



Courage & Conviction

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UN faces hostile Maoists



Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai visited PM on Thursday.

Verification of arms and combatants stalled.

■ nf correspondent

Maoist Chief Prachanda has objected to the way the United Nations special office headed by Ian Martin had been carrying on the verification process in Maoist cantonments. His advice to Prime Minister Koirala was to stop the verification and go for the integration of the Maoist combatants in the Nepal Army straightaway.

Prachanda, accompanied by his comrade in arms Baburam Bhattarai, conveyed his message to the PM on Thursday at his Baluwatar residence. He said what the UN was aiming at was demobilisation and disarmament of the combatants, which was, "not acceptable to us." His alternative suggestion was to go for security sector reform right away, ignoring the United Nations if necessary.

Responding to Koirala's query, Prachanda tried to clarify that the first step was the integration of the Maoist combatants in the Nepal Army, something Koirala felt was not practical. Prachanda's tough stance with Koirala on Thursday was echoed by another senior Maoist leader, Prabhakar, on Saturday when he

accused the United Nations of conspiring to disintegrate the People's Liberation Army, something not at all acceptable to the Maoists.

The stand off has posed the biggest ever threat to the UN process as the verification now remains stalled for more than two weeks. Prachanda's assertion for giving up the verification process follows the Maoist Chief's statement in Switzerland that the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) need not wait for their reintegration through the usual process of demobilisation and disarmament.

Prachanda's meeting with Koirala had followed his detailed discussions with UNMIN Chief, Ian Martin, who the Maoist sources say, was overruled by the Maoist chief when Martin insisted that both sides of the conflict should honour the mandate they gave in writing to UN.

After registration of the arms and combatants, verification was the next logical step. The Maoists seemed to be irked by UNMIN's disqualification of hundreds of cantonment inmates, which triggered fears that the fate of other combatants in other camps and sub-camps would also not be very different.

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Hostility directed from Indian soil

Do not encourage Nepali secessionists, PM tells India

■ nf correspondent

Prime Minister G P Koirala has lodged a feeble, on camera, complaint about Indian territory being used by some of the Nepali 'terrorist' groups. He lodged this protest when Shyam Sharan, former Foreign Secretary, made an unscheduled visit to Kathmandu and called on Koirala last week.

According to the sources, Koirala gave detailed information about the activities of the Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (JTMM) leaders which was aimed at disintegrating Nepal. Sharan was categorical in his assurance that India would not allow its territory to be used against Nepal. He also went a step forward to pledge all assistance at its disposal to ensure that elections to the Constituent Assembly takes place on November 22 as decided by the government of Nepal.

Although Indian Embassy played down the significance of Sharan's visit, Koirala shared a bit of what transpired during his meeting with Sharan when he met Maoist leader Prachanda and UML General Secretary Madhav Nepal.

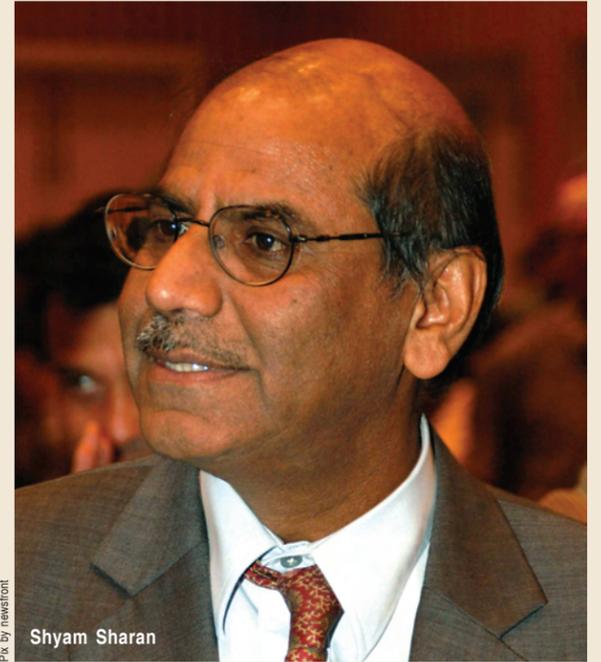
Koirala is believed to have got copies of Tehelka.com, a weekly tabloid published from Delhi as evidence about the presence of JTMM leaders in Indian territory and their directing activities against Nepal. JTMM-Goit leader Jaikishan Goit, in his interview to Tehelka had said that Terai was a separate country, independent of Nepal and India.

Earlier, Koirala is also believed to have raised the issue of various Terai groups having met in Patna in presence of some Indian officials in which a plan to have Terai as a separate country was discussed.

"I am sure the issue or the fate of monarchy might have been discussed as well, but your guess is as good as mine," a cabinet minister who was not willing to be identified told newsfront.

Sharan was the architect of the 12-point agreement in Delhi that brought the Maoists and the seven party alliance together in favour of 'peace, democracy and prosperity.' Sources said Shyam Sharan pledged that India would act sternly against such activities of the Terai groups, but asked the PM not to delay settling what the people from Terai are demanding. And his emphasis was not to postpone elections at any cost. The ultimatum issued to two Terai groups by Home Minister K P Sitaula, a man trusted by India despite his poor performance, is being linked with the assurance Shyam Sharan gave to Koirala that India had no love lost for Goit or Jwala Singh.

Sharan was last here accompanying Dr Karan Singh, a special envoy of Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh, in an effort to bring about conciliation between the king and the seven political parties when the people's movement was at its peak. Indian proposal that the parties accept the king's offer of the political parties forming their government was however turned



Shyam Sharan

down by the seven political parties, saying nothing short of revival of the parliament and the people as the sole source of sovereignty would satisfy them. The movement was called off after the king conceded to these demands through a second proclamation.

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Newsbrief

Moriarty's departure

All throughout his tenure, he spoke on behalf of the United States government. But he slightly deviated from that practice the day he left Nepal after completing his 3-year tenure as US Ambassador to Nepal. In personal capacity, James F Moriarty suggested that King Gyanendra should take up some dramatic steps to save the institution of monarchy, even though it might have been already late.



He did not suggest who King Gyanendra should be abdicating in favour of. But that was a clear endorsement of what G P Koirala had stated a few months ago; first in Biratnagar, then in Delhi and later in Kathmandu when speaking with Pakistani journalists. But Koirala was in favour of Prince Hridayendra, King Gyanendra's grandson, ascending the throne.

Moriarty however said that the official position on behalf of the US President and the US government was unchanged; and that it is for the people of Nepal to decide whether they want monarchy or a republican set-up. His position on the Maoists remained totally unchanged. He maintained that they were terrorists and only their conduct should be taken as proof their changed behavior. Moriarty is likely to be taking up his new assignment in Bangladesh as its ambassador.

Sitaula's new deadline

Home Minister K P Sitaula is known for making promises and not fulfilling it. His repeated promises in and outside the parliament to improve the law and order situation, and his inability to show any result is just one example.



But that did not deter him from

renewing the pledge. On July 14, he served an ultimatum through media representatives in parliament to extremist Terai groups that said, 'come to the negotiating table within two weeks, or face the fury of the State.' Sitaula said the government would dispatch security forces to deal with the extremists if they did not heed his appeal. He named Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha, Goit and Jwala Singh groups as the ones facing State's wrath if they did not come forward for the dialogue.

He however, did not clarify if the government was contemplating dispatching Nepal Army or the Armed Police Force in Terai. His warning comes almost two weeks after Prime Minister G P Koirala had asked Chief of the Army Staff, Gen Rukmangad Katawal, to keep the army on standby to meet any eventuality in Terai.

Minister in charge of Peace and Reconstruction, Ram Chandra Poudel who has been assigned to talk to the Terai groups has not been able to take the dialogue to a positive direction so far.

P M approaches Ramraja

Prime Minister G P Koirala has approached veteran Terai leader, Ramraja Prasad Singh to work for peace in Terai. Prime Minister's nephew and political aide, Dr Shekhar Koirala, met Singh at his residence in Baneshwar on Thursday with a message that he should work for peace and settlement in Terai.



Singh has come into prominence after both Maoists and non-Maoist groups approached him separately to lead them. While Madheshi Janadhikar Forum and various factions of the Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha approached him in Patna few months ago to be the first president of an 'Independent

Madhesh'; Maoists were keen to have him in the cabinet as their minister. Singh however, turned down both offers stating he was opposed to Nepal's disintegration and both groups should publicly affirm to 'nation's integrity.'

Maoist minister's simplicity

Matrika Yadav has proved time and again that he is a minister with a difference. The latest proof came when he traveled to Bangkok for medical treatment with his wife. Although entitled to travel business class at government expense, Yadav insisted that he would travel only in economy class. Requests from Thai Airlines and his officials were in vain.



What Yadav did was in contrast to the luxury his leaders, Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai, availed of during their recent travels to Norway and Switzerland. According to a Maoist source, Yadav who continues to live a simple life had protested against the Mercedes Benz car being given to him as a minister. But he used that in absence of an alternative arrangement by the government.

India's new ambassador?

Rakesh Sood is likely to be tipped as India's new ambassador to Nepal. Currently posted in Kabul, Sood is expected to replace Shiv Shankar Mukherjee by next month, according to information available from Delhi. Ambassador Mukherjee who is due to retire in January visited Delhi earlier this week apparently to have his next posting finalised.

Redeeming honour

A senior judicial officer protests and quits

Jaya Prakash Man Singh Maskey, a special class judicial officer, created a history by resigning as member secretary of the Administrative Court, after a junior official superseded him as its chief.

Maskey who still had more than four years to go in the service put in his papers a month ago after the Koirala government appointed Kashiraj Dahal as chief of the court. "I did what my conscience asked me to do," Maskey said in his brief response to newsfront query.

Official sources said Maskey shot out a letter as soon as Dahal's appointment came through on June 15. "I cannot work under someone who has been my junior all through," he wrote to the law minister and forwarded a copy to the PM last month. He also requested that his

resignation should come into effect the day Dahal who was earlier a registrar in the Supreme Court joined the office.



A law ministry official said the decision to supersede Maskey was not some thing that originated from the ministry. That was a decision imposed from the top, he said, making it clear that it was the PM himself who was responsible for this.

This brings to an end a career which began as a section officer in the ministry some 28 years ago. In his impressive career graph, Maskey served as joint secretary in the judicial council for five years, last two years as its active secretary. Dahal had worked under him there, and earlier in the ministry as well.

Direct to Colombo

Nepal and Sri Lanka are close to finalising some deals to promote tourism in both countries. The move comes in the wake of assessments from both sides that pilgrim tourism has a lot of potential to link the world with Buddhist heritage here. Besides reviewing the existing Air Service Agreement (ASA), the government of Nepal is also likely to permit Sri Lankan entrepreneurs to set up big hotels in Lumbini and other places of their choice.

According to the information available, Air Sri Lanka might start a direct flight to Nepal beginning October 8, the first ever direct air link between the mountains and the island nation. The importance of tourism sector promotion for mutual benefits is visible now as there is a possibility of the president himself making an official trip to Nepal in the inaugural flight.

An estimated 30,000 to 40,000 Sri Lankan tourists visit Nepal every year with only little above two percent traveling by air. Most of those tourists are pilgrim tourists who visit Lumbini along with other sites associated with Buddhist religion in India.

D P Bhattarai, Nepal's ambassador to Sri Lanka is in Kathmandu, to formalise the ASA review and facilitate the visit of the president.

China all over

nf correspondent

China, Nepal's northern neighbour, is not only trying to be visible politically and diplomatically in Nepal, but has also stepped up its interests in business and tourism sector here.

The government, in order to encourage more Chinese tourists and entrepreneurs from China, is making preparations to review the Air Service Agreement with China and do away with the 367 per week



seat limit for air passengers. Once this revision is formalised, additional air services between China and Nepal will be a reality in near future, official sources said.

China which had declared Nepal as one of the nine most preferred tourist destinations about three years ago, however, had not shown the kind of interest it is showing now. Chinese entrepreneurs have

taken under their management the Thamel based Manang Hotel besides hiring two floors in Ganjong Hotel in Lazimpat.

"We believe they have signed at least four other contracts," an official in the tourism department said. Some Chinese entrepreneurs have also shown interest in starting hotels in Lumbini and other sites outside the capital, sources said.

'UMLising' tourism board

Selection board chief quits in protest

Prakash Shrestha, head of the three-member jury to select new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) has resigned in protest against a minister's interference in the process.

Shrestha resigned in the midst of the selection process after Tourism Minister, Prithvi Subba Gurung insisted that Juddha Gurung, a UML leader, should be appointed as the new CEO. Juddha Gurung, a conservation expert, had contested elections to the parliament unsuccessfully on UML ticket and now remains a full time politician. There

are five candidates in the race including the acting CEO, Subhash Niraula.

According to NTB sources, Shrestha was keen to let a fair trial proceed so that one of the three candidates including Gurung could be selected on merit without any political interference. But he quit after the minister wanted a commitment from Shrestha that his nominee would ultimately be selected. The post of CEO has been lying vacant for some months now after Tek Bahadur Dangi's tenure ended last year.



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Point to Ponder

In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act. - George Orwell

Costly indifference

The country is confronted with the gravest ever crisis with a couple of violent outfits demanding separate states carved out of Nepal. These demands, clearly favouring secessionism, are something 25 million people are opposed to. And the fact that they are being raised by individuals either from the Indian soil, or purely as propaganda without any backing from the people shows a lack of seriousness. But this is something the government of the day can ignore only at a heavy cost. Total absence of governance, collapse of the law and order situation and authority of the State, highly centralised power structure and political apathy towards all these issues will take a heavy toll on the integration of the country.

The end of more than a decade-long armed conflict was a welcome event in Nepal's politics but it also came with certain danger signals. If the present and future governments are not effective and responsive enough towards genuine issues of rights, representations and inclusiveness in power structures, no one can stop the use of violence in politics from increasing in days to come; when people will take up arms at a slightest provocation or without any provocation.

The demand for separate Madhesh by a couple of Terai groups or their leaders and the mushrooming growth of armed outfits, already around a dozen now, shows that the government is not at all effective, and is very unclear about how it wants to go about empowering people from all regions. The government also needs to take urgent steps towards building a national consensus about defeating such fissiparous and secessionist tendencies. Absence of such an initiative will also trigger an ugly political competition in which every group, individual or party, visible or invisible, may embark on radical demands advocating disintegration of the country.

A large share of the blame for the present day situation should also go to the Maoists for what they demanded as rebels yesterday. They demanded autonomous provinces based on ethnicity with the right to self-determination which in principle meant supporting secession. It is time that they make their position clear about it since most of the clandestine groups; now demanding separate Madhesh have been associated with the Maoists, and took up that doctrine as the source of legitimacy for Nepal's disintegration.

With Maoists already a major partner in the government, it is the responsibility of Prime Minister G P Koirala to assure the nation that all the partners in the government are opposed to dismembering the country, the least that should be expected of any government. The PM should also call an urgent meeting of the 13 parties in parliament and if necessary those from outside the parliament also, to forge a national consensus that they are one on Nepal's sovereignty and integrity and that these issues are not negotiable at any cost. This would get a much wider mandate and endorsement of the government act in dealing with such forces in any manner necessary.



Letters

Spiritual corner

Thanks to newsfront team which has given a new experience of English weekly newspaper in the country since the past six months. It always has raised different political, social and cultural issues and presented them in quality language and presentation.

The regular column 'Spiritual corner' is effective though small in size. I read the column regularly. Keep it up!

Bikas Dahal

Shankardev Campus, Kathmandu

Dual standards

Newsfront did a wonderful job exposing Prime Minister G P Koirala's dual role in the Rashtra Bank Governor case. On one hand, Koirala seems to have given a green signal to try Governor Bhattarai on the basis of the Krishna Jung Rayamajhi Commission report. But on the other, he saved him from going to the jail (or police custody in Singha Durbar) as mentioned in the report. Which one is your real face, Mr. Prime Minister? You can not fool the country and its citizens all the time by maintaining these dual standards.

Amod Kumar

Trichandra campus, Kathmandu

Rayamajhi commission

The G P Koirala government has almost been following the King's style, in a more sophisticated form, in persecution of political rivals. I want to commend newsfront for highlighting this, especially the manner in which Rayamajhi Commission was used for the purpose.

Justice Rayamajhi did not allow fair and detailed investigation of the people allegedly involved in suppressing the people's movement. In fact, as all the members of the commission belonged to one or the other political party, each of them had a brief from their 'political boss' about whom to frame. At least one member of the commission, who had a pro-Congress background, kept telling Justice Rayamajhi on



many occasions that the people summoned by the commission should at least be given a fair chance to respond. Justice Raymajhi always said 'we must do it', but he always seemed to be in hurry to finalise the report, cutting short the vitally necessary procedure that any commission of inquiry must follow.

In some cases, civil and police officials who were not summoned by the commission, were implicated clearly on the basis of recommendation of each member of the commission, as per the briefing they got from their political masters. The report is a hoax.

But I am quite surprised why different party leaders without even trying to ascertain how sincerely and honestly the Raymajhi commission functioned, are

demanding the report should be made public and implemented.

If at all G P Koirala government is sincere, he should form another committee, like the one he did on the Royal commission on corruption, to investigate if the Rayamajhi commission indulged in corruption, political deal and abuse of the responsibility entrusted by the state.

Ganesh Thapa
Gongabu, Kathmandu

India knows

This refers to Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (Goit) Chief Jaikrishna Goit demanding a separate nation carved out of Nepal's territory. The story suggests that Goit gave the interview to Tehelka magazine from India.

India always insists, and rightly so, that Nepali territory should not be used against India. Has the government of Nepal taken up the issue with Indian authorities about Indian territory being used for such a dangerous conspiracy against Nepal? Goit's story, the one on Ramraja Prasad Singh in the same issue of newsfront, makes it obvious that disintegrate Nepal campaign is taking place in India in the knowledge of Indian authorities.

Anuj Khanal
Sitapaila, Kathmandu

Spiritual Corner

Become divine

Swami Sivananda, one of the greatest Yoga masters of the 20th century, is the inspiration behind the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centers. Born in 1887 in Pattamadai, Tamil Nadu, South India, Swami Sivananda whose name was then Kuppuswami, was a brilliant boy naturally inclined toward spiritual and religious practices.

His parents were very devoted to Lord Siva and Kuppuswami was eager to join them twice daily for worship. His natural selfless spirit led him to a career in the medical field. His amazing eagerness and ability to learn and

assimilate his studies earned him respect of his professors who invited him to attend surgeries while still in his first year of medical school. Swami Sivananda became one of the most prolific Yoga teachers. Although he rarely left the little town of Rishikesh, his teachings spread far and wide. He wrote by hand more than 200 books on Yoga and philosophy. His teachings are summarised in these 6 words: "Serve, Love, Give, Purify, Meditate, Realise."

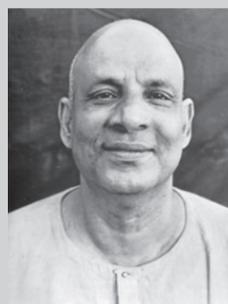
Sivananda's poems:

Universal Prayer

O adorable Lord of mercy and love,
Salutations and prostrations unto thee.

Thou art omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient;
Thou art Satchidananda, truth, knowledge and bliss;
Thou art the indweller of all beings.

Grant us an understanding heart,
Equal vision, balanced mind,



Faith, devotion and wisdom.
Grant us inner spiritual strength
To resist temptations and to control the mind.
Free us from egoism, lust, greed and hatred,
Fill our hearts with divine virtues.

Let us behold thee in all these names and forms,
Let us serve thee in all these names and forms,
Let us ever remember thee,
Let us ever sing thy glories,
Let thy name be ever on our lips,
Let us abide in thee for ever and ever.



Bhaswar Ojha

Utility of military force

the resurgence of the old insurgency is still a possibility.

The new paradigm of war is based upon the concepts of continuous criss-crossing between confrontation and conflict. Today the opponents are mostly non-state

Threats to national security are diverse, complex, intense and lethal. Of these threats, internal conflict, 'the war within' impacts the most on the integrity and unity of a nation. Internal threats are represented by an explosive combination of political, social, economic, psychological elements combined with violence. Threats to core national values and interests of a state justify and legitimise the use of military force, an essential component to any geopolitical entity. However, the ability to act and react in a timely and effective manner hinges as much on credibility of the leadership group in power, as it does on the general state of operational readiness.

In the modern era, the responsibility of formulating the national security policy and its implementation is upheld completely by the civilian authority guided through its elected representatives. Strong democratic civilian control must identify itself with two dimensions: institutionalised oversight of all military activities without politicisation and promotion of professionalism. The prime reason for civilian control of the military is to retain the de jure authority to maintain control over the de facto power afforded by weaponry and military competence. Military power in its deterrent and employment dimensions is a significant security asset. Military power is a relationship comprising of means – men and material, methods and the will that sustain them in adversity.

The new paradigm of war is based upon the concepts of continuous criss-crossing between confrontation and conflict. Today the opponents are mostly non-state actors. We are engaging in conflicts for objectives that do not lead to the resolution of the matter directly by force of arms. Therefore, wars are societal in their make, asymmetrical in nature and permanent in their durability.

Militaries prefer mandates that permit a more decisive use of adequate force and resent ambiguous missions and restrictive conditions. The civilian hierarchy prefers to create a

conceptual space for diplomacy, economic incentives and political pressures to enforce a desired political outcome. The Nepalese people mandated the Seven Party Alliance to impel the Maoists to strictly extirpate the use of violence, join the political mainstream and provide good governance to facilitate the conduct of constituent assembly elections.

The division over ethnicity, community, class, caste, gender, religion and languages are indelible. Inequity in representation and opportunities indicate acute lack of inclusiveness. The aspirations created by a much hyped federal system of governance have opened a Pandora's Box, which if not handled properly, may incite sub-nationalism.

The proliferation of small arms and explosives due to the Maoist insurgency and the open border, the proximity of numerous insurgencies in the adjoining Indian states, the establishment of the precedent that the use of violence delivers recognition and a short cut to power, as well as the presence of additional vindictive armed splinter groups have debilitated the rule of law. The propensity of the human rights activists to 'regret' rather than to 'condemn' the intentional Maoist atrocities elucidate their indirect support, be it due to fear of retaliation or an attempt in exoneration. Threat perceptions emanate from internal vulnerabilities that remain neglected and unaddressed. Neutralisation of certain threats may require the application of legitimate coercive force including the military.

The Nepal Army (NA) maintains a history identified with the unification process of Nepal. Despite the few human rights violations regrettably committed, NA at times of isolation did force the Maoist insurgents to abandon their aspirations to achieve military victory. The Nepalese state of affairs requires the establishment and maintenance of a viable Nepalese military force structure with a rapid deployment capability. The NA needs to further build and develop an effective response capability to counter transnational threats and stretch its roles and

missions to new professionalism. In terms of serving the people during peacetime, the NA must be capable and equipped to conduct civic actions, civil affairs, rescue and relief operations during disasters and national development programmes.

Downsizing the NA and integrating politically indoctrinated People's Liberation Army (PLA) into the NA are theoretical steps but should not be considered redundant. The Maoists may see victory as theirs and want to dictate their terms of surrender, but their entry into the parliament is due to the liberal and accommodative stance of the seven party alliance. The illegal YCL activities and adamancy displayed by the PLA towards the process of UN verification are clear indicators that the resurgence of the old insurgency is still a possibility.

The sanctity of the NA must be maintained. An appropriate security organisation must be created and commanded by officers to accommodate eligible PLA combatants. The organisation must remain under the jurisdiction of the military law but the role, mission and capabilities must be secondary. The members of the PLA must fulfill the physical, educational, medical requisites and successfully graduate from the intensive basic training. All political affiliations and beliefs must be surrendered. Human rights violators and those involved in criminal activities must be banned from enlistment. Lastly, the violators of the existing law, regulations and rules should be prosecuted without impunity.

Realisation must dawn upon the people that the dedicated participation of the NA in the counter insurgency operations, prevented Nepal from succumbing to a totalitarian communist rule. It must be clearly highlighted that simply assigning roles and mission to the NA without furnishing appropriate resources will eventually invite another catastrophe.

(The author is a well known defense and security expert. His name has been withheld at his request.)



Fascinated by birds

The villagers who used to observe me climbing trees and watching birds used to think I was crazy.

Hari Sharan Nepali, 78, popularly known as Kazi is the leading ornithologist in Nepal; and is one of the directors of nepalnature.com. Kazi has compiled a list of 874 species of birds in Nepal so far. He talked about his life-long passion with newsfront recently.

How long have you been working as an ornithologist?

I have been working as an ornithologist for around 50 years now. I am still studying and working in the field. That which began as my hobby is my work through which I have earned my livelihood. My fascination for birds began when I was very young. Nobody taught me anything about it. I was self taught.

How did you start your education in this field?

I did not have any equipment in the beginning. I learned how to use the sling shot first and began handling guns when I used to accompany some people I knew who used to go hunting, carrying their guns. Much later, I bought a gun and other equipment that was required for my work. I learned as I went along and survived through sheer determination and faith in my ability to make it in this field. This passionate pursuit fulfilled my dreams, sustained me financially and gave me an opportunity to contribute to my country. I assist tourists, experts and anybody else who wishes to study and watch birds in any part of Nepal.

Don't you feel sorry to kill such beautiful birds?

I love birds and feel sorry to have to kill them but this kind of research is such that it has to be done for the purpose of study and collection. We take only what is needed for research. It is a physical evidence of the species. Taking one or two from a species does not impact on its existence. If you do not take it, it might disappear like the dinosaurs. It is also a kind of conservation for the future. It may not sound good but that is the fact. For a species to survive, it takes more than three or four in number and a proper habitat. Only a few numbers left in any species just do not

survive. All my collection of bird skins are now in Kathmandu Natural History museum.

What inspired you to start collecting birds?

I realised early on that there was no collection of birds in Nepal although the Europeans began collecting birds from Nepal and taking it out of the country around 150 years ago. Now they are exhibited in the British and American museums.

There were no books available on birds then. With difficulty, I found a book that helped me catalogue the names of the species. I clean and preserve the birds myself and this is something only somebody with genuine interest can do.

I have trekked extensively in Nepal and have spent half of my life walking and still do. I am writing a book based on my experiences which will be published in near future.

How were you viewed by others for your unique work?

Life certainly was not easy, financially and otherwise. The villagers who used to observe me climbing trees and watching birds used to think I was crazy. Even now I am considered a bit out of ordinary so you can imagine what people used to think of me 50 years ago.

Are rare birds smuggled out of Nepal?

Rare species might be smuggled out although I have not come across any concrete proof of it yet. Take the recent case of the birds that were flown in from Pakistan and were destroyed. Nobody knows what kinds of birds they were and why they were destroyed without so much as a photograph of the birds. There have been several cases where smugglers were caught and it is said that Nepal is a base for foreigners to smuggle birds.

How can birds be protected from extinction?

Their natural habitat, be it swamps, forests, dried tree trunks and so on need to left untampered. Different birds live and thrive in different kinds of habitat. Green habitat

conservation is very necessary to protect the species and for it to flourish. Air, noise and water pollution also play a major role disturbing the birds and causing them to relocate.

Keshar Mahal in Kathmandu used to be a hub of different birds' habitat and migratory birds but now due to intolerable conditions, they moved out to friendlier environment. Birds and animals are very sensitive to disturbances in environment and humans should heed the warnings before it becomes too late for their own survival!

Many species have disappeared and have relocated elsewhere due to lack of ideal habitat here in the valley. Here in Thamel, there was a swamp behind and birds called ruby throat used to come here but now with houses all around, they are not to be seen anymore. Species will start disappearing if their habitats are destroyed and this is true for all areas in the 14 zones.

In Nepal, no areas have been separated for conservation of birds. It has not caught the attention of the government yet. Preservation of birds should be in the interest of Nepal, not of organisations outside. The real people doing the actual work in Nepal should be acknowledged and the credit given to them and not to outsiders with money, as is the common practice.

Has any survey been done on birds in Nepal?

No extensive research, counting has been done in Nepal yet since such a survey takes a lot of resources, time and man power. So no accurate data on birds in Nepal exists really.

How important are birds to the ecosystem?

In an ecosystem, from a tiniest insect, every single species is important. Disappearance of one species affects the whole cycle. With this in mind the government should start taking interest in it and make policies to preserve birds' habitat all over the country. It would be a way to attract more tourists. Recently I assisted the ex-president Jimmy Carter on a bird watching trip and he enjoyed it.

It is no use creating a model habitat only although it has its own purpose for education but it is most important to create awareness in peoples' minds about the role of birds in the eco-system that affects all the people

How do you feel while watching birds?

I feel very happy, it makes me euphoric. I feel trapped when I cannot go out for long durations. I could spot birds from long distances but now I need my glasses. To spot some birds it requires two to three people since they move so rapidly. I myself have found 25, 20 new bird species.

Obviously you need a lot of stamina in this work?

Yes, a lot of hardship is involved in this work where you face unpredictable weather conditions, scarcity of food and water and have often to sleep out in the woods. I have faced problems like porters running away with supplies. It all is part of the job.

A lot of courage, dedication and tenacity are required to survive in this field. It does not come with money. If it did, then the Ranas of the yore who used to hunt so much would have a good collection by now. But instead so much has gone out.

Are there bird fans in Nepal?

Yes, though they are only a handful, they are increasing but the number is peanuts compared to those in western countries where there are hundreds of thousands of people whose hobby is bird watching.

In Nepal people tend to concentrate only on their work, be it business or office work. Most of them have no hobbies that they can pursue in their free time. We need to develop that trend of having a hobby which keeps you constructively occupied.

What are your future plans?

My wish is to go on working; walking and finally I hope to die in Mustang. I love that place. I am happy with the way life has turned out for me. I wish more people would enter this field and persevere in it.



Nina Saphota

Difficult choice

...There are ways to verify the merit as claimed in media advertisements.



The debate goes on about what makes a college preferable over others. Academic results still attract many students and their parents.

■ Chhatra Karki

An estimated 150,000 students constituting almost 80 percent of those who passed the school level are looking for enrolment in plus two level. This according to the Higher Secondary Education Board (HSEB) Vice President, Upendra Koirala, shows how popular the plus two education system is getting in the country.

But this has left students and their guardians quite confused whether this is solely because of its popularity or the lure of competitive media advertisement. "There are ways to verify the merit as claimed in these advertisements. One visit to these colleges and a look into their infrastructure and academic atmosphere will dispel exaggerated claims," said Dr Bishnu Karki, an educationist. "And the choice should be that of the students," he asserted.

A few colleges have hired counselors to check the IQ level and aptitude of students so that they could make their right choice of subjects and colleges. These techniques have been found quite useful for students as it makes them confident that the subject they have chosen is right for their future. According to Shaligram Bhattarai, a counselor at Little Angels School, Hattiban, plus two is the gateway to future career, so parents and students should take it seriously.

Educationists emphasise not only on academic performance but also on teaching faculty, environment, extracurricular activities etc. Absence of a grading system or policy on the part of the government has also made students difficult to decide on which is the best institute for them. There is a demand from some parents that there be an authentic body of government to rank the plus two on the basis of academic, physical and educational facilities.

The debate goes on about what makes a college preferable over others. Academic results still attract many students and their parents. "All requirements are essential for the overall development of students, but academic performance comes first," Ramesh Maharjan, a guardian, emphasised.

What they call an overdose of commercialism in the plus two category is something that worries guardians and students alike. "Absence of uniformity in the fees structure in the plus two level even in institutions with similar infrastructure is a case in point. There is also a lack of supervision and monitoring system," said Mahendra Singh Rathor, Minister of state for Education and Sports. He added that the government will soon form a committee of experts to determine fees and make other suggestions for quality and service enhancement in the system.

Education for competence and virtue



Khagendra Prasai
Principal, SM College

What should be the purpose of education?

I am of firm conviction that education should be directed towards creating a virtuous and knowledgeable citizen of society, nation and the world. A similar idea is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that education should be directed to the full development of personality and to the strengthening of human rights and freedom. Rig Ved says, "Education is what liberates" (*sa bidhya ta bimuktaya*). To put it simply, education should build and enhance competence and virtue in individuals.

What would you advise students who are choosing their subjects?

Students should keep in mind their own potential and the opportunities for higher studies that the subjects offer. Today, natural science, management, humanities, social sciences, all offer good opportunities if students are committed to achieve good results and they can develop the confidence required in their respective fields.

What should students consider while choosing a college?

Firstly, they should know in which areas the college has invested; such as laboratory, library etc. which directly or indirectly benefit students. Secondly, the teaching method adopted; is the method conducive to building and enhancing their ability to learn and develop their personality? Thirdly, they must consider whether the college motivates students to make progressive achievement in score, competence and development of personality.

Many colleges proudly publicise high scores of their students, but little attention has been paid on whether any progressive achievement is being made by students or not. I have seen many students being misguided and duped by exaggerated and false advertisements of colleges. Sometimes students are deluded by glittering facades of college building and the like. Keeping all these factors in mind, students can make a wise and rational decision.

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Binod P. Bista

Budget at a glance

It seems highly unlikely that the growth target projected at 5% for next fiscal year can be reached.

National budget of Nepal has been announced for the fiscal year 2007/2008 by Nepal's finance minister of a government led by eight coalition partners. This budget is believed to be the first one for the three-year transition period. The transition period can last longer as per current conditions of instability and lawlessness as well as lack of understanding and harmony among the present leadership.

Understandably, it is a complex exercise which had to be carried out for running day to day affairs of the nation even if Nepal were not facing the Constituent Assembly elections in the near future. It would require a good amount of study and deeper understanding of the elements of the budget prior to making informed comments. Nevertheless, economic survey of the past period provides a good basis to start discussion on the budget.

The government of Nepal has pointed at two major factors for its lack of performance (achievement) of its estimated 4.5% growth for 2006/2007. The revised estimates state the GDP growth last year as 2.5% only. The major factor, as per the speech of the finance minister, has been stated as "lack of improvement in law and order and investment climate."

With the current situation of law and order, which seems to be worsening progressively, and

lacking serious efforts from all sides, particularly the conflicting groups affiliated with major political parties in the all powerful parliament, it seems highly unlikely that the growth target projected at 5% for next fiscal year can be reached. Let us hope that the finance minister's assessment relating to adverse impact of law and order last year on economic growth was wrong.

While the first factor is fully in the hands of people of Nepal, especially its current leadership, the second important factor lies with nature. For countries like Nepal, adverse weather conditions always come in handy to be blamed for lack of growth. One wonders why we must base a large part of our projections on nature's ways which has ever remained mysterious and unknown even to the most learned.

On the revenue side, the government expects to generate 99 billion 605.9 million Nepali rupees from domestic sources as against a mobilisation of 86 billion 135.5 million (as revised) in the last fiscal year. A jump of over 10% in domestic revenue without a stable environment encouraging increased investment from domestic and foreign sources can be anything but highly ambitious. At this juncture, Nepal is neither equipped with mega projects that can bring in sizable benefits nor a sound basis for small and medium scale businesses



Finance Minister Dr Ramsaran Mahat presenting the annual budget-2006

has been found.

Equally difficult to digest is the planned capital investment of 75.252 billion Nepali rupees, which is more than double the outlay under this head last year. Besides the uncertainty in realising the commitment of donor countries, and likely delays in working out loan proposals with regional/international financial and monetary institutions, expected to raise 44.828 billion Nepali rupees as foreign aid (grant plus loan), the absorptive capacity of a country cannot be raised overnight. That is unthinkable in a state of transition.

If it is not possible to increase revenues and make investments as desired, can then the government cut down on certain expenses? From the face of it, this proposition also looks to be difficult. The government must ensure the CA elections on time, the extended one in November. Law and order must be secured in order to carry out the elections in a free and fair manner. General administrative expenses, particularly on security agencies, need to be adequately apportioned. Lacking any support

from the national military, as per the agreement among the coalition partners, the cost to equip the police force is an added extra.

Nepal has to pay nearly 15.561 billion Nepali rupees to the foreign lenders in the next fiscal year. As an excellent borrower Nepal has been successfully meeting its loan obligations at all times voting itself out of one of the crucial criteria established for highly indebted poor countries (HIPC) for writing off of all loans.

Presently, Nepal has been following a path of all-inclusive democratic governance with full regard paid to human rights as per advice and encouragement of the international community. If this were not the right time to help Nepal, when would? The government should try to obtain this rightful concession from its lenders, which will make a huge difference in streamlining its budget for this year and successive years in the interim period. The United States, the EU, Japan, China and India should take the lead to make it happen. ■

(Bista is a development economist, works with Boao Forum for Asia in China.)



Siddhartha Thapa

Questionable mergers

"Their tactics, strategy might have changed, but not their goals."

Nepal's political discourse has entered the decisive phase where the future of tomorrow's Nepal will be charted through a Constituent Assembly. Throughout history state power has been captured through popular revolts and by paralysing or more likely by destroying the morale of the existing state security apparatus. Similarly in Nepal an intense debate has ensued regarding the merger of a politically motivated armed outfit – People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the Nepal Army. However, the state must strongly resist the pressure either domestic or international for the amalgamation of PLA into Nepal Army. In the unfortunate event that the merger takes place, prior to Constituent Assembly polls, it would be accurate to conclude that Girija is indeed preparing for the eventual surrender of power to the Maoists.

As the International Crisis Group states in its report vis-à-vis the Maoists, "their tactics, strategy might have changed, but not their goals". The Maoists today appear to be the only political party with a game plan. On the other hand the Nepali Congress is under an illusion that by virtue of being the largest democratic party in the country, the people will vote for them. Nonetheless, the realistic picture of Nepali politics is vastly different from what our leaders have been portraying.

A few days ago senior of the Eight Party Alliance, Raghu Pant, Binay Dhoj Chand and Dinnanth Sharma conceded that the

law and order situation has taken a nose dive and admitted that under present circumstances, the chances of holding elections is only remotely possible. Due to Girija's failure to assert political authority, the Maoists have strategically unveiled their much expected move: to paralyse or trigger a mutiny in the national army by pushing for the integration of their ideologically armed outfit into the Nepal Army.

However, if Girija gives the nod under pressure to merge the two armies, it would be prudent for the Nepali Congress to weigh the political ramifications of such a move. There are several issues that need to be taken into consideration prior to giving consent for the merger of the two armies. First, it is important to consider that for almost a decade the Maoists took up arms against the state and the political system of multi-party democracy, in order to establish a communist republic. It is also important to note that there is no guarantee that the Maoists will renounce violence if the elections or the political proceedings do not go their way. Prachanda, Kiran Vaidya and C.P Gajurel, all senior Maoist leaders, have consistently maintained that their party will not accept any political solution that contravenes their agendas and party policies.

Nepal Army is a voluntary army and works in the interest to protect national security. In comparison, the PLA killed unarmed political opponents and anyone who dared to speak up against them. Even after the formation of

Young Communist League, the atrocities still continue: the recent killing of a journalist in far western Nepal by the Nepal Republican Army (NRA), reveal that there is little room to suggest that the Maoists have mended their ways. And there is still a significant threat of the Maoists going to war.

Chairman Prachanda has boasted repeatedly about their ability to wage war at any given time if need be. It is also clear, that the political wing of the Maoist party has ultimately succumbed to the pressure of their military wing. Or perhaps it is the inability of the political wing to outmaneuver the political parties which has compelled the Maoist leadership to give more weight to the voices from the military wing. However, the ground reality is that the military and political wings are working in tandem to eventually overwhelm the state.

There are social aspects too that need to be looked into. Family ties and ideological loyalty to the party makes it hard for the PLA to separate and decipher the importance of national security from party interest. It is a foregone conclusion that once the PLA and Nepal Army are merged, politically indoctrinated members in the armed service coupled with the infiltration of YCL and NRA, will undoubtedly undermine the impartiality of the army.

In retrospect it is imperative to look into past cases of tried and tested mergers. For example, even though the Indian National Army (INA) spearheaded by Subash Chandra Bose waged a military war for India's independence, they

were never integrated into the national army. In Britain, the IRA (Irish Republican Army) too was not made a part of the British Army. Likewise, in Congo, South Africa, Angola and Guatemala integration of state forces with the rebel army led to serious indiscipline, internal confrontation, and misunderstanding that ultimately lead to the collapse of the structure of the army. Worse still is the case of Bangladesh where the opposition army assassinated Presidents. These past experiments of amalgamation must be taken into consideration before such mergers are implemented.

Even today, the YCL and NRA have failed to mend their ways. The crimes committed by the PLA, consistent negligence of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the constant abuse of human rights will make it harder for the UN to accept Nepal in future peace keeping missions if the rebel army and Nepal Army are integrated without trying those who are guilty. It is important to note that there is no mechanism within the PLA, that can punish the guilty and even if there were, it would be a hoax designed to fool the powers that be. To conclude, the recent political upheaval in the Terai and concurrently, Maoist behavior at this particular juncture, will boost the confidence of other armed outfits in Terai and force them to demand the integration of their cadres into the national army along ethnic lines, as a precondition for successful talks. ■

Voice of restless youths

They expected their leaders to turn into statesman who think about the next generation, but what they are getting is politicians who just think about the next election.



■ Gagan Thapa

Each succeeding generation manifests the accumulated culture of generations that have preceded them while also embodying the attributes resulting from its own interactions with the natural, social, political, social, scientific and religious world. Each generation gives continuity to change as it carries past culture and experiences blended with new ideas.

Youths of Nepal are no exception. Their different personal life experiences blended with common new ideas have developed a common characteristic among Nepali youth. Even though Nepali youth have multiple identities there have a lot of things in common.

Regardless of their caste, class etc., Nepali youth have been discarding the status quo. They have got quality imagination, temper of will, an appetite for adventure and a yearning for progress. They are visualising an economically decent, politically and socially participatory, naturally and religiously harmonious, spiritually and philosophically dignified life. They are dreaming of a democratic republic Nepal.

They are for change, better life conditions, opportunities, better society and a better nation. They want it to happen in their life time. For that they want things to start happening right now. The migration of large number of youths in pursuit of material goods or the active participation of youth in the April uprising is an example of it.

The youths were in a euphoric stage after the successful April uprising. They were hoping that Constituent Assembly would be a platform for an equitable and just society, a peaceful and prosperous nation. With time their hopes have begun to shatter.

Deteriorating law and order situation, rampant violence in several parts of Terai, are some of the features helping to compound the

frustration among the youths. The failure of the Maoists to renounce violence ideologically as well as through practice is fueling their annoyance. They expected their leaders to turn into statesman who think about the next generation, but what they are getting is politicians who just think about the next election.

They cherished the moment when the date for the elections was announced, but it did not last long.



Bhaskar Ojha

They treasured the moment when the Maoist Supremo publicly committed to abide by the democratic principles, but the 'fearless and clueless' Young Communist League crushed their appreciation. They applauded when the ruling political parties decided to accept federalism as a basis for designing a new State, but the complete absence of intra party and inter party discussions about federalism forced them to a conclusion that it was mere rhetoric.

Nepali youths have been accustomed to these phenomena but they are getting tired of it. The acceleration of frustration among them would either turn them into survivors/passive recipients or violent aggressors. No

matters what the result, it will certainly be counterproductive for the consolidation of democracy.

Democracy desires active participation of its population. Nepal is predominantly a young country. The continuation of hope among the young population ensures larger participation of youth in the political process, which would also create an incentive to take long term consequences into account.

Exclusion of youths in the political process would mean disregarding the population, which is unwise for electoral reasons and result in the misrepresentation of population in general.

What then would encourage the youth to participate in the political process? By listening to them; giving them more space to interact, encouraging them to build strong and durable alliance; reassuring them that they do not have to attend funeral of their own dreams; and most importantly, creating a conducive atmosphere for constituent assembly elections. If you want the youths to wait till November, you have to act now. ■

Marshland Flowers

Buddha discouraged his teachings from being formalised in any one language.



■ Acharya Mahayogi Sridhar Rana Rinpoche

Another example from the Sravakayana tradition (Theravada) is of Achan Jha (Acharya Jha) of the Thai – Laos Mountain. He was renowned to be an Arhat but when a journalist approached him and asked him the question, he asked, "How can I be an Arhat?" This answer has a double entendre. One, he just clearly denied it and second he was also teaching the journalist that as long as there is an 'I', there is no Arhat, when there is 'no – I' (anatma) there is no one to be an Arhat. This beautiful answer hits the heart of the entire Buddhist tradition.

Now let us go back to the lineage issues. Within Buddhism there always have been two major lineages – the Sravakayana lineage and the Bodhisattvayana lineage. Let us first talk about the Sravakayana lineage. From the time of Shakyamuni the Sravakayana lineages grew, expanded and branched out into 18 to 24 Nikayas. Each Nikaya had its Tripitaka written in its own language. For example, the Shaila and Purva Shaila Nikayas had their Tripitakas in Paisachi language, Sarvastivadins had their Tripitaka in Sanskrit language and the Theravadins had their Tripitaka in Pali language. The Buddha himself is said to have discouraged his teachings from being formalised in any one language. When a group of Brahmin disciples suggested to him to record all his teachings in the 'Chanda' (Vedic Sanskrit) he discouraged that and unequivocally reiterated that his teachings should be made accessible in all languages.

That is why the Tripitakas developed in so many languages. Of the 24 or so Nikayas today only the Theravada is alive while the Tripitakas of the Sarvastivadas exist in Chinese language. While

the Theravadin Tripitaka remained in Pali language which was a language developed out of the Saurseni family of Indian language for the express purpose of maintaining high philosophical standards, the Sanskrit Pitaka of the Sarvastivadins and the Prakrit Pitaka of the Mahasanghikas were further translated into Tibetan, Chinese, Khotanese, Mongolian etc following the injunctions of the Buddha himself.

The Mahayan Pitaka also was in Sanskrit and later in accordance with the inner intention of the Buddha, translated into Tibetan, Chinese, Khotanese, Mongolian, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese and various Central Asian languages. So of all the various Sravakayana lineages, only the Theravada is alive today and still going strong. The Theravada Nikaya spread to Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Southern Vietnam. This system began when in the 3rd century King Asoka's son Bhikkhu Mahinda (Mahendra) took the Pitaka prevalent in Ujjain in the Pali language from Ujjain to Sri Lanka.

Since then the lineage spread to Burma and Thailand. Although Burma was already Buddhist, the Sri Lankan Theravada reformed and gave it an impetus. The Bhikkhu lineage and the Samatha and Vipassana lineage of the Theravada School are still running strong and unbroken in these countries. Because a form of Sukkha Vipassana from Burma arrived in Nepal through the venerable Sri Goenka; many Nepalese, including those who should know better, are a bit confused about the Vipassana meditation. (To be continued.)

(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master.)

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N Korea 'closes nuclear reactor'

North Korea has shut down its nuclear reactor at Yongbyon, a US state department spokesman has said. Sean McCormack said that the US had been informed of the shut-down by North Korea and was now awaiting verification from the UN nuclear watchdog, the IAEA.

A team from the International Atomic Energy Agency is in Yongbyon overseeing the closure, taking place under a deal agreed in February, but much delayed. Under this deal Pyongyang got its first heavy fuel oil shipments on Saturday.

"We welcome this development and look forward to the verification and monitoring of this shut-down by the International Atomic Energy Agency team," Mr McCormack said in a statement as the news was announced.

Financial wrangling

If confirmed, the shut-down would be the first stage in disabling the North's nuclear programme. The IAEA's 10-member team are to decommission and seal equipment at the reactor and plutonium reprocessing plant. It may take the inspection team up to



three weeks to complete the task, says the BBC's Kevin Kim in Seoul. In nuclear talks held in Beijing in February, North Korea was promised heavy fuel oil in exchange for the Yongbyon shut-down.

The deal was delayed amid a wrangle over North Korean funds frozen in a Macau bank account. But the first ship of oil arrived in the North Korean port of Sonbong on Saturday, loaded with 6,200 tonnes of heavy fuel oil.

On Friday, the chief US nuclear envoy, Christopher Hill, emphasised that the closing of the Yongbyon reactor was only the first step though. Mr Hill said he expected a full list of the North's nuclear facilities within months - as agreed in the February deal. North Korea tested an atomic bomb for the first time last year, and has repeatedly said it needs nuclear weapons to fend off a US attack.

Talks involving South and North Korea, Russia, Japan, the United States and China are set to resume in Beijing on Wednesday to map out the next stage of the process.

(BBC)

Pakistan tense after suicide blast kills 24 troops

Pakistan on Sunday braced for more backlash violence to the army's deadly raid on a hardline mosque last week after a suicide car bomb attack killed at least 24 troops in an Afghan border area.

Pakistani army trucks carrying more troops rumbled into northwestern mountain areas after President Pervez Musharraf last week vowed to

according to a state media report published in the Dawn daily.

In Saturday's suicide blast in North Waziristan, the attacker rammed an explosives-packed car into a paramilitary convoy, also wounding more than 20 troops, said chief military spokesman Major General Waheed Arshad.

Besides the blast and a spate of

protest the army raid and the ongoing army build-up in border regions.

In North Waziristan, pro-Taliban militant commander Abdullah Farhad threatened to end a peace deal struck last September between the government and tribal leaders unless the army left newly-set up check-points by Sunday.

"If the government troops do not vacate the checkpoints by July 15, we will end the existing peace agreement with the government and launch a guerrilla war," Farhad told AFP by phone from an undisclosed location Saturday.

The United States has raised pressure on its ally Musharraf, the army chief who grabbed power in a coup eight years ago, to do more to hunt down Taliban and al-Qaeda insurgents hiding in Pakistan's rugged Afghan border lands.

New US intelligence reports suggest Al-Qaeda is gaining strength and has established a safe haven in remote tribal areas of western Pakistan for training and plotting new attacks, the Washington Post said last week.

White House national security advisor Stephen Hadley said Musharraf had failed to contain al-Qaeda and said the plan to give tribal leaders more autonomy "has not worked the way it should have," speaking on US television.

General Musharraf has in recent days sent additional soldiers and equipment into parts of the troubled North West Frontier Province.

"Troops have been deployed in Swat district and in Dera Ismail Khan following instructions by President Musharraf to beef up security to counter the threat of extremist forces in the region," a military official said.

(France 24)



crush extremists and "root them out from every corner of the country."

There were unconfirmed reports of fighting between militants and government troops in the Swat valley of North West Frontier Province early Sunday.

Pakistan's radical Islamic minority has called for "holy war," infuriated by the siege of the pro-Taliban Red Mosque in the capital and the army assault that ended it, claiming 103 lives through the week, mostly of militants.

The interior ministry said the bodies of 10 unidentified foreigners and seven children were among the charred remains found in the devastated mosque complex,



other attacks on troops in recent days, there has been political fallout in the world's second-largest Muslim nation amid the heightened tensions triggered by the Red Mosque raid.

Qazi Hussain Ahmed — powerful head of the six-party Islamic alliance the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal — said he would resign from parliament to



Fresh fighting erupts in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO: Sri Lankan troops used war planes and long-range weapons to attack suspected Tamil Tiger positions as fresh fighting broke out early on Saturday, the defence ministry said.

Fighter jets pounded suspected Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) locations in the north of the island, where heavy artillery duels killed at least one soldier and wounded another 12, the ministry said.

Both sides traded heavy weapons fire across a defence line in Vavuniya district, the ministry said. "It is confirmed that many LTTE terrorists were killed," the ministry said in a statement. There was no immediate comment from the Tigers.

The clash Saturday at Thampanai came three days after security forces wrested control over the final rebel base in the east of the island. "We bombed the LTTE camp in Mannar and it was very successful, lot of casualties," Air Force spokesman Group Captain Ajantha De Silva told Reuters.

The air raids came hours after the Tigers killed one soldier and injured 11 in the northern district of Vavuniya, which borders rebel

territory. "The LTTE were firing mortars and artillery and we confronted them ... there are a lot of LTTE casualties," military spokesman Brigadier Prasad Samarasinghe told Reuters. "We also had one soldier killed and 11 injured," he said.

The LTTE admitted on Thursday losing Thoppigala in the district of Batticaloa, but said it would now revert to guerrilla tactics in the troubled region.

Fighting across Sri Lanka has worsened since the breakdown of a 2002 truce around 19 months ago.

Sri Lanka's 35-year-old conflict has claimed more than 60,000 lives, and over 5,200 people have been killed in fighting in the past 19 months, according to government figures. The rebels are fighting for an independent homeland for the Tamil minority on the Sinhalese-majority island.

Tiger political wing leader SP Thamilselvan told Reuters in an interview that peace was "not possible" as long as Mahinda Rajapaksa remained president, pouring cold water on international efforts to halt the two-decade conflict. agencies.

(Daily Times)

Poet on an island

I am a poet on an island
I dip my finger in the sea
salt blends with my blood
I become the sea.

I take deep breaths
as the rocks breathe
I lean with old men
against stone walls

(Fred Johnston)



■ Yuyutsu RD Sharma

Faith in poetry is an intriguing question. And at the same time as important as air is to human survival.

"I still believe in poetry," says the distinguished Irish poet Fred Johnston while introducing his collection of poems, *Being Anywhere* (Lagan Press, Belfast). He adds, "Though I am not always sure what precisely I mean by that."

Faith in poetry is an intriguing question. And at the same time as important as air is to human survival. I cannot imagine a poet without faith, even if he/she comes from another planet. But what poets believe in can be drastically different from the traditional definition of faith. Poets get attached to strange things, develop attachments that ordinary people find crazy. Eliot wrote scores of poems on cats, Yeats fell in love with a beautiful woman and kept writing tirelessly on her for decades. In this light, Fred Johnston is a poet with a faith in the landscape, his seashores, his boats, and his Irish sky. The attachment to the landscape can be daunting.

No wonder he had set up my reading in Galway on the docks. We

I am what is on the sea
and below the sea, and above
the sea
the sun roped to my shoulder
black my Pythagorean sail
wind is the breath
of the world in sleep
I am hailed by name from the
stone quay.

A brief chat with Johnston made me realise the supremacy of cultural guards that Irish society has raised over the years. Johnston not very long ago had to lose his job at a prestigious newspaper for reviewing a contemporary woman writer with influential friends in the media in negative light.

Johnston had stated the view that many young woman writers were being published just because they were women. Most of them did not have true poetic value or literary merit.

"It's very important to observe," opines Fred, "Ireland is a very conservative society. It pretends it's not. It's very rural and Dublin is not its true representation." Johnston believes a writer should engage fearlessly in politics and in the making of contemporary society. "Writers are not strange spiritual beings, isolated from the rest of the world." remained his mantra.

The writer can be reached at writer@yuyutsu.de

even decided to put together an issue of my magazine *Pratik* on the famous port Galway. This was the port where during the great Irish famine they used to put the famished people into those famous 'coffin ships' to carry them across the black Atlantic waters. Countless died on the way, only a few lucky ones survived and reached America. Johnston's poetry weaves a stimulating song of the same sea and the landscape that this fearsome sea shapes and shines. This is how his boat dreams:



Being ethical and productive keep ex-addicts clean

Counseling by drug therapist, Ragina Shah

My cousin overdosed herself with tranquilisers recently. Why did she do it?

■ S.Khadga, Baluwatar

There could be two reasons for it. Firstly, it could be addiction. Unhappy, hopeless people are more prone to drugs (tranquilisers or sleeping pills are also drugs). Their negative emotions, feelings and sensations are problems for them since they do not want to feel, experience or face it. To them, their problems appear overwhelming without any solutions.

When anybody tries to deal with their problems with help of drugs, it could be a beginning of addiction. No one likes pain or discomfort and we all instinctively try to avoid these feelings. By using drugs, somebody like your cousin may feel good for sometime but with time, her body begins to adapt to the toxic chemicals and increases its tolerance to the drugs.

In the beginning users experience an instant feeling of well-being or a 'high' but with tolerance, the intensity of the pleasurable feeling they are seeking lessens and the physical and mental 'lows' intensify when the effects of drugs start wearing off. To overcome it and to get that

'high' again, they start increasing their drug intake. This is how overdosing takes place.

Another reason could be that your cousin may be seeking attention. She may feel that she is deprived of attention and sympathy from others and may be trying to get it from others through this act of overdosing. This is a psychological problem and needs to be treated by psychotherapists. To determine the exact cause and to find the right treatment, she first needs to be checked by a psychotherapist and a psychiatrist.

What does a recovering addict have to do to stay drug-free for the rest of their lives?

■ Gambhir Kayastha, Battispatali

'Once an addict, always an addict' is a false and discriminating attitude prevalent in our society. But this can only be true if addicts in recovery do not follow certain rules to remain drug free. They have to stay away from areas where they used to spend time and from friends they used to hang out with while using drugs; since such company or environment could trigger craving for drugs. This will lead to, "just a few sips of alcohol" or "just a puff" and soon they are back to being addicts and worse than before.

Going into those areas of past and meeting those friends re-stimulate those moments of pleasure and thus ex-addicts easily get caught up again in the cycle of addiction again. To stay drug free, ex-addicts have to be taught to fulfill responsibilities to themselves and to others. They have to be ethical and honest. When they are doing good and not hiding anything they will find it easy to establish communication with everybody. But the moment they become unethical they will start avoiding others.

Thus being ethical is the way to drug free survival. Being productive is also very important. When they start taking on useful projects and complete it, their morale gets boosted and they start doing better; but if their achievement status stagnates, they start going downhill. Thus, whether big or small, they have to be engaged in something constructive. These steps may sound very ordinary but they are the most essential steps for a recovering addict to follow if they want to stay off drugs.

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

Insight

Not just a writer

Writers worth their salt, true to the spirit of their art never sought to align themselves with any corridors of power.



■ Sushma Amatya

"Oh, so and so is just a writer" – hearing the spontaneous, disparaging remark about a fiction writer by an educated, 'broad minded' person came as a bit of a surprise and just reaffirmed how little we Nepalis value the art of creating stories.

Story telling is an art I greatly appreciated right from my childhood thanks to the streams of stories I used to extract from my indulgent aunts. The vivid pictures replete with dramatic gestures and intonations are still alive in my mind. The sense of wonder and enchantment that was evoked through their stories sowed a seed from which my love for the imagery, the fantastic expressed through words must have been born.

Story writing is no different when you string together words that evoke a picture, stir up emotions and weave a world through which readers are informed, entertained, inspired, encouraged to think, feel and explore. Communicating a good story through different means is as great an art as painting, sculpting, creating music or songs. It is the foundation on which block buster movies, epic novels are made. The fine skill of story telling is employed in poems, theatre, documentaries, reporting news, investigations as well as in research of people and different aspects that go to make their lives. It takes as much time, sweat, dedication, perseverance and hard work to hone the skill of writing as it does for any other discipline.

It is interesting to note comments made by prejudiced academicians about writers. An academician who considered herself to be on the top rung of the academic ladder commented that her rival's paper appeared more like a BBC report than an academic paper! Personally, if at all I was inspired to read an academic paper, I'd reach out for the scorned paper than a bagful of academic jargon that prides on its indecipherable antiquity and storage value. Is the halo created around academicians of her ilk, a case of assigning greater value to something that is least understood by many?

As the history of the world shows, writers worth their salt, true to the spirit of their art never sought to align themselves with any corridors of power. There are umpteen examples of writers, painters, poets whose lives were mired in poverty and its vicious claws gripped them till their very last breath. Such writers have always been critical of tyranny, sycophancy, hypocrisy and have not been afraid of speaking out what they think and feel, even if it makes them an ugly duckling in a pond full of white painted swans.

This lack of association with power has caused the society at large to view principled writers through distorted lens. The magic writers create by delving deep into the recesses of a human heart and soul; the joyful light it sheds on troubled hearts and blank minds casting a glow of hope, seem to pale before the scepter of power and the modern-day throne of money. It is akin to the soft glow of candle being overshadowed by the harsh glare of neon lights.

Any profession that is associated with money and power commands much respect, almost reverence in the eyes of people, especially in Nepal. Since we hardly have seen any writers in Nepal who have become successful monetarily the tendency to look down on those who choose this art for living comes naturally to most people. But writing as a profession deserves as much if not more respect as any other money guzzling professions. That it is synonymous to penury is because of our ignorance, large scale illiteracy and increasing mercenary attitude resulting in lack of appreciation for this art.

Writers give a lot to the society. They prod, awaken hearts and minds to see, feel, empathise, listen and act. Through their writings are the darkest fears, starkest realities, unparalleled passions, supreme courage, deepest sorrows revealed; that otherwise would have remained hidden, unrecognised in the tunnels of mind. It is more through stories than anything else that human nature, its peaks of brilliance and cesspools of dark sides are most revealed. Legends, myths, the mysterious that inspire and guide, survive through generations through story telling and writing. And they remain long after the creators have gone. ■

As the history of the world shows, writers worth their salt, true to the spirit of their art never sought to align themselves with any corridors of power.



Harry made it

cool to read

Like circus elephants on parade, J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels have lumbered past a dazzled young public for the last 10 years. Now the beloved fantasy series is ending with the release of the seventh volume, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, at midnight July 21.

Media coverage is in overdrive and millions of fans are arguing and obsessing over the fate of young Harry in his struggle with the dark wizard, Lord Voldemort. Others in the world of books and reading, meanwhile, are contemplating the end of the historic series. Besides wondering what, if anything, could take its place, they are reflecting on the impact the books have had on reading, bookselling, and publishing for the young.

The adventures of the bespectacled English boy at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry have achieved sales far beyond any comparison with normal books. More than 325 million copies of Harry Potter books have been printed worldwide, in 66 languages. Scholastic Inc.'s first U.S. printing of Deathly Hallows is an unprecedented 12 million copies, and Amazon.com has already received 1.6 million advance orders.

Publishing revolution

Author J.K. Rowling, 41, did more than sell a lot of books. Her character "revolutionized publishing for middle-graders and above," said Betsy Groban, vice-president and publisher of Houghton Mifflin's children's division. "Harry Potter made it cool to read a big, fat, complicated book. Before Harry Potter, that sort of book was the hardest sell." Potter, said Jodi Reamer, a New York children's literary agent, "led to an explosion in the middle-grade world. Agents who only represented adult work now also represent middle-grade fiction."

With the burgeoning genre of hardcover fiction for children that began with Harry Potter, The New York Times created a separate children's hardcover bestseller list for its website in 2000, because Harry Potter and other hardcover children's

novels were repeatedly ensconced atop the adult hardcover list.

As with any craze, imitators have tried to cash in. "With 70 per cent of the manuscripts submitted to us, we're told it's just like Harry Potter," said Holly McGhee, a New York literary agent who handles children's books. "The character is the same age, it's fantasy, it contains magic."

Potter broke all rules. Boys as well as girls liked the books. Length was no problem — the longest novels in the series run nearly 800 pages. "It used to be the mantra of teachers and librarians that a book of fiction has to be thin or kids won't read it, especially not boys," said Terri Schmitz, owner of a children's book store.

The subject matter changed after Potter, too. "When I was a kid, if you read fantasy, you were a geek," said Barry Goldblatt, a New York children's literary agent. "With Harry Potter, you could have a book on your desk with dragons and knights on the cover and no one made fun of you."

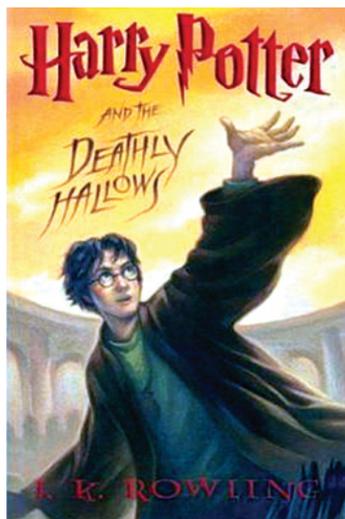
Many credit Rowling with creating a whole generation of new readers. "The effect on kids' reading has been huge," said Elizabeth Bluemle, owner of The Flying Pig Bookstore in Shelburne, Vt. "Kids discovered they can read harder and longer books than they thought they could."

Next blockbuster

Booksellers, who once exulted over their Potter business, are much glummer lately. "For us, it's a sad thing," said Schmitz, who hosted Rowling for a local reading in 1999, just as the series took off. "With each book, we have sold fewer copies because there are so many places to get it steeply discounted. If I bought it from Barnes & Noble, I'd be paying less than I pay Scholastic."

Other storeowners said they expect to break even at best. Amazon.com CEO Jeff Bezos told the annual meeting last month that Amazon will not make a profit on Potter, with its 49 per cent discount (\$17 off the \$34.99 list price).

"The independents broke this book in the first place, when the chains



Seventh volume of Harry Potter will appear on July 21.

were hardly even buying it," said Kristen McLean, executive director of the Association of Booksellers for Children in Boston. "Now the independents are getting shafted. They have to stock it, but they can't be competitive."

Some say the enormity of the Harry Potter phenomenon has eclipsed other kinds of children's books, especially for younger children. "Picture books have suffered tremendously, and the quality is pretty sad," Schmitz said, "because no one wants to take a chance on them."

While there is much talk in publishing about what will be the "next" Harry Potter, no one has ever been able to predict even a normal-sized bestseller. Few believe that another 10-year, 325-million seller is over the horizon.

(The Chronicle Herald)



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Who's new to the Potter

"Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix" introduces several new characters to the screen from the book series. Most notable, perhaps, is the sadistic, toad-like Dolores Umbridge — at least, that's how she's described in J.K. Rowling's book. In the film, she's played by Imelda Staunton — the Oscar-nominated actress from "Vera Drake."

The director, too, is new to the series, but he's sticking with it: David Yates, best-known for his BBC television work, already has begun pre-production on the next film in the series, "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince." He follows Chris Columbus, who directed the first two films, Mike Newell and Alfonso Cuaron.

Here are some new friends and foes Harry, Ron, Hermione and company will contend with in film No. 5:

— Dolores Umbridge (Imelda Staunton) — The Oscar-nominated actress, recently seen in the inspirational film "Freedom Writers," plays a cloying, nasty piece of work in Dolores Umbridge, who was brought to the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to quash what Harry knows to be true: The evil Voldemort and his followers have returned. Umbridge tortures Harry, both mentally and physically, while trying to keep him quiet.

— Bellatrix Lestrange (Helena Bonham Carter) — A disciple of Voldemort and therefore an enemy to Harry. Bellatrix is worse for wear after doing time in Azkaban Prison. She also is the sister of Narcissa Malfoy, aunt to Draco Malfoy and related to Harry's true guardian, Sirius Black — a relationship that has dire consequences. Carter has lately been seen and heard in projects with her partner, director Tim Burton, for whom she'll play Mrs. Lovett opposite Johnny Depp in the upcoming film version of

"Sweeney Todd."

— Luna Lovegood (Evanna Lynch) — A Hogwarts schoolmate, her father is a tabloid publisher, and she takes gossip as gospel. Harry is one of the few classmates to befriend the bespectacled, often annoying Luna, who proves steadfast in troubled times. This is Evanna's film debut.

— Kreacher (voice of Timothy Bateson) — A magical creature known as a house elf, Kreacher belongs heart and soul to the Black family's dark side. When Sirius Black was the only male member of his family left, Kreacher was forced to serve him, although reluctantly. Kreacher despises Sirius because the elf sees him as having betrayed his mother, who was adored by the elf. Like Dobby the house elf in previous films, Kreacher will be a computer-generated creation.

— Kingsley Shacklebolt (George Harris) and Nymphadora Tonks (Natalie Tena) — Both characters are Aurors (skilled in defense against the Dark Arts) and members of the Order of the Phoenix. Author J.K. Rowling describes Shacklebolt as a tall, bald black man who has a deep, calming voice. Harris has worked with Laurence Olivier, who was an early mentor, Harold Pinter and on films with Ridley Scott and Steven Spielberg. Tonks (she hates her first name) spices things up with a youthful vivacity, not to mention purple hair. She's also a metamorphmagus, who can change appearance at will. Tena's previous films include "About a Boy".

(Pittsburgh Post-Gazette)



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