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Media Coverage of the Murders of Nepal's Royal Family

This issue of the *Himalayan Research Bulletin* is devoted in part to a forum on the tragic events that took place in the Royal Palace in Kathmandu on June 1. Some weeks after the murder of most of Nepal's royal family - allegedly by the crown prince, Dipendra - two Nepalese activists, Bipin Adhikari, a lawyer, and S.B. Mathe, an architect, circulated via e-mail an article they had prepared for a conference in Stockholm. Their article criticized both the international media for the uncritical way it represented the tragedy to an international audience, and the probe commission appointed by the new king, Gyanendra, for numerous failures in the investigative process. A revised version of that article is the centerpiece of the *Himalayan Research Bulletin's* discussion of these events. We decided to publish Adhikari and Mathe's piece because of the trenchant and forensically informed challenge it gives to the official version of events, and because of the questions it raises (not necessarily explicitly) about the democratic process in Nepal and the degree to which democracy has taken root in Nepal just ten years after the People's Movement. The critique that these two authors make is one that is widely subscribed to in Nepal but not well known in the United States even among Nepalists, whose principal sources of information have been the media outlets — CNN, the BBC, the New York Times, Reuters — that Adhikari and Mathe critique. We invited a number of people to comment on their arguments; five responded. I would like to record here our thanks to Adhikari and Mathe and their reviewers for working so promptly to the deadlines we gave them.

In preparing this issue, we have been struck by the readiness with which observers in the United States have accepted the official story attributing responsibility for the murders to Prince Dipendra. We believe that the probe commission was so procedurally flawed that it failed to establish his guilt beyond any reasonable doubt, and that failure did a significant disservice to Nepal. This is the view of many Nepalese, a fact highlighted in Adhikari and Mathe's article. The Probe Commission report, compiled after only a three-day investigation into a crime of such magnitude, would never have been accepted in the United States or Europe as an official response to a similar event there. Procedures that would not pass muster in the United States are, however, apparently acceptable when it comes to understanding events in Nepal. Such attitudes are unfortunately common. Sri Lankans could cite the official endorsement given by European Union election observers to the last parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka, which were widely regarded on the island as compromised by large scale thuggery, intimidation and vote fraud by ruling party politicians. And to observers from a part of the world where conspiracies have led to the deaths of dozens of political figures, including one head of state and a former prime minister, conspiracy theories are less implausible than they might be to American or European observers. Certainly, the Probe Commission did little to categorically reject such theories and that is perhaps its biggest failure.

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Bipin Adhikari and S.B. Mathe:

“The Global Media, the Probe Commission and the Assassination of Nepal's Royal Family: Questions Unasked and Unanswered”

Responses: David Gellner
Pratyoush Onta
John Whelpton
Binod Sijapati
Ramesh Parajuli

Authors' Rejoinder