journal to almost all the poets present there. The writers accept the books as earned prizes and even welcome the treat of free tea from him. Most of them have had their works already published in the journal or intend to in ensuing issues.

This is a familiar scene in the arena of Nepali publishing controlled primarily by author-publishers. The writers play the dual role of being the mouth and the eye. He is the book and the reader, the maker, and the thing made. Almost every alternate day I receive a gift of a book published by a Nepali author. The scene seems vibrant and vital.

That Nepali literature thrives and flourishes without any institutionalised support is magic in itself. There are no art councils or promotion centers. No publishers are genuinely interested in promoting the cause of written words. Nepal Academy or Sajha Prakashan remains just a tool to recompense the semi-literate party workers loyal to their respective leaders for their services in the past. The fact that there is little or virtually no help to assist the creative ventures of these writers and their low income does not make the scene less interesting. To a western reader this might seem pure madness. But this is the norm here. A book is gifted like refreshments after the reading. You accept it as a reward for being present at the ceremony, without any guile or guilt. Only rarely do you buy a book.

It is usually the lower middle class in Nepal who buys literary books, consider themselves to be a part of the creative world, and circulates it among their friends and family members. Buying a book is a rare thing. Once a Nepali reader buys a book, it seems to become like a scripture. The reader hands it down from generation to generation. The book is worn out through multiple readings. It is bound, and rebound by posterity. A good Nepali book once bought moves like a mantra in a monastery from one mouth to another. It appears to me that over time it envelops the readers, and becomes them, the bread and breath of their sacred frames.

There is little or no help to assist creative ventures of these writers…
Drugs and alcohol may irreversibly harm your child
Counseling by drug therapist, Ragina Shah

So, why do some pregnant women still drink alcohol? There could be several underlying reasons. Lack of information or misinformation could lead a woman to underdose the effects alcohol will have on her unborn child. If a pregnant woman is an alcoholic, she may be unable to quit her addiction on her own. She may also be in denial, thinking that she is simply a social or an occasional drinker. It is important to understand that every pregnancy is different. Alcohol may barely affect the first child, whereas it may cause severe disorders in the second. The best way to prevent any problems is to stop consuming all types of alcoholic beverages, without any exception. Marijuana use during pregnancy may slow brain growth and increase risk of premature delivery. Cocaine causes low birth weight; increases risk of miscarriage and trigger pre-term labor. Low birth weight babies have a higher risk of dying in their first month of life than normal weight babies. They also are more prone to lifelong disabilities, such as cerebral palsy and mental retardation. Other drugs such as heroin, amphetamines and a majority of prescribed medications are equally harmful for pregnant women. Any medications, however vital, should only be consumed after consulting a doctor. If you are unsure about the prescribed medications you are using or have any other concerns regarding drugs and your pregnancy, do not hesitate to contact a health professional. It may prevent you and your baby from long-term suffering.

Please address any queries you have about drug addiction to: newsfront@bharatkutlu.com (Your identity will be protected.)

A human soul needs more than just food, shelter, health insurance and a job. This need expresses itself in many ways through creative expressions of different kinds – arts and literature being just one of them. It seeks something intangible, inexpressible and taps on all existing forms of artistic expressions. And their amazement at Nepal Himalayas that are so intricately woven with culture needs no articulation. Surrounded by the relics of yesteryears, some get very emotional too. All this makes one wonder if amidst all man-made structures and comforts, their souls are not seeking its nourishment that cannot be drawn from intellectual pursuits or material advancement only.

China of today has lost a vital link with China of yesterday; that was replete with stories, magic, memories, artifacts, literature, religious texts – all in all a storehouse of knowledge of their past which belonged as much as to those who destroyed it as it did to their predecessors. Though the impact of the absence of the connectivity on societal level would call for extensive research, it definitely seems to have created a sense of emptiness on personal levels. Chinese tourists of all ages, make up a large number of those visiting Lumbini, a major Buddhist pilgrimage site in Nepal. They are also the ones who buy a large number of Thankas depicting Buddha and other Buddhist deities. And their amazement at Nepal Himalayas that are so intricately woven with culture needs no articulation. Surrounded by the relics of yesteryears, some get very emotional too. All this makes one wonder if amidst all man-made structures and comforts, their souls are not seeking its nourishment that cannot be drawn from intellectual pursuits or material advancement only.

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China of today has lost a vital link with China of yesterday; that was reple...
Angelina: More baby

Angelina Brad Angelina Jolie’s “rainbow family” of adopted and biological children is not finished yet - not by a long way.

Poonam Dhillon remembers him for his antics on and off screen. Anupam Kher is in awe of his screen presence. Filmmaker Pankaj Parashar calls him The Man. Dimple Kapadia recalls the method in his madness. When it comes to espionage, fellow actors and directors of Rajnikant have lots to say about him, especially now that he’s taking home a wad of Rs 20 crore for Tamil film, Sivaji—The Boss.

“Rajnikant mania hit Bollywood in 1989. Yet, money was never a criterion for Rajnikant. For him, it was a friendly gesture; I still say he knew, like K C Bokadia, Parashar and Om Prakash,” film analyst Indu Mirani notes. But except for his screen presence, Rajnikant is probably India’s most untouchable, it’s his screen space with Amitabh Bachchan, Rakesh Roshan, Sunny Deol, Vinod Khanna, Hema Malini, Sridevi and Kamal Hassan. Rajnikant mania hit Bollywood in the late 80s and early 90s. Suddenly there was a sea of films about one after the other, with people he knew, like K C Bokadia, Parashar and Om Prakash,” Pankaj Parashar recalls. In that sense, he is untouchable, even top Bollywood actors don’t pocket more than Rs 12 crore per film.

Yet, though he is Kollywood’s undisputable King, Bollywood never really saw Rajnikant as a hero, except fellow South Sharma’s Farahkhan, J Om Prakash’s Bhagwan Dada and Vafadar, which were forgotten soon after. Rajni was often the bridesmaid in which were forgotten soon after.

Bhagwan Dada and Wafadar, hero, except for Anil Sharma’s never really saw Rajnikant as a undisputable King, Bollywood crore per film.

Dhillon, his Dosti Dushmani co-star. In that sense, he is untouch- able, it’s Sivaji—The Boss.

Dhillon remembers him for his antics on and off screen. Anupam Kher is in awe of his screen presence. Filmmaker Pankaj Parashar calls him The Man. Dimple Kapadia recalls the method in his madness. When it comes to espionage, fellow actors and directors of Rajnikant have lots to say about him, especially now that he’s taking home a wad of Rs 20 crore for Tamil film, Sivaji—The Boss.

“At that point, Rajnikant earned about Rs 18 lakh to Rs 20 lakh per film. But, of course, I’m talking 1989. Yet, money was never a criterion for Rajnikant. For him, it was a friendly gesture; I still say he was helping me out,” Chaabbaaz director Parashar recounts.

Author Salman Rushdie, who was forced into hiding for a decade after Iran’s spiritual leader ordered his assassination, is to receive a knighthood in the latest honors list. Buckingham Palace has announced.

“The Midnight’s Children” author, along with CNN reporter Christiane Amanpour as well as a KGB double agent and perhaps the government’s toughest human rights critic are on the list marking Queen Elizabeth II’s official birthday Saturday.

“One of the most remarkable names on the list is former KGB agent Oleg Gordievsky, who like Rushdie lived for years under the threat of assassination. British intelligence recruited Gordievsky in the 1960s and he later became invaluable when Moscow assigned him to London embassy to spy on Britain in 1982. But three years later, his cover was blown and he was arrested while in the Soviet Union. He was released due to a lack of evidence and he escaped by secretly boarding a train to Finland. Gordievsky was appointed a Companion to the Order of St. Michael and St. George, or CMG, an honor for individuals who have rendered important services related to Com- monwealth or foreign nations. Author lan Fleming wrote in his novels that the queen gave the same appointment to his fictional spy, James Bond. Other famous names on the list include singer Joe Cocker, soccer player Teddy Sheringham, Agent Provoca- teur fashion label founders Joseph Corne and Serena Rees, and actor Peter Sallis, the voice of Wallace in the “Wallace and Gromit” films.

Queen knights

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