



Courage & Conviction

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Govinda Panjyar

Maoist cantonment at Dudhauri, Sindhuli

Behave

Koirala tells Maoist

Interim Government only after arms management

Newsfront Correspondent

The under declaration of weapons and 'no change' in Maoists' conduct has deeply annoyed Prime Minister G P Koirala. How the Maoists could be included in the cabinet if they fail to convince the eight parties and the international community about their sincerity in the peace process were the worries the PM's expressed during a high level meeting on Sunday. "I am under pressure not to include them in the cabinet until their arms and guerrillas are properly verified and they stop intimidating the general public and workers of the political parties," Koirala said during a meeting of the cabinet committee for management of the cantonment which the PM heads. He was particularly perturbed by the attack by Maoists on Congress and UML workers in the capital on Saturday. International community as well as some ministers have expressed fear that the number of arms declared is a 'gross understatement' and it will bring Maoist sincerity in the peace process under doubts.

Koirala's insistence in the cabinet committee contradicts what the Maoist chief Prachanda said in Butwal on Sunday. Interacting with local media people and intellectuals, Prachanda said that he was pretty sure about Maoists being included in the interim cabinet by next week. Koirala has assured the representatives of the international community including ambassadors of India, U S, U K and some other European countries that Maoists

would be included in the interim Government only after the arms are 'managed.'

Koirala however, agreed to release a sum of 55 million Rupees for over 30,000 Maoist cadres who are in the cantonment at present. Each one of them will be paid Rs 60 per day as food allowance while necessary construction, sanitation, installation of drinking water facilities and construction of approach roads will also start immediately. A member of the committee told Newsfront that around 2,000 tents have already arrived and they will be supplied to the cantonment areas.

"The sum of Rs 55 million should be sufficient for a month as we hope that all the non-combatants and child soldiers would be identified and asked to leave the camps very soon," official sources said. The Government has already given Rs 350 million to the Maoists, but the Government has not received any details about how it was spent.

The cabinet committee also decided to extend the services of 111 ex-Gurkhas of Indian army who are presently supervising the camps by additional 45 days when their three months contract expires next week. When their extended tenure gets over, the ex-Gurkhas will be replaced by the team of UN observers. By next week, CCTV and alarm devices will be fitted in the camps.

The committee also decided to ask Maoist to be reasonable in making demands like telephone facilities with STD connection in every cantonment and sub-cantonment. ■

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Dinbandhu Pokharel



Who killed my father?

Pundit Dinbandhu Pokharel demands an investigative commission to find out the truth behind the mysterious death of his father, Bachanshiromani Pundit Narayan Prasad Pokharel. The young Dinbandhu said, "This government is not serious about forming the commission."

During his life time his father collected Rupees 2400 million for building hospitals, schools, temples, roads and the like. The late Bachanshiromani who stood against social discrimination and untouchability was widely popular all over the country. Pundit Dinbandhu added, "My father spent all his life for the welfare of the society. If the government neglects this issue, the people will surely investigate the case independently."

Two years ago, the senior Pundit was killed mysteriously. The Maoist sister organization, Dalit National Liberation Front (DNLF) had taken the responsibility for the murder of the Pundit, but Maoist Central leadership has maintained a silence through out.

The incident took place when king Gyanendra was in power but the Government took no cognisance of the incident. The palace, apparently under the influence of the fundamentalist Hindus, chose to ignore the killing of a liberal preacher. Pokharel junior's demand publicly for a probe 'on behalf of millions of admirers of Pundit Pokharel' follows indifference on the part of the Government. Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala and UML secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal who met the Pokharel family soon after the killing had promised that the case would be investigated soon after the establishment of Democracy. "A year has passed and the promise made appears to have been forgotten", said Dinbandhu Pokharel.

Pundit Dinbandhu is now following the path his father created. He began reciting the Puran for different social purposes since last year and has performed dozens of 'Yagya' and collected Rupees 24 million for social work.

■ Chhattra Karki

Upendra Yadav



No let up in Terai imbroglio

MJF adamant about pre-conditions it has set

The Madheshi Janadhikar forum (MJF) has declined to join the negotiation with the Government saying the pre-condition it had set for the dialogue has not yet been met. MJF Chief Upendra Yadav conveyed forum's firm stance to Mahantha Thakur, Minister of Agriculture and the convener of the Government negotiation team.

Yadav conveyed that it would be a great injustice to the people of Terai if the forum joins negotiation without Home Minister K P Sitaula resigning for the 'killing' of 38 people by the state. He also insisted that the Government needs to first constitute a judicial commission into the use of violence by the State.

MJF, an umbrella body of different organisations which are agitating for more political representation and autonomy for the region, told the Government any amendment to the interim constitution without taking into account what the Terai groups are demanding would be meaningless. "This would mean putting a cart before the horse," the forum conveyed.

The Government however seems all set to move ahead with its decision to amend the interim constitution for which the motion has already been tabled in parliament. At the same time it will also be holding dialogue with other Terai and ethnic groups including the Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha led by Jwala Singh and the National Federation of Indigenous People's Nationalities (NFIN). The NFIN and MJF who clashed with the Maoists in Chitwan, Bhairahawa and Nepalgunj on Saturday have also insisted that the Government should not be dictated by the Maoists while dealing with demands for regional autonomy and devolution of power.

■ Newsfront correspondent

A growing elephant needs on an average, 15 kilograms of paddy, one and a half kilogram of sugar cane, 25 grams salt and one and a half quintal of grass.

Notorious for rhino poaching, the Chitwan National park seems pretty serious to redeem its pro-conservation image if the success of elephant breeding center is any indication. The center located at Bardeni area has registered a fifty per cent increase in the number of elephants compared to last year. This has also drawn increased number of tourists and locals to the center, as verified by the stream of an average two hundred people coming in there daily.

"At least 11 elephants were born in the center and they are doing fine," the office assistant Rajesh Kumar Tamang told newsfront. With this the number of elephants has gone up to 23. Altogether 16 baby elephants were born in the past five years in the center that was established in 1986.

The mortality rate was a bit high until 2004, the period when eight elephants were still-born. "We are taking adequate care regarding food and other needs of the elephants," Tamang said. A growing elephant needs on an average, 15 kilograms of paddy, one and a half kilogram of sugar cane, 25 grams salt and one and a half quintal of grass. Each elephant in the center has three Mahuts to look after it.

■ Nabin Aryal in Chitwan



Free from Jaundice

Prime Minister G P Koirala, under attack from hepatitis E, is free from jaundice now. "He is as best as he can be," Dr Madhu Ghimire, personnel physician of the 84-year old Prime Minister told newsfront.

Koirala, along with his nine cabinet Ministers and his Foreign Affairs Advisor, Dr. Suresh Chalise was infected with jaundice and he was declared free from it last week. Hospital sources indicate that Jaundice had almost taken an epidemic form in Kathmandu and part of Lalitpur area during the period.

The jaundice invasion in Baluwatar coincided with the accumulation of garbage in the capital and decision of the 'Khane Pani Sansthan' (Drinking water Cooperation) to sever water supply to the P M residence. The act was to protest against the Government decision to allow a Britain based private company to handle the water supply system in the capital. ■



Bhaswar Ojha

Vindictive discretion

AIG Singh is the lone official denied the 2-year extension

Vendetta and abuse of discretion were out on full display last week when the Government refused to extend the tenure of Rajendra Bahadur Singh, an additional Inspector General of Police following his completion of 30 years in service.

Singh is the lone official denied the 2-year extension, something automatically granted to every police official in the past 11 years. About half a dozen officials up to the rank of DIG were however, given the extension last week.

"Home Minister K P Sitaula made it a prestige issue, and the Prime Minister relented," a senior cabinet minister told newsfront. Singh who retired from the service as a result of his not getting the extension said he is going to move the

Supreme court against this 'injustice'.

One of the first decisions that Sitaula as Home Minister took was to suspend Singh stating that his remaining in the 'post' could obstruct probe by the Rayamajhi Commission into the use of excessive force and fund by the state to suppress 'Jana-andolan'.

Singh who headed the Operation Department of the police during the Jana-andolan was denied any facilities attached to his position even after his suspension was revoked. Sitaula, on the other hand, promoted his cousin, Basudev Oli, as head of the Armed Police Force (APF) although he, like Singh, headed the Operation Department of the APF during the Jana-andolan.

■ Newsfront correspondent

Ministers at loggerheads

Narendra Nembwang, the straightforward Minister for Law and Justice came forward to bell the cat. He publicly stated that Home Minister K P Sitaula should resign to pave the way for solution to the Terai problem.

Nembwang who belongs to the Nepali Congress (Democratic) Party is the only minister to demand ouster of the all-powerful Home Minister who despite apologizing for loss of life and property in Terai, has refused to quit.

The Law Minister's statement came soon after Sitaula was quoted by a television channel of having gone to Indian Embassy to solicit

'India's support' to uproot feudalism, by extension monarchy. Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) has set Sitaula's resignation and formation of a probe commission into killing of more than 30 people during the Terai movement as conditions for its coming to a dialogue with the Government.

In fact, the latest controversial act on the part of the Home Minister has also irked senior Congress leaders like Vice President Sushil Koirala who met Prime Minister G P Koirala on Saturday to take the 'minister to task for his behavior not confirming with the position he holds'.

■ Newsfront correspondent

Over my dead body

After lying low and demoralized for months, Nepal Army seems to have begun asserting on issues directly under its domain. The latest was its refusal to allow the 'Shainik Manch' in Tundikhel to be used on the day of the Maoists' rally on Feb 13 despite a request from the Home Minister.

Sources say that the Chief of Army Staff, Rukmangat Katwal not only said no, but also met Prime Minister G P Koirala and told him, "it could happen only over my dead body". Maoists wanted the Manch for its meeting, the first one to be addressed by its Chief Prachanda. Koirala is believed to have endorsed the Army Chief's request.

The Army was not only opposed to the space being used by the Maoists "since no political party has used it for any political programme," but also had its personnel positioned to thwart any move by the Maoists to forcibly occupy it.

In yet another army versus Maoists instance, Maoist guerrillas were chased away by the Army personnel when some party activists tried to enter the Bardia National Park "We stand by the Government, but we refuse to be bullied by any force that does not comply with the norms and spirit of the law," a senior army officer said.

■ Newsfront correspondent



Bhaswar Ojha

Chief of Army Staff, Rukmangat Katwal refused to allow the 'Shainik Manch' to be used for Maoist rally



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Unjustified arrogance

End of impunity is the Mantra that democracy can afford to ignore only at a heavy cost. It is what everyone from the civil society, donors, NGOs, Government, Human Right groups et al have been chanting in Nepal for more than a decade now. Impunity is clearly something that Democracy that preaches rule of law and its enforcement in a transparently judicious manner cannot condone.

The Rayamajhi Commission that the Government headed by G P Koirala formed, ostensibly to fix responsibility for excessive use of Government resources and muscles to curb the movement for Democracy, sadly appears more as a tool of vendetta in the hands of the Government than for digging the truth in a credible manner.

The fact that the Government has been deliberately ignoring to handover a copy of the Rayamajhi commission for nearly three months now despite repeated requests from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights only indicates it has more to conceal. The formation as well as the conduct of the Commission was blatantly political. The way it picked up its targets, indicted 202 people - all pro-king politicians and those from security agencies, smacks of a pattern. As circumstantial evidence would indicate, the Government dictated their choice.

How thorough was the investigation, why the 202 were held guilty and how the other 94 interrogated were given a clean chit remains a mystery. Were all the people 'indicted' by the commission given a chance to defend themselves? The Commission was a silent spectator when some of the alleged suppressors of the Movement who the commission was investigating, were given promotions and others punished.

At no stage did the commission try to explain what the right use of force was. Nor has it tried to find out if the mob during the movement was responsible in any way for provoking the security forces to act. The UNOHCHR preliminary report released a few months ago was far more objective on the issue.

By not giving a copy of the report to the UN Commission, the Government is only displaying its arrogance. It is under obligation to give the report to the Commission

in the light of the bilateral agreement in Geneva last year. Rayamajhi Commission cannot be an exception to the generally accepted norms of probe, conduct and method. OHCHR's views on it would be crucial given the probe commission's vindictive approach and findings. It will be a breach of the agreement on the part of the Koirala Government not to handover a copy of the report to the UN body.



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Letters

What is secularism?

Dear Editor,

The new government will indeed have a huge task of convincing Nepali citizens what secularism means to them as it is undoubtedly the most accessible weapon used by anti-social elements. Will secularism just be about pleasing muscle flexing groups or will it be concerned with the economic betterment of all people and not of any one class, caste, creed or community?

I wish to see a state that is not anti-so and so religion/ person practicing so and so religion and a government that treats all faith and religion equally (Flexing secular muscles?, # 4). But for the government to be able to do so, it has to have a firm stance on whether it considers the King or the institution of monarchy unimportant.

The reason why the Pashupati incident and the clamor about security and the daylong Bandh and using Shivaratri as an opportunity to create problems took place was because the government and Nepali *janata* are still not decided on what they want. Until then, all the VHPs, BJPs, Bajrang Dals and the pro-King elements in the world will continue to flex their muscles in Nepal.

Bhavna Adhikari
Kathmandu

Interesting spiritual item

I enjoy the spiritual corner carrying on your editorial page every week. This age people don't have time to contemplate and analyse about the activities in the world, they just be a part of day to day affairs as a robot as if they don't have a powerful mind and passionate heart to be a part of the philosophical world.

Being philosophical is being content and it is a way of fearless and meaningful journey towards life. I hope

Newsfront will continue carrying such philosophical item.

Binod Pathak
Kathmandu

Work for peace

I think Newsfront is a great achievement of Samay team. Nepal is moving towards peace and it should contribute to long lasting peace in nation as a powerful media.

Ramesh Dulal
Kathmandu

Improve conduct

'Intimidation Vs Democracy' (# 4) has shown the reality of Nepali politics. Maoists still haven't been able to change their ways. It ought to be obvious to the leaders that intimidation, aggression will not be accepted by the public anymore. If the Maoists do not improve their attitude and change the way they have been conducting themselves, it would prove harmful for their future and their chances in the government.

Pankaj Sharma
Kathmandu

Right to live in safe world

City of filth (# 4) was a serious piece revealing poorest state of state. In the capital city, people have to overlook the filth for almost a month being vulnerable of thousands of diseases. I think as a habitant of world, we have all the rights to live in a safe and clean environment.

Upasana Oli
Kathmandu

Letters to the Editor should be addressed to:
newsfront@bhrikuti.com

Spiritual Corner

The path of love

Then there was the man we picked up from the drain, half eaten by worms and, after we had brought him to the home, he only said, "I have lived like an animal in the street, but I am going to die as an angel, loved and cared for." Then, after we had removed all the worms from his body, all he said, with a big smile, was: "Sister, I am going home to God" - and he died. It was so wonderful to see the greatness of that man who could speak like that without blaming anybody, without comparing anything. Like an angel - this is

the greatness of people who are spiritually rich even when they are materially poor.

We are not social workers. We may be doing social work in the eyes of some people, but we must be contemplatives in the heart of the world. For we must bring that presence of God into your family, for the family that prays together, stays together. There is so much hatred, so much misery, and we with our prayer, with our sacrifice, are beginning at home. Love begins at home, and it is not how much we do, but how much love we put into what we do.

I had the most extraordinary experience of love of neighbor with a Hindu family. A gentleman came to our house and said: "Mother Teresa, there is a family who have not eaten for so long. Do something." So I took some rice and went there immediately. And I saw the children - their eyes shining with hunger. I don't know if



you have ever seen hunger. But I have seen it very often. And the mother of the family took the rice I gave her and went out. When she came back, I asked her: "Where did you go? What did you do?" And she gave me a very simple answer: "They are hungry also." What struck me was that she knew - and who are they? A Muslim family - and she knew. I didn't bring any more rice that evening because I wanted them, Hindus and Muslims, to enjoy the joy of sharing.

There were those children, radiating joy, sharing the joy and peace with their mother because she had the love to give until it hurts. And you see this is where love begins - at home in the family.

(Extract from Mother Teresa's Speech at the National Prayer Breakfast Washington, DC, February 5, 1994)



Niraj Sapkota

Maoist on a clean Kathmandu drive

Managing garbage problem



■ Dr Hari Bansha Dulal

A nation can be prosperous only when it is healthy. Thus, our success lies in turning this solid waste crisis into an opportunity

The menace of solid waste in Kathmandu Valley has become a monstrous reality. Although ordinary citizens want this issue to be brought to the front burner, the blame game continues. The poor institutional capacity and lack of political will to address this problem has forced valley residents to live with garbage that is damaging to their health and is aesthetically repelling.

Solid waste management has remained one of the most neglected areas of urban management and a major environmental health hazard in Nepal. Even though waste quantities are increasing at an alarming rate due to rapid increase in population, nothing substantial has been done to tackle this problem.

Undermining the health and well-being of its people in a poor country like Nepal would be a great mistake. Unsanitary conditions will result in increased morbidity and mortality due to infections as also loss in foreign currency due to fall in tourism. The poor and the elderly will be the ones who will be affected the most. The last thing Nepal would want is to have its health care system bogged down by an astronomical rise in the number of patients that cannot afford to get treated. With health care system in shambles and productive workforce diseased, Nepal's road to prosperity would appear bleaker than ever.

In Nepal, solid waste management is more of a political issue than a technical one. Since politicians in Nepal do not like addressing issues of public interest unless there is a public threat, the issue of solid waste management will not be addressed properly until there is persistent pressure from the residents. Due to lack of active and strong public interest, it has not moved up in the list of priorities of the political leaders.

The most effective method to deal with this problem in a country where terms such as 'accountability' and 'moral responsibility' hold very little meaning, is through privatization of solid waste management. According to Lowell

Patterson, chairman of the solid-waste management committee of the American Public Works Association, "solid-waste management is a vital public responsibility, but ownership and operation of solid-waste facilities is not. Through privatization, public officials are often trying to achieve effective and efficient use of scarce resources. Privatization decisions do not eliminate services. Rather, they create alternative ways of providing those services."

Countries such as Malaysia and Egypt have benefited tremendously from privatization of solid waste services. Since Malaysia and Egypt adopted the privatization system, garbage collection standards and customer satisfaction have been raised. Nepalese politicians should get over the idea that solid waste services are a basic function of local government. Evidence has been seen in developed countries such as the United States, for example, that the percentage of landfill facilities owned by the public sector declined from 83 percent in 1984 to 73 percent in 1997 and to 64 percent by 1998. The percentage of municipalities considering privatization as an option to fulfill their disposal needs in the United States is increasing day-by-day.

In Nepal, where programmes that incorporate socialist views are appreciated and ones that reflect capitalist bearing are politicized for the wrong reasons and subsequently vehemently opposed, the idea of privatization of solid waste management may not be liked for political reasons. But politicians should exhibit guts to raise above populist politics and decide what is best for the citizens.

With the ongoing rapid growth in population, local governments will face increasing regulatory costs in owning and operating landfills. Furthermore, finding politically acceptable locations for new facilities to replace old ones will be a huge challenge. To manage liabilities, improve efficiency, cut costs, and improve accountability, it is extremely important to privatize solid-waste services.

Private companies will do a better job of managing waste simply because, like any other business in the private sector, the company that gets the contract for solid waste services has to ensure that it can compete in the market by providing satisfactory services to customers without going over the budget. Private companies achieve operational efficiency and quality of service by cutting down the bureaucratic hurdles.

Privatization of solid waste management helps reduce the potential of liability. It ensures that the private owners and operators of landfills have adequate funds available to meet the costs of closure, post-closure care, and corrective action for environmental violations associated with landfill facilities. This is extremely important to ensure the health and well-being of the current generation and generations to come.

Privatization of solid waste management in cities of Nepal is the only remedy to get rid of this menace, which is a ticking time bomb. A nation can be prosperous only when it is healthy. Thus, our success lies in turning this solid waste crisis into an opportunity.

If the government is totally averse to the idea of privatizing complete solid waste services – from solid waste pickup to disposal in landfills – it can provide some relief to the citizens by allowing private companies at least to operate at landfill sites. This saves the government from becoming occupied in the cumbersome, often lengthy processes. The government can then rely on private landfills that simply charge for their use. As the private sector makes the initial investment, the government does not have to raise capital for landfill construction. Furthermore, as private landfill sites are built increasingly larger to cut down on per-unit disposal costs, it will actually be cost-effective for local governments to bear the transport costs of hauling waste, even if the private landfills are located in remote areas.

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

Match words with action

Violations by the Maoists' side are far more glaring



One each to seven

The weapons and combatant ratio in the seven camps and 21 sub-camps as registered with the U N is one each to seven. This was disclosed by Ian Martin, special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General, during a press conference on Friday, just before he left for New York. Martin is due to return on March 8 as his team is scheduled to start the process of verifying arms and combatants.

According to the information gathered by the team, the number of arms registered is just two pieces less than the total number of arms that the Maoists looted from the security forces during the years of conflict.

The total 3428 arms registered include 2,403 rifles, 212 shotguns, 114 side arms, 91 mortars including 55 of local make, machine guns and automatic weapons 61 pieces each. The guerrillas have kept 524 weapons for the purpose of providing security to designated camps. The UN team is collecting details of the arms in the rebels possession for the security of their 37 central level leaders.

In order to facilitate Maoists entry into the interim cabinet, the U N team is expected to begin the verification as well as installation of monitoring and alarm devices in the camps. Desertion by more than 3,000 guerrillas complaining of inadequate living conditions from Chitwan's Shaktikhor camp that Martin described as breach of the code of conduct, is believed have come as a pressure to have the monitoring devices installed fast. □



Lena Sundh demanded that both the Government and Maoists address the ongoing serious abuses of Human rights



Newsfront correspondent



The Maoists are silent on the whereabouts of 126 people, mostly political party members, teachers, security forces personnel and alleged informants, who were abducted by them during the period of conflict

It was a usual busy week for the UN agencies, mainly the ones involved in peace process related activities; but it was visibly hectic for the two UN outfits—the OHCHR headed by Lena Sundh and UNIMIN headed by Ian Martin. Just an hour before he left for New York, the UN headquarters, to brief secretary General Ban-Ki-Moon, Martin made public the details of 'arms and combatants' as registered. The completion of registration is an important step in a long and not so easy process but a much bigger challenge, verification of arms and combatants, begins now.

According to Martin, altogether 3428 pieces of arms and weapons and 30852 combatants have been registered from seven main camps and 21 sub-camps. The number of weapons almost exactly tallies with what Maoists captured from security agencies during the past eleven years of conflict, but whether they are exactly the same is something which will be verified in due course. Martin's tough job now is to ascertain who out of 30852 are not the 'People's Liberation Army'. "The PLA weapon ratio does not qualify most of them to be recognised as guerrillas, since the numbers of the two have to match," a senior official of the Armed Police force told newsfront.

Lena Sundh gave a gist of the improvement in the Human Rights situation during the past eight months after the return of Democracy, but her sense of frustration and resultant fear about

the Government and Maoists commitment, or lack of it towards Human rights was palpable. Releasing the report that covers the period of up to January 2007, Sundh expressed happiness over the cessation of hostilities, end of conflict related violations and restoration of the right to assembly and expression. She demanded that both the Government and Maoists address the ongoing serious abuses of Human rights.

"...OHCHR has been disappointed at the continued lack of response to a number of reports and letters to the government and Maoists, and by the failure to implement many recommendations for ending abuses and strengthening human rights protection," the report said. OHCHR has an obligation to monitor Human Rights provisions under the November 21 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). This also means that both parties, the Government and the Maoists, need to collaborate with the office providing information and implementing recommendations.

The list of frustration begins here. The two sides have not yet formed a code of conduct monitoring committee which leaves the OHCHR with no one to assist on this vital issue. Extortion drives, abductions, torture and killing declined vastly after the ceasefire but continue to threaten the peace process. Prachanda's call from Tundikhel recently almost justifying the extortion terror has only encouraged his cadres to accelerate the drive. "It's sad that no one is putting pressure on the two sides to form the



Maoist Army

Pic. by Bhaswar Ojha

code of conduct monitoring committee," a UN official said. Neither the Government nor the Maoists seem interested in the issue and both have not paid heed to the grievances the UN Body has listed.

Topping the list are two cases: the death of Maina Sunwar, a 15-year old girl who died in custody of the then Nepal Army hours within her arrest in Kavre district. The report blames the Army of trying to cover up the violation.

Violations by the Maoists' side are far more glaring. The Maoists are silent on the whereabouts of 126 people, mostly political party members, teachers, security forces personnel and alleged informants, who were abducted by them during the period of conflict. The OHCHR has noted with special concern the casual approach of the Maoists to the investigation on the attack on a public bus in Chitwan's Madi town that killed 35 civilians. The Maoists' response that those responsible were given 'corrective punishment', an imprisonment between two to three months was not considered adequate. The UN body insists for a probe by the state agencies asking the Maoists to cooperate in the process.

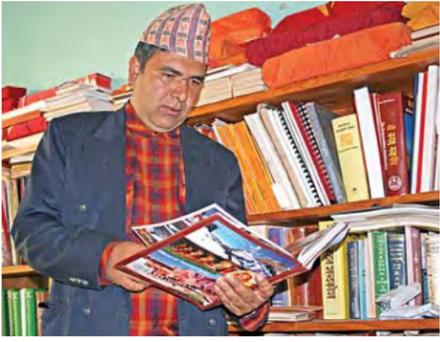
The whole gamut of human rights situations have come under the sharp focus of the UN team. Sundh's office dispatched its team from

Pokhara to Bhairahawa on Friday following clashes between the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) and the Maoists. With its intervention, 41 MJF activists who Maoists had illegally detained were released, Marty Logan, spokesperson of the OHCHR said. Sundh has visited many disturbed parts in the Terai during the recent spate of violence that left 30 dead in its wake.

The stepped up UN activities no doubt will be crucial in making both the Maoists and the Government sides realise their obligations in adhering to the commitment made through CPA and the code of conduct. There is a clear warning that words need to match action, if end of impunity and Human rights establishment are what the Government and the Maoists are really concerned about. ■

According to Ian Martin, altogether 3428 pieces of arms and weapons and 30852 combatants have been registered from seven main camps and 21 sub-camps





It has been a remarkable journey for Punya Prasad Parajuli, 41, born in Bhojpur district, eastern Nepal. He recalled, "I had this sense of belonging in the Himalayas ever since I remember. I longed to live up there rearing sheep but fate had it otherwise."

Following the call



PH: BY NINJA SHUKLA

■ Sushma Amatya

He wished to live a life of a recluse up in the mountains but ended up becoming an expert in Tibetan language and a practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism. It has been a remarkable journey for Punya Prasad Parajuli, 41, born in Bhojpur district, eastern Nepal. He recalled, "I had this sense of belonging in the Himalayas ever since I remember. I longed to live up there rearing sheep but fate had it otherwise." When he saw the Buddhist Thankas while exploring Kathmandu as a student of science, he felt

instantly connected with it and realised that Buddhism was what he had been searching for all along. "I could read the Tibetan script, Om Mani Padme Hum, without having learned it but did not know its meaning then."

After completing Intermediate in Sciences, he taught in a school in Rasuwa district for seven months hoping to meet a Lama who could teach him Tibetan. The urge to learn Tibetan and to meet Tibetan people was overriding. He came back to Kathmandu when his hope was not realised. He said, "All the while, I suffered from this sense of dislocation, of knowing I belonged elsewhere doing something else." His first encounter with a Lama took place in Nagi Gomba when he strayed from the Vipasyana center where he was learning meditation.

"The Tamang Lama was kind enough to heed my request and informed me the basics of Buddhism. Some time later I met Ugyen Tulku Rinpoche in the White monastery and later had the opportunity to study under Chokyi Nima Rinpoche."

He did a course in Tibetan language in Vishwa Bhasha Kendra and polished it up with help of different Lamas and was able in a year to translate Tibetan into Nepali, and could speak fluently in three years. "I was teaching science in a school in Lamatar then and had only my weekends to pursue what interested me the most. I also owe a lot to the scholar from Mustang who helped me during a month long retreat in 1990." With help from various quarters, he quenched his thirst to be well versed in Tibetan language. "My progress was further accelerated when my Guru Shridhar Shumsher Rana entrusted me with the job of

His search to read Kangyu, the Tibetan version of Buddha's teachings led him to the library in National Archives. The department under Ministry of culture and tourism was looking for an expert and he joined the archive formally as a Tibetan specialist four years ago. Since then, he has categorised around 3500 hand written books with descriptive analogues. In the past fourteen years, he has translated 20 books and authored one on basic Buddhism specific to Himalayan region, 'Indra Dhanushi Rang Haru'.

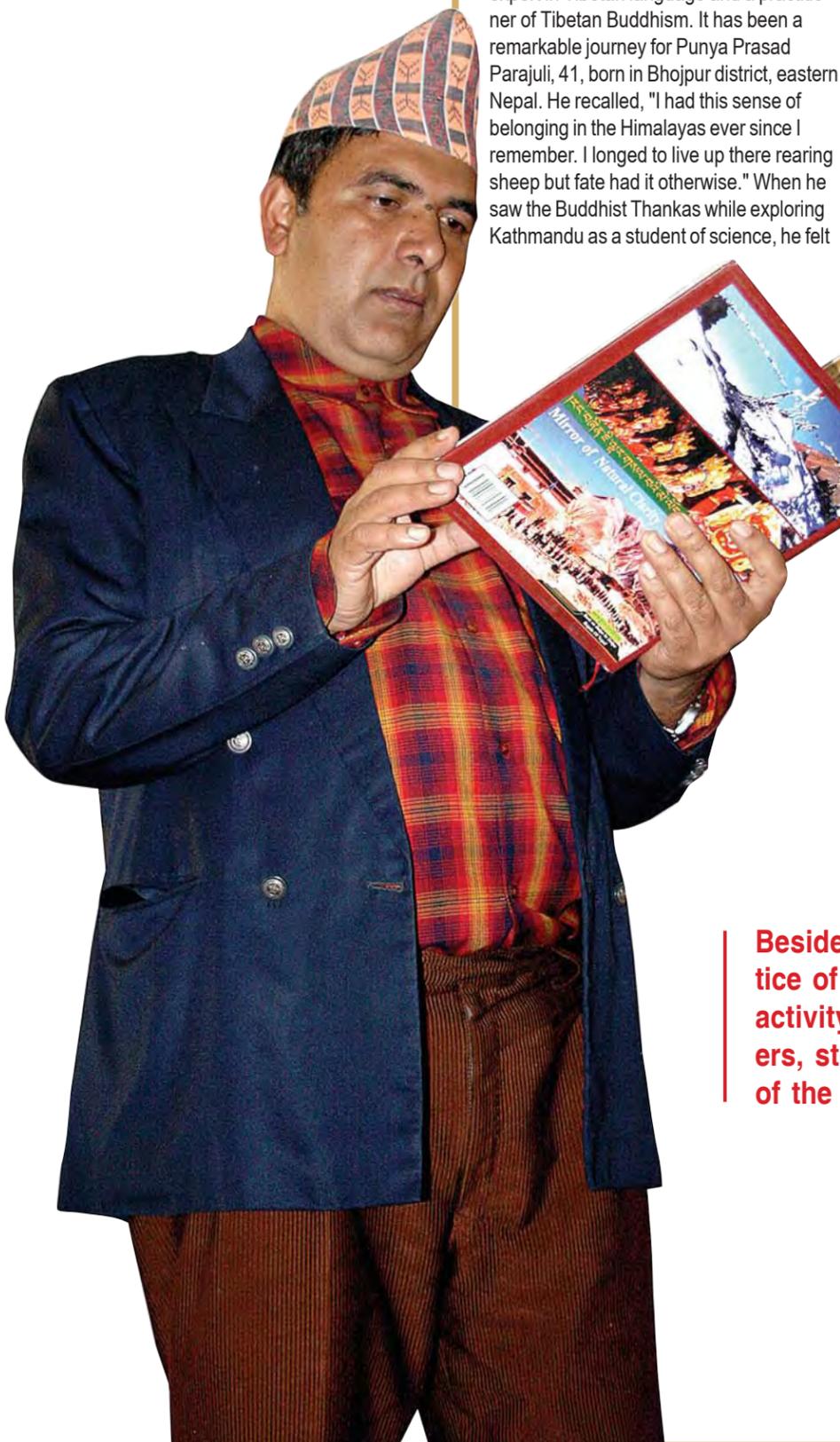
The National Archives has the largest collection of Tibetan books in Asia, an apt place for someone who loves the language. "There are around 8000 books, xylographs according to an informal estimate. It is a treasure house of history of Tamangs, Sherpas and other indigenous groups of Himali areas and of rituals in Gombas." The one-man management team in Tibetan context sees many possibilities in preservation and translation of the ancient manuscripts.

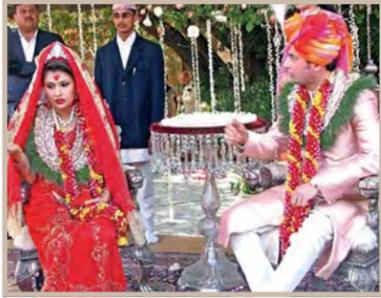
He earned his Masters degree in Buddhist philosophy from Magadh University, Bodhgaya and taught Buddhist philosophy for five years in Tribhuvan University. Punya admitted that he faced obstacles while competing due to lack of formal educational background in Tibetan despite his expertise in the language. In recognition of his skill, Karma Thinley Rinpoche gave him the title of Lochawa; an honour usually conferred on Tibetans who gain proficiency in Sanskrit. Punya was invited to teach an intensive course of nine weeks in Tibetan by Antioch University in Ohio, US last year and will be going again sometime this year.

Besides his regular meditation practice of 4 hours daily, he focuses on activity meditation like helping others, stepping in to arrange for rituals of the dead and other Poojas. This has been his way of life for the past 15 years. "Through these activities I developed close connections with Lamas from Nyingma, Shakya and Kagyu traditions." He plans to devote more time to meditation in future. Punya is content with his identity and admits with a grin that though his income is less than when he worked as a science teacher and it leads to difficulties sometimes, he is happy where he is today. Advancing steadily in spiritual path, his serene countenance shows absolutely no regrets. ■

Besides his regular meditation practice of 4 hours daily, he focuses on activity meditation like helping others, stepping in to arrange for rituals of the dead and other Poojas

translating meditation texts from Tibetan into Nepali before he went into his six years, six months long retreat. He would ask me for a new text almost every third day and at the end of it, I found myself capable of translating twelve meditation texts in a month." He provided his Guru with translations of texts and instructions from Tibetan Gurus continually for seven years. Self taught in Sanskrit as well, Punya is well versed in one more ancient language.





Pic by Gopal Kharel

Wedding bells for Devyani

The woman who found herself at the centre of Nepal's royal massacre in 2001 has wed in India in a ceremony attended by thousands of guests. Devyani Rana married businessman Aishwarya Singh, the grandson of Indian Human Resources Minister Arjun Singh.

It was widely reported in Nepal that Crown Prince Dipendra shot eight members of his family because he had been forbidden from marrying Ms Rana. Dipendra met her in 1989, and was said to have been immediately "smitten". But the union was fiercely opposed by his parents, King Birendra and

Queen Aishwarya.

It was a grand celebration with 5,000 dignitaries from India and all over the world attending.

"Such a huge number of the great and the good do not congregate that often, and it's the most memorable event of my life," said Nepali youth leader Udaya Shumsher Rana, who is a relative of the bride.

The two day ceremony - which culminated on Friday - was held at Singhiya House in Delhi.

It was a mixture of Indian and Nepali traditions, with a group of Nepali priests attending.

'Psychological toll'

In June 2001 a drunken Crown

Prince Dipendra killed his parents and seven other royals before killing himself. Ms Rana was not there at the time, but relatives say she was fortunate to have escaped with her life as she was a regular visitor to the palace.

"Devyani was no less a victim than the people who were actually killed. She was lucky to escape alive, but the psychological toll it took on her was very deep," her uncle told the BBC in 2002.

She fled Nepal immediately after the massacre and now works for the United Nations Development Programme in Delhi. Recently she had been seriously ill with meningitis. ■

(BBC News)



Maoists meet after 36 yrs

■ Shafi Rehman

NEW DELHI : Giving the Union Home Ministry a rude jolt, the banned Maoists, who fight a low-intensity war with the Indian state along the "Red Corridor" down a swathe of central India from the border with Nepal in the north to Karnataka in the south, have concluded their ninth party congress somewhere in the "liberated zones" along the Jharkhand-Bihar border with a call to extend support for secessionist struggles ranging from Kashmir to Manipur.

The month-long Unity Congress, held after a period of 36 years since the eighth congress in 1970 and the first to be held after merger of the Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCC) with the People's War Group in 2004, was attended by 100 delegates from 16 states, including activists of the fraternal Maoist parties from Nepal, Philippines and Bangladesh. It concluded on February 3.

While vowing to fight the SEZs coming up in different parts of the country, the CPI (Maoist) Congress also supported the demand for pardon of Afzal Guru, convicted in the Parliament attack case, as well as for formation of separate states of Telangana and Vidarbha. The Unity Congress also exhorted its cadre to use every possible means to free its detained activists, even if meant organising jailbreaks.

"We should support 'just struggles' of nationalities and sub-nationalities that demand a separate state for their development. Kashmiris and various nationalities of the North-

East, such as the Assamese, Nagas, Manipuris and Tripuris, have been long waging an armed struggle against the Indian Government for their right to self-determination, including the right to secede from the so-called Union of India," Muppala Lakshman Rao alias Ganapathi, who was re-elected general secretary, told the delegates.

Focusing on the Kashmir problem, he said: "The conflict between the Indian forces and Kashmiris has generated fresh mass resentment in the wake of the Centre's designs to hang Afzal Guru. The Kashmiri people, along with the enlightened democratic sections all over India, have raised the just demand to desist from hanging the innocent Afzal Guru."

The congress decided to form organisations such as 'Committee to Release Prisoners', comprising intellectuals, democracy-lovers and members of the families of imprisoned comrades. "Efforts are already underway," the general secretary said.

According to the Credential Committee report of the Unity Congress, top six activists in Andhra Pradesh and 26 in Tamil Nadu are detained under POTA, while 16 in Karnataka and about 25 in north Chhattisgarh have been languishing in jails. Upbeat about its "success" in organising Dalit protests and demonstrations against SEZs, the Congress also resolved to further strengthen people's army, and deepen the mass base of the party.

(The Indian Express)



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Ethnic time bomb

The ethnic issue has the potential to lead to the disintegration of the nation-state



■ Siddhartha Thapa

Various ethnic groups across Nepal have renewed their calls for further protests. The latest turmoil in Terai is a direct consequence of the murky politics envisioned by the Maoists that provided the base for their revolution – inciting minority groups based on the theory of “self determination”. Ethnicity has and remains a big issue in Nepali politics. While political pundits belonging to various political systems have ignored the sentiments of the ethnic minorities, the Maoists on the other hand have merely exploited the niche as a catalyst to storm into power.

Continued negligence of minority rights is the nucleus of political crisis in Nepal. If politicians continue to ignore the rights of minority groups, the ethnic issue has the potential to lead to the disintegration of the nation-

state. So far, the problem of ethnicity has been only morally acknowledged and the government procedures to tackle the ethnic problem remain short on substantive ideology at policy levels.

The rip in the existing social fabric is a result of Maoist's policies. To begin with, the Maoists espoused the policy of ‘self determination’ that promised autonomy for minority groups. As a result, the overwhelming majority of Maoist combatants hail from ethnic minorities. But here lies the paradox – the ethnic combatants who fought for the Maoists for equality along social, cultural, political and economic lines, expect to achieve through the medium of democratic dispensation which eventually will prove contradictory to radical communism, the Maoists' school of thought.

Unfortunately, even after the conclusion of the April revolution, the Maoists have failed to deviate from the path of violence and they remain wed to their cause of establishing one party communist republic thereby



A press conference to inform about the schedule of protests

defying the norms of multi-party democracy.

In hindsight, the political parties' commitment towards ensuring and institutionalising an inclusive political structure remains questionable, mainly due to the construct of their existing internal social structure. The ethnic representatives are in average, old and have gone ‘soft’. The passion and determination to impact changes is inactive. Majority of the ethnic leaders that belong to the major political parties have for long strayed away from their home constituencies and are thus, out of touch with rural and ethnic shortcomings.

Another crux of the problem is overwhelming ‘Brahminisation’ of the leadership and the domination by the Hindu males. The leaders also fear that revamping the social structure within the party could eventually lead to the waning of their influence.

What is also foreboding is the fact that the prelude to the election to Constituent Assembly elections might be marred with violence. Possibilities

are also high that the elections might be fought along ethnic, geographical and religious lines, contradicting principles of secularism. If the problem of ethnic minorities remains unsolved prior to the elections, the eventual outcome will be a disgruntled mass, no matter which party wins.

It is a foregone conclusion that the Maoists' will keep their true intentions hidden prior to attaining an electoral victory. Ironically, they will fight the elections promoting equality for minorities and promising autonomies. But their election promises contravene the principles of Maoist communism.

The Maoists' aspirations for equality would not be met if the minorities fear that they are losing their cultural and social identity. The minorities, in such a situation would revolt to protect their religious rights, right to private property and human rights. These very issues could form the basis for a new revolution. The gravity of the problem could mean that the country would have to

witness a cycle of anarchy and face threats of possible disintegration of the nation, prior to the convulsion of a mass based revolution against the Maoists. If the Maoists are true to their cause and achieve an electoral victory; it is doubtful that radical theorists within their rank and file can resist pursuing their radical ideologies.

On the other hand, if the political parties win, namely the Nepali Congress, the current domination of the male elites will continue. But Brahminisation in itself is not the real problem. The fulcrum of the problem is the reluctance of political leaders to diversify, the fear being that diversification could lead to the decentralization and demise of their political careers. The current lethargy towards inclusiveness heralds a scenario of further unrest. Thus the differences between the political parties and the Maoists aiming to impact changes are critical; which if not handled with foresight and sensitivity could result in utter chaos. ■

Nepali Diaspora



■ Neeraj Pradhan

I currently live tucked away in the southwestern corner of the United States, wedged between the dry Mohave and the azure Pacific with Mexico just a half hour's drive away. San Diego, with its geographical landscape, is almost a classical musical composition presented in variations and themes. The city is a pastiche of mountains, beaches, greenery, and arid expanse; the physical possibilities here are only rivaled by the creativeness of one's imagination. Its physical power seethes from the moment you encounter the cool air drifting inland from the coast or the views from atop Mount Soledad, one of the city's highest peaks.

San Diego is indeed one of America's natural gems, and I'd heard about this picturesque enclave before coming here. But just like so many of the physical wonders of America that people had told me about before (like the four corners of the southwest, the hills of Montana, or the sounds of the Pacific northwest) my imagination failed to do justice to this American landscape.

As a son of immigrants, by the age of

American Landscape

I was presented with more of the peculiarities and intricacies that the landscape had to offer

eighteen, I'd come to think of myself as a well-seasoned globetrotter. As one who'd toured through innumerable airports, visited countless cities, and encountered a panoply of variegated cultures, at a young age my overseas travels had disillusioned me to a small degree. Every trip across borders had brought excitement of the unknown, and I felt that there was just no way that there could be close to that fun and excitement in my national backyard.

Alas, this naive snootiness plagued my youth. I scoffed at my friends who'd rave about trips that they'd taken to Napa's wine country or the lakes of Michigan. "That's all old hat!" I'd mutter to myself, "who needs fifty little states for entertainment when there's a whole world out there? In fact, what can these fifty states offer me?" All this changed when I left my bubble in Washington D.C. to explore New York.

New York changed my opinion because it had so much to offer, from a mélange of culture, music, and art to architectural accomplishments, the likes of which I'd never encountered even during my travels abroad. I was confronted with man-made brilliance (embodied in so many of the buildings and structures throughout the city) woven together with natural harmony (embodied in the city's parks and gardens).

The Brooklyn Bridge was a favorite spot of mine—especially at night—to go for walks with friends. From the midpoint of the structure, one could see near nearly all five boroughs, the statue of Liberty, and hordes of city-dwellers walking, biking, and driving around in Manhattan. At night, especially during the earlier hours, the lights in lower Manhattan would begin to activate in succession, and the darkness engulfing the city would get etched away by various luminosities and colors. Of course, the visual crescendo was always complemented with the humdrum of obscure languages, pattering footsteps, and subway noise emanating from Manhattan and Brooklyn.

Sprinkled between my four years in New York were two summer sabbaticals I spent in America's heartland. More specifically, I spent two summers in Texas and Louisiana. My stays in these areas provided many first experiences: I boated on a bayou, experienced the pangs of a hurricane, and stared down at a fifteen-foot crocodile.

I suppose it was the pure strength of the weather that most amazed me about the South. I'd surely gotten accustomed to the frigid northern winters after one year in New York. In Louisiana, I was forced to reckon with new

elements, a new form of nature and environment, the likes of which I'd never encountered before. Upon arriving in Baton Rouge especially, I remember being smacked by the heaviness of the moisture. The atmosphere seemed weighed down, and it took me a few days to get acclimatized. After the initial stickiness and sweatiness wore off, I was presented with yet more of the peculiarities and intricacies that the landscape had to offer.

Over the recent Thanksgiving break, I went to visit some family in Los Angeles, which in relation to San Diego is a rather brisk hour drive to the north. On the way back, I was driving right next to the coastal highway—with the Pacific just to my right—without a cloud in the sky and the sun unshielded in the sky. Thinking back of the experiences that I have had on the Potomac, Hudson, Mississippi, and Pacific, I can now safely say just how much of a difference in opinion a few years can make and how I have only just started to explore and understand the intricacies and diversity of this country.

(Neeraj is a student and currently lives in southern California.)

Cancer invading the Dolpa spirit



His eyes sunken and his familiar long hair and beard almost gone, he tires easily

■ **Jyoti Devkota**

The memory of his days of glamour and adventure stands fresh in his mind. "I vividly remember the five-day trek from my village Saldang in Rolpa to Jumla's Raralihi, crossing vast tracks of snowy area along the route. There were days when I would wander energetically from one village to another with herds of yaks carrying salt to be bartered with corn." Thinley Lhundup Lama, 66, the man from Dolpa who shot to stardom with the popular feature film, Caravan, said, "Yes, I acted in the film and it cheers me up even to recall those days." The protagonist of the Oscar nominated film has also worked tirelessly for snow leopard conservation in upper Dolpa.

Living in the past appears to take

away the pain Thinley has been suffering in the present. Today, his days are spent battling harsh realities of disease, pain and penury. He was diagnosed with abdominal cancer during a check up in the Mumbai based Tata Memorial cancer hospital. Since he could not afford the expensive treatment, Thinley is back and is bed-ridden at his daughter's house at Bouddha. He said that the doctors advised an operation that he could not afford and added that all his savings were spent during his trip to Mumbai and "now every single day is a struggle to survive".

His eyes sunken and his familiar long hair and beard almost gone, he tires easily. He expressed his sadness at his inability to pay a visit to the Bouddha monastery, the symbol of his faith and reverence.

In the past his yearly trips down to Kathmandu to escape the cold in Dolpa used to attract the media and his daughter's house was often filled with visitors. But his last trip to Kathmandu, and then to Mumbai around three months ago went almost unnoticed. Thinley used to be a camera friendly person with a ready smile but this time he did not want to have his photo taken. With a deep sigh, he said, "I would have gladly allowed you to take my photograph but I am in a bad shape now."

Thinley's hopes were revived when the well known director of Caravan, Eric Valli called him saying that he would be arranging for his treatment in France, "but that might take two months," said Thinley who's fighting the tough battle with cancer where every single day counts. ■

Revelation

Mind, no dumping ground



■ **Sushma Amatya**

Any form of media carries with it a sense of responsibility and misuse of any medium for destructive purposes smacks of disregard for its intended use. Arrival of mobile phones has definitely made communication faster and easier despite its lackluster performance in this country. However, misuses of such tools for destructive purposes have also been growing alongside. An example is SMS messages sent by mobile phones designed to spread wrong info as in the recent case of chain SMS that tempted its receivers with free Rupees 50 if forwarded to ten more people. The supposed sender, NTC, denied any connection with the practical joke.

A commonly heard complaint now from the law keepers is that drug dealers and others involved in various rackets now have an easy networking to warn each other and get away far more easily from hands of law. Mobile phones certainly seem to have affected mobility patterns of criminals.

During the last phase of Janandolan, a SMS asking

accountability could prove to be as damaging to a naive reader. Self-expression need not always benefit others. Often, spilling one's beans or venting out one's ire or opinion with negative under or overtones does damage others' minds in unpredicted ways.

Right to information we certainly must have and the vacuum that is created when the right is

We are good at borrowing technology but we need to get better at developing regulatory mechanisms for the imported tools and contain it within a frame of law.



Fatty tissues retain drugs

Ragina Shah's counseling on impact of drug and addiction

What are the main causes behind any addiction?

Subi Thapa, Bhaisepati

Lack of awareness is the main reason. False information such as alcohol not being a drug, that drugs get rid of pain, that marijuana is not harmful and other myths attracts a person into this vicious circle. A user never reflects upon consequences of using drugs. The fact is that any drug is very harmful and it takes a heavy toll on physical, mental and emotional health. Another main factor leading to addiction is curiosity of the young people that encourages them to try out risky things; and getting lured by other addicts with false promises.

In our society where most children are not really encouraged to become independent, pressures from the elders at school and home become the reason why some children look for alternatives ways to make up for their perceived inadequacies. Children unable to handle stressful family environment, painful sensations and emotions tend to turn to drugs for instant gratification. I cannot stress enough the importance of keeping oneself in good company. Friends with bad habits can easily lead one the wrong way no matter one's determination.

Another factor that leads young people to drugs is availability of easy money. Blinded by love for their children, some parents tend to give more than is needed and thus makes it easy for their children to gain access to drugs of all kinds. Thus, it is really important

for schools and parents to make everyone aware of the drugs and its harmful effects.

How does a person feel 'high' even after quitting drugs?

Yukti Basnet, Battispatali

Drugs remain in the fatty tissues in our body where the toxic matter is stored for a long time. When fatty tissues break up after exercise or physical work, the drugs get released into the blood stream. This results in a person feeling 'high' even after having given up using drugs.

An ex-addict also feels high when stimulated by certain factors in the environment, such as sorrow and happiness. Different emotions give rise to flashbacks and the 'highs' are a re-stimulated.

On a positive note, a recovering student of mine, Rajeev, once said to me with a radiant face that completing a cycle of action without drugs gives him the greatest satisfaction and it was better than any 'high' he had experienced before.

Happiness derived from keeping oneself disciplined, of having tried one's best given one's capability and having achieved something is the best 'high' one can feel. Drug induced 'high' can only end in misery for the user and everybody around him.

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



everybody to join in the campaign of surrounding the palace made its' rounds. Provocative SMSs such as those would serve to incite minds even without ideological leanings. Most receivers, especially the young caught by such a message would be tempted, perhaps out of mere curiosity, to just be a part of any campaign, thereby rendering any such SMS provoked gathering not entirely a genuine one.

The Internet that is easily accessible by anyone anywhere is a huge cauldron of many kinds of information and knowledge. Adult sites of no added value appears to hold much fascination for young people and the impact of such exposure to impressionable minds is yet to be investigated in our culture. There are no regulatory mechanisms to protect children's minds from this onslaught of disparaging visuals and words.

Similarly, Blog sites are a great a way of displaying what is on your mind but its content that hold no

suppressed was experienced by all during the Musharraf styled ban on mobile phones and the Internet by king Gyanendra during his takeover in February 2005.

The right needs to be tempered by an awareness of what is good for us and how not to get manipulated by the onslaught of any medium, be it television, radio, mobile phones, the Internet, cinemas or the print material. The public needs to be aware of how not to be exploited by those using media for their own benefit.

We are good at borrowing technology but we need to get better at developing regulatory mechanisms for the imported tools and contain it within a frame of law. This is essential to protect the tools of media from being misused and to prevent minds of vulnerable minds--young generation included--from being contaminated by messages sent through junk visuals and literature that rightfully belongs in garbage cans.

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Dying to be divas

Between hourly updates on the decomposing body of Anna Nicole Smith and the balding of Britney Spears, we can confidently declare that the Jerry Springerization of America is complete.

The travails of these two tragic characters would be of little interest in a normal world, but "celebrity" is the new normal. Like it or not, we're all in this together.

Britney and Anna Nicole, after all, are our inventions. We made them celebrities, awarded them icon status, gave them life. Now, like Dr. Frankenstein upon realizing he's created a monster, we've become instruments of their undoing.

Anyone who has turned on a TV the past few days has been witness to the spectacle in Fort Lauderdale, where hearings have been in progress to decide what to do with Anna Nicole's body.

In death as in life, it's all about the body. Who gets it?

I confess that it took a few minutes watching the probate proceedings to realize that it wasn't a spoof or a soap opera. The posturing and pontificating of Judge Larry Seidlin, clearly enjoying his 15 minutes of fame, makes Lance Ito, of O.J. Simpson trial fame, look like Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Also at issue is the paternity of Anna Nicole's 5-month-old baby girl, Danielynn. The subtext to the entire mess is, of course, money -- the other defining concern of the former Playboy model's short unhappy life.

Anna Nicole spent most of her public life trying to get millions from the estate of her deceased oil-tycoon husband, J. Howard Marshall, who died in 1995 at age 90. Now that same money is up for possible grabs among her survivors.

Wednesday, titillation merged with the macabre as mortals clamored over the bombshell's remains like the ravenous widows in Zorba the Greek. The weird got weirder when the disembodied voice of the Broward County medical examiner was piped into the courtroom via speakerphone to issue a decomposition status report.

Better hurry up with that funeral, he said. Things are deteriorating fast around here. No kidding. And then everyone took a lunch break to visit Anna Nicole at the morgue.

While you're mulling that image, we switch channels to the other coast, where Britney has shaved her head and checked in and out of rehab.

Theories vary as to why Britney clipped her hair. The most recent is that she was reacting to estranged husband Kevin Federline's alleged threat to have her hair tested for drugs in a custody battle over their two children. If Federline indeed wants one of those strands, he'll have to take a number and bid on the sheared tresses, now for sale by the owner of the salon where the shearing took place.

At "Buy Britneys (sic) Hair Dot Com," bids start at \$1 million.

"This is the Ultimate Britney Spears Experience!" boasts the site.

At the same time we might recoil from these prurient displays, we're also involuntarily mesmerized. The human wrecks of Britney and Anna Nicole transcend the usual roadkill metaphor, however, because we're participants -- not just spectators, but also instigators.

We are the mirrors to their vanities.

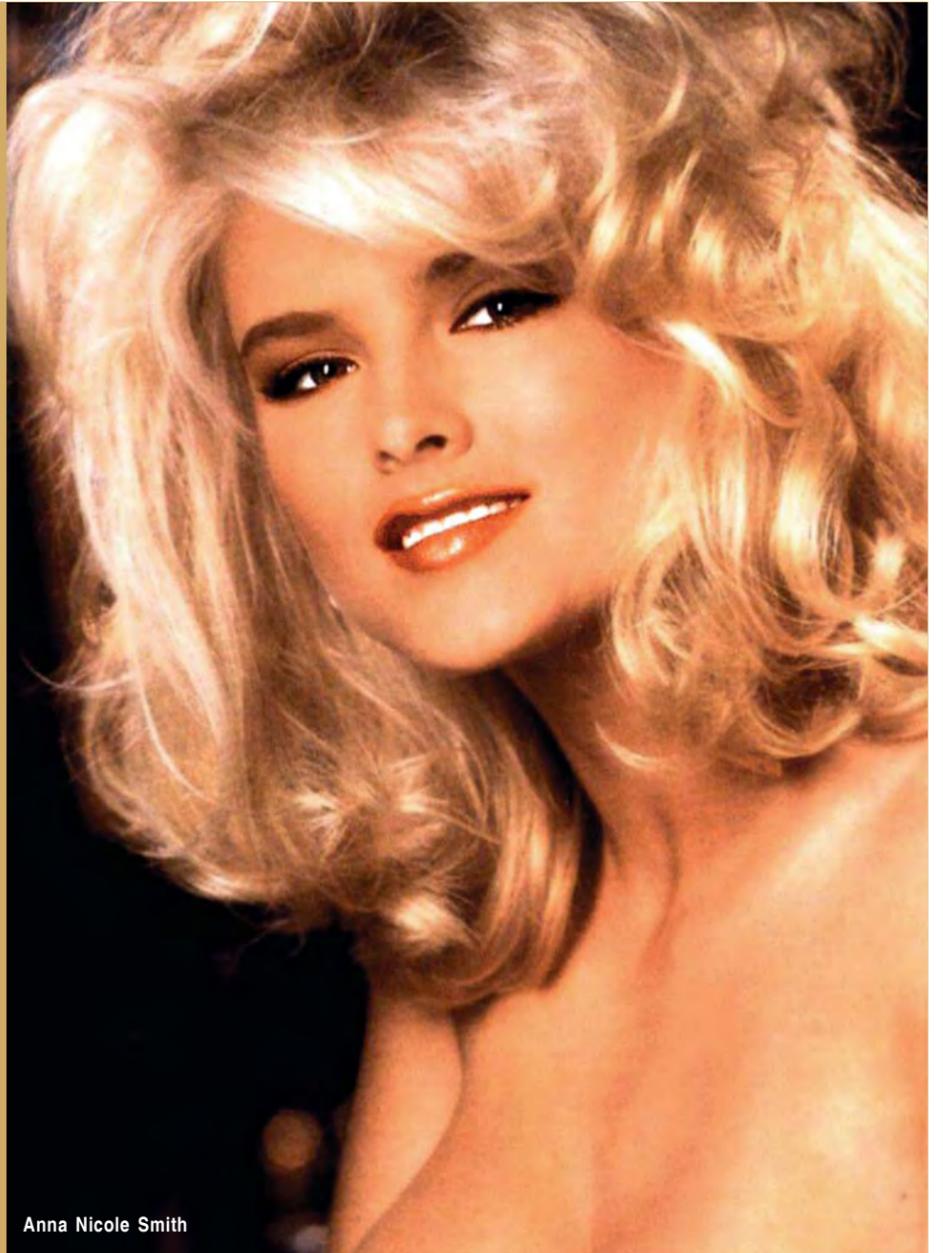
For former child stars like Britney, who didn't get to develop a normal sense of self, identity comes from what is projected by the audience. What happens when the projection stops, or when it shifts from admiring to critical?

If you're Britney, apparently, you take out the shears and turn the rage on yourself.

Anna Nicole, who was without talent except the ability to attract our attention, existed only as an object. She posed; we ogled. But what happens when no one's looking? If you're Anna Nicole, apparently, you take more drugs and make a spectacle of yourself as a slurring, stumbling bimbo with her own reality TV show.

The parallel sagas of these two sad divas -- one dead and one self-destructing -- have the feel of reality TV that has spiraled out of control. Too much exposure. Too much celebrity. Too much attention -- if never enough. The desperation that drove them both to extremes, and then to the brink, may have been born of the truth that reveals itself to all celebrities eventually: What the public giveth, the public also taketh away.

(Orlando Sentinel)



Anna Nicole Smith

Britney and Anna Nicole, after all, are our inventions. We made them celebrities, awarded them icon status, gave them life.



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