

Courage & Conviction

newsfront

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Women in Sirung VDC, Lamjung in western Nepal spinning Charkha on a cold January day a week ago. The school children are enjoying their grandmother's work.



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Deuba bells the cat

No reintegration

■ nf correspondent

In a tone that defies the Congress policy of appeasement of the Maoists, former Prime Minister and Nepali Congress leader, Sher Bahadur Deuba has opposed the integration of the Maoist combatants in the Nepal army (NA). "Maoist combatants should not be integrated in the Nepal army at this stage," Deuba told Newsfront. "Nepal Army should have a decisive say on the matter and no decision should be imposed upon them unilaterally."

He also said that Maoist combatants are a political army and their integration in NA without securing a commitment that the combatants would obey the norms, behaviour and conduct of the army will have serious consequences.

Deuba said while the NA needs to be reformed, modernised, made more composite and trained; elements of politics cannot be injected in it by including the Maoist party cadres at this moment. They must go through a process of de-indoctrination and de-politicisation to earn basic eligibility to join the national army. Deuba who is next only to Prime Minister GP Koirala in the party hierarchy has often been candid in expressing his views on issues of national importance.

His remarks against the integration of the

Maoist combatants in the NA come in the wake of demands made by the Maoist leaders including Prachanda that the integration should begin immediately. Congress central committee member and Prime Minister Koirala's nephew, Dr. Shekhar Koirala had recently stated that the election cannot take place in April without the integration taking place. Earlier, Home Minister KP Sitaula had also stated that the issue of integration is on the card.

The Prime Minister is believed to have advised the Maoist leaders earlier not to make the integration issue an immediate priority as that might derail the political and peace process including the election to the constituent assembly in April.

Deuba who is next only to Prime Minister GP Koirala in the party hierarchy has often been candid in expressing his views on issues of national importance.

As a result, the Maoist leaders agreed not to make the integration issue a condition for the election to the CA in April. The 23-point agreement signed by top leaders of the seven parties recently simply says that the issue of integration of verified combatants of the Maoist party would be discussed in the special committee of the cabinet, and taken forward as mentioned in the interim constitution.

The interim constitution is equally vague on the issue. The agreement also says that the verified combatants of the Maoists will get all the arrears as per earlier agreement by mid-January, and thereafter, will continue to get a fixed amount every month. ■

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Keep army off politics

Gen Katawal asserts

■ nf correspondent

Nepal Army literally said no to any move to integrate Maoist combatants in the army asserting that the issue is best left to an elected government in future. The clear and categorical assertion was made by Chief of Army Staff, Gen Rookmangat Katawal before his departure to China on a week-long visit, almost a month after he undertook similar trip to India. "Nepal army believes in the sovereignty and supremacy of the Nepali people and is always ready to comply with the instruction and directives of the government which has secured people's mandate," he told media people at the airport.

"To serve Nepal and Nepalis is our dharma and occupation, but the army should be kept above any ism, political ideology and motivation," he said, adding, "We cannot compromise on the issue that the army should be effective, professional, disciplined and respectful to the chain of command." Gen Katawal continued, "Nepal army is always available to contribute

towards consolidation of democratic forces. It will always respect and carry orders of the forces who have secured people's mandate. Nepal army will never compromise on what it has to do to uphold country's unity, independence and integrity under instruction of a government which carries the mandate of the supreme



and sovereign people."

His assertion comes in the wake of reported endorsement by India that integration of the politically motivated Maoist cadres in the Nepal army will not be in the best interest of democracy as well as the Nepal Army. He did not clearly mention if he was going to make any effort to secure China's support

to his belief, and simply said, "It is a goodwill visit in deference to our tradition. I have the endorsement of the Prime Minister as well." There are also speculations that Koirala might undertake a visit to China in near future.

Gen Katawal said there is no other mission of the Nepal Army than to respect people's supremacy and sovereignty besides maintaining national unity, independence and integrity. "But these are being questioned by some sectors now as the burning of our national flag would suggest."

"The country requires a force that promotes national unity national interests, democratic system and respects supremacy and sovereignty of the people," he said, adding that all that the Nepal Army wants is a stable and durable political system which alone can fulfill these basic issues. "Nepal Army, of course will act under directive of such a force, but it should be kept above ism, political ideology and motivation," he asserted. He said Nepal Army belonged to the Nepalis and survived on the taxes the people have paid. ■

Flouted

Maoists violate new agreement

■ nf correspondent

In a systematic campaign that violates the new 23-point agreement, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) have launched a massive extortion drive against schools and businessmen across the country, that brings Maoists intention to allow a fair poll in an atmosphere free from fear under question..

Several private and boarding schools in the capital have been warned over phones, through letters and verbally, to cough up Rs. 100,000 each for the upcoming conference of the Maoist affiliated teachers in Butwal. "Although we have received the demand letter and messages from the Maoist affiliated teachers, we have evidence that top-level leaders of the party are involved in it," an official of the Private and Boarding Schools Organisation of Nepal (PABSON) told newsfront.

All teachers in Butwal and adjoining areas have been asked to donate a month's salary and those defying the demand have been threatened with dire consequences, said the official. "And all this is being done in the name of voluntary donation," he added.

The extortion drive appears as a parallel campaign to what the Young Communist League cadres are doing in different parts of the country. Reports from Mahendra Nagar and other parts of western Nepal suggest that more than a dozen businessmen have been assaulted by the YCL cadres for the alleged non-cooperation from the business sector. Report from



Pix by newsfront

Sankhuwasabha said the YCL cadres beat up an official of the National Investigation Department which falls under the Home Ministry.

"This appears as a determined attempt on the part of the Maoists not to let the election to the constituent assembly happen in April," a cabinet rank-Minister belonging to the Congress party told newsfront further claiming that Prime Minister is aware of it.

Article 17 of the new 23-point agreement in which top leaders of the seven political parties including Prachanda put their signatures barely two weeks ago, states that no action that may obstruct the election or have a negative impact in the process shall be conducted by the political parties and bodies affiliated with them.

It says, "Activists and organisations affiliated with the political parties shall stop immediately activities like using force, weapons, mob etc to levying taxes from tourists, teachers, employees, professional and any other person. Activities like extortion, assault, abduction and confiscation of any type of property will cease immediately." All the signatories to the new agreement had also stated that every party will honour it to ensure a free and fair poll.

The growing cases of assaults on the UML party cadres as well as ordinary people have also triggered sharp protests from many leaders including Madhav

Nepal. "There is no point demanding Prachanda to behave now. They must be countered," he is believed to have instructed his party cadres. Nepal was also critical of his party's student activists for having gone to Prachanda to 'plead for justice.' Nepal said, "you do not beg for justice."

Drunk driver kills

Six killed, many wounded



Niraj Sapkota

■ nf correspondent

At least six people including the principal and three students of a school were killed, when a bus fell off the road near Kakani on January 5. In the accident, 50 are wounded out of which about a dozen are in a critical condition. The tragic incident is suspected have taken place because the driver had been drinking.

Ms Sushila Shakya, teacher Pramila Rai and Mohan Lungeli - a class five student were killed on the spot when the bus fell ten metres below the road near the Okhapauwa area. The driver is absconding. The bus was packed with teachers and students of the Sacred Heart Academy of Swayambhu and was on its way

back to Kathmandu after a day long picnic in Kakani. The bus was carrying altogether 77 students and teachers.

The police suspect that the driver, who is still absconding, was driving under the influence of alcohol. The teaching hospital doctors and medical staff set-up a make-shift unit out in the lobby for injured students as there were not enough beds available in the emergency ward.

Besides the Teaching Hospital, the injured are undergoing treatment at Bir Hospital and the Siddhartha Hospital in the capital. Reports gathered from the hospital said 28 injured students have already been discharged while others are under treatment, most of them for multiple fractures.

Newsbrief

'Sorry' with a difference

Maoist chief Prachanda may have the requisite qualifications to get into the Guinness Book of World Records. He must have said 'sorry' for the highest number of times publicly for the atrocities committed by his cadres, without being able to check their repeated acts of violence and other crimes.

He has done it again but with a difference. Prachanda not only said 'sorry' over the assault of Dipak Gautam, an activist of the All Nepal National Federation of students Union (ANNFSU), a student outfit affiliated to the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), by the Young Communist League cadres, but actually paid a visit to Gautam at the Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu.

But Prachanda's charisma and power to influence even his allies through such 'sories' seems on the decline remarkably. "Was it Prachanda or crocodile shedding the tears?" - Madhav Nepal quipped when he got to know about Prachanda's visit to the hospital.

A delegation of the ANNFSU led by Thakur Gaire had submitted a memorandum to Prachanda protesting against the assault on Gautam by YCL cadres at Kavre on December 31. Prachanda promised that he would find out details of the incident, and as usual, did not fail to assure the delegation that such incidents would not be repeated in future.

Nobel: fresh target

The Nobel Medical College in Biratnagar has made more news than any other medical colleges in Nepal. It has been made a target many times by known and unknown people. Unidentified miscreants planted a pair of socket bombs outside the college reception on January 4. A number of windowpanes and other college property were destroyed when the bombs were detonated by the security personnel.

The college was in the news about two months ago when its Chairman, Dr. Gyanendra Giri was abducted and tortured for

nearly 14 hours by the Young Communist League cadres, apparently at the behest of one Sunil Sharma who is supposed to be very close to Dr. Shekhar Koirala, the nephew of the Prime Minister GP Koirala. Sunil is still absconding despite Koirala's order to Home Minister KP Sitaula personally to have him arrested.

Maoist Chief Prachanda who is personally in command of the YCL activities instructed the valley commander of the YC to apologise for the Nobel kidnapping episode. Officials say they have no clue as yet as to who planted the bombs in front of the college; and they added that the investigation is on.

Polarisation

In what appears like an emerging political scenario in Terai, some Terai outfits are finding it difficult to join the Terai-Madhesh Loktantrik Party (TMLP) which is led and dominated by the upper caste people at the moment.

All this indicates that the UDF is also a strong contender for the leadership of Terai in the emerging political scenario and is not quite comfortable about joining the group led by Mahanth Thakur.

A press statement issued by the UMF on January 6 said all the Madheshis must unite to ensure rights of all the marginalised groups in the country including Madheshis, Dalits, Janajatis and Muslims hinting that the new outfit is also trying to have a pan-national political outfit rather than confining in Terai area alone. It however, welcomed Mahanth Thakur's decision to quit parliament membership to float a new party for the right of Terai.



Less hatred?

US Ambassador Nancy Powell and new Maoist Minister, Pampha Bhsuhal have at least come to a hand-shaking distance or proximity. It is yet to be seen whether Bhsuhal is more likeable to the US than other Maoist leaders; or it is going to adopt a softer policy towards the Maoists in days to come. Information available suggests that the two came together at a meeting organised by the ambassador of a Scandinavian country in the capital recently.

As Bhsuhal is in charge of the Ministry of Women and Child Welfare, she will have to interact a lot with the UNICEF and some of its related activities that are being funded by the US government.

The US embassy's position during Powell's predecessor James F Moriarty suggested that the US would avoid interacting directly with the Maoist ministers while continuing to support and assist the peace process in Nepal. Moriarty had also repeatedly stated that Maoists must give evidence of their honesty and commitment to the peace process and democracy through their conduct and not mere words.

Family business?

Sujata Koirala, Prime Minister GP Koirala's daughter and heir-apparent is likely to be inducted in the cabinet in near future. This is something that the Prime Minister has been exploring these days, a Prime Minister's Office (PMO) source told newsfront.

Sujata, who is in charge of the party's Foreign Affairs cell might be given independent charge of the Ministry of Defense with a Minister of State rank, the source said.



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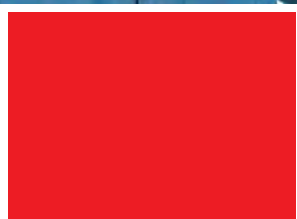
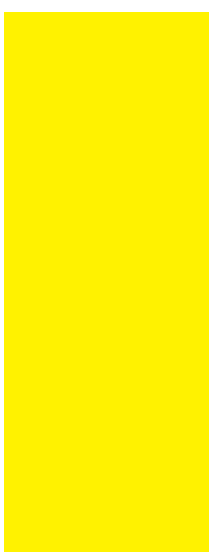
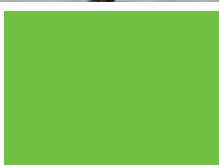
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Point to Ponder

To sin by silence when they should protest, makes cowards of men.
 - Abraham Lincoln

Fraudulent politics

The seven party alliance that rules the country now is using all kinds of tricks to subvert a journey that they embarked on nearly two years ago, to establish peace and democracy in the country.

The people actively participated in the movement called Jana-Andolan II; on pledge from the seven parties and the Maoists that they would together work to end the insurgency and decide on the future constitution and the model of future governance, through free and fair election to the constituent assembly.

All these were scripted in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and later incorporated in the interim constitution. But the CPA that was signed by Prime Minister GP Koirala and Maoist Chief Prachanda in the presence of representatives of the international community including the United Nations has now been reduced to a farce. The recent 23-point agreement signed among the top leaders of the ruling alliance makes the CPA redundant.

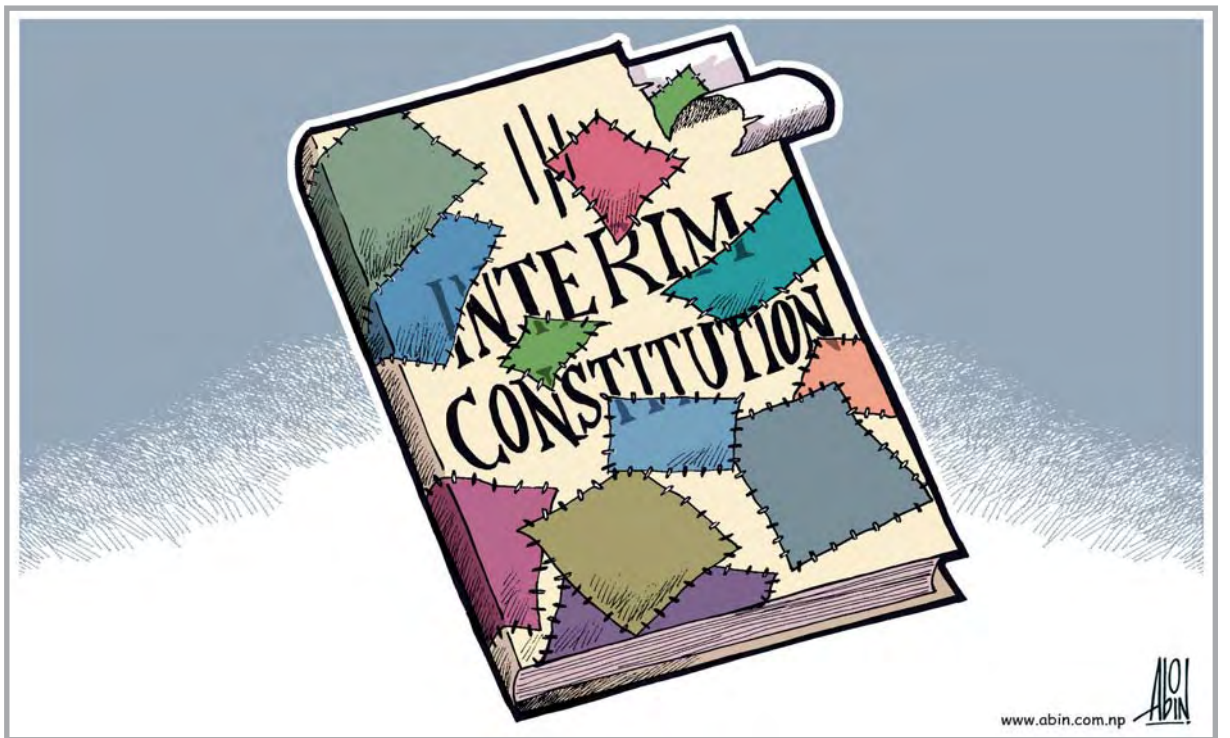
The yet to be formed Truth and Reconciliation Commission will be nothing more than an eye wash and the Maoist party, its leaders and activists would not have to face any consequences for the rampant human rights violations committed during the years of insurgency. It was on that condition that the Maoists' return to the government, ostensibly to ensure CA election in mid-April was facilitated.

All the cases of murders, abductions and torture committed from the Maoists' side will be withdrawn within a month. But there is no such undertaking to withdraw cases of similar nature by the state agencies. Once all cases against the Maoists are withdrawn totally exonerating the party for gross human rights violation, the TRC will have no jurisdiction to open the cases against them at a later stage.

Condoning gross human rights violation cases should not be acceptable in any society which believes in the rule of law. But the government led by GP Koirala that survives on the support of the Maoist has done just that. This also goes clearly against the slogan of the present regime that it is out to do away with the culture of impunity that was in practice in the country.

No doubt, the international communities including the OHCHR as well as major human rights organisations in the country have adopted dual standards on the issues of human rights violations depending upon whether they were committed during the previous regime or under the rule of the seven parties.

These bodies without exception have kept silent when the Rayamajhi commission, an out and out political commission, unleashed a campaign of persecution against a certain set of people, in a brazenly partisan and political manner. An en block exoneration of insurgents for human rights violation means a set of HR violators being treated differently. That only amounts to playing fraud and cheating the people in the name of democracy and peace process.



Letters

Jung Prachanda

I agree completely with Mr. Ghimire's point of view and applaud his references to Nepali history. Actually Prachanda's fascination with Buddha is quite understandable. After all, don't opposites attract? Like Mr. Ghimire writes, Lord Buddha promoted equality and unity through non-violence. Mr. Prachanda is doing a marvelous job of achieving neither peace nor unity even after resorting to violent means and having forced our country into more than ten years of civil war.

Frankly, I wouldn't be surprised if Prachanda went and staged another Jungbahadur-esque massacre. It would be very like him. How can you trust a man who denounces a treaty less than a week after he signed it? Have we Nepalis sunk down so low that we are actually considering giving the proverbial keys of our nation to him?

■ **Aakash**
Kathmandu

Victims of hatred

The fact that the government is most worried about the status of the disappeared Maoist combatants is rational. One should worry because 8,640 is a large number and we do not know why they are missing. These combatants are trained to use ammunition and it could also be a possibility that they are planning something.

Even if we raise questions about the reliability of UNMIN's reports, it's not that we haven't witnessed or heard about child recruits being used in wars. Some



of these children might be members and leaders of YCL and other organisations in their communities, but most of them are victims of hatred and distrust in the same community. These children have equal rights to live as freely as any other child, and given the opportunities they deserve. But, who is going to guarantee their security, their future, and treat their completely politicised minds?

■ **Santosh**
Kathmandu

Killing reality

License to kill by Pasang Dolma Sherpa reflects the reality of the day. Although as some one who has lived in Bangkok for years, I know things are not different here than in Nepal. The 'driving examiner' fails those appearing for the trial for umpteen number of times until he or she has made enough money out

of the 'retakes'. I agree that such issues must be taken up and corruption should have no place in grant of the license. It is a good article to raise awareness.

■ **Andy**
London

Timely edit

Your editorial 'Judicial emasculation' was very appropriate and timely. The Supreme Court is no more an apex representative of the judiciary, and it is only increasingly becoming the extended organ under the executive. Judiciary's independence was subverted completely the day Kedar Prasad Giri was nominated as the Chief Justice by the Prime Minister after the parliamentary hearing had failed to endorse him.

Giri is more like Koirala's Chief Justice now, as his appointment is much against the provision of the constitution. But as your editorial rightly points out, this judiciary can not go against the government on crucial cases for the simple reason that we have an Executive's or the Prime Minister's representative as the Chief Justice; and his first loyalty will be towards the Prime Minister, not for the constitution.

■ **Ramesh Thapaliya**
Bishal Nagar, Kathmandu

Readers, your reactions, criticisms, comments, suggestions are most welcome. Please address it to:

newsfront@bhrikuti.com

Spiritual Corner

Active meditation

Hakuin Ekaku (1686-1769) was one of the most influential figures in Japanese Zen Buddhism. He revived the Rinzai School from a moribund period of stagnation, refocusing it on its traditionally rigorous training methods integrating meditation and Koan practice. Hakuin's influence was such that all Rinzai Zen masters today trace their lineage through him, and all modern practitioners of Rinzai Zen use practices directly derived from his teachings.

The most important and influential teaching of Hakuin was his emphasis on, and systemisation of Koan practice. Hakuin deeply believed that the most effective way for a student to achieve insight was through extensive meditation on a Koan. The psychological pressure and doubt that comes when one struggles with a Koan is meant to create tension that leads to awakening. Hakuin called

this the "great doubt", writing, "At the bottom of great doubt lies great awakening. If you doubt fully, you will awaken fully." Only with incessant investigation of their Koan will a student be able to become one with the Koan and attain enlightenment.

Much of Hakuin's practice focused, as his teachings did, on Zazen and Koan practice. His motto was, "Meditation in the midst of activity is a thousand times superior to meditation in stillness." Hakuin's experiences of enlightenment seemed to come at unexpected moments, often when he was



just walking or reading. One experience that he wrote about took place while he was walking through a torrential rain.

As the water reached his knees, he suddenly realised the meaning of a particular verse that he had read earlier, and was seized by enlightenment. He had many such experiences. Laughter was a large part of Hakuin's reaction to his enlightenment, and he was known to burst into spontaneous laughter upon realising the essence of a particular Koan, causing those around him to believe him to be a madman.

Hakuin's early extreme exertions affected his health, and at one point in his young life he fell ill for almost

two years, experiencing what would now probably be classified as a nervous breakdown by western medicine. He called it Zen sickness, and sought the advice of a Taoist cave dwelling hermit named Hakuyu, who prescribed a visualisation and breathing practice which eventually relieved his symptoms.

From this point on, Hakuin put a great deal of importance on physical strength and health in his Zen practice, and studying Hakuin-style Zen required a great deal of stamina. Hakuin often spoke of strengthening the body by concentrating the spirit, and followed this advice himself. Well into his seventies, he claimed to have more physical strength than he had at age thirty, being able to sit in Zazen meditation or chant sutras for an entire day without fatigue. The practices Hakuin learned from Hakuyu are still passed down within the Rinzai School.

Binod P. Bista



Nepal perhaps is one of the pioneers in promoting employment in foreign lands for her people. Though the significance of the policy of foreign employment dawned on the people quite recently, particularly during the Maoist struggle, despite early criticisms and objections against this policy by most nationalists, Nepal had adopted the practice much earlier.

Immediately after Nepal opened to the outside world and sometime after the first bout of freedom from Rana oligarchy, residents of remote areas such as Manang, Mustang had been awarded appropriate passports by the then monarch of Nepal enabling them to travel and engage in trading in Hong Kong, then under lease with the UK.

These Nepali residents had been given special privilege as their country hardly provided any means of life support to them. Nepal seems to have made a choice of foreign trade vis a vis employment instead of providing these hard working people with alternate jobs within the country.

Movement of labor gained tremendous importance after the Second World War and with the coming of the European Union. Though there still seem to be some sort of barriers against free movement of Europeans within the EU for jobs, this aspect has been gaining increasing importance everywhere including in Asia. The question on free movement of persons has been repeatedly debated in all regional groupings such as ASEAN, SAARC, and NAFTA.

With the Chinese economic prowess, and now with booming India's economic strength, these two giants alone can absorb a majority of manpower of their neighbors in the region now being utilised by the affluent East Asian economies and the oil exporting countries of the Middle East.

The importance and value of foreign employment is better understood by Nepal, which, despite a decade long insurgency coupled with rampant corruption and stagnant economic growth, managed to lower its poverty level by a huge ten

percent. Over 1.5 billion American dollars worth of remittance has not only supported Nepal's sagging economy but also helped promote and develop remittance agencies, finance companies and banks.

This resource has also boosted the real estate sector of Nepal remarkably. Air travel has picked up good momentum, and Nepalis seem to be traveling more frequently not only for employment but also for holidays and leisure. A new Nepal is rapidly emerging.

As with every activity, this rosy picture, too, has its dark side. Recent news puts 500 deaths of Nepali workers last year in the gulf countries alone. Of which more than fifty percent death seems to have occurred due to hazardous jobs and road accidents. The number of suicide cases is placed at about ten percent of the total in one year. This figure, if true, is certainly alarming and requires serious attention of the regulatory agency of the government and the manpower agencies working as contractors of the foreign employers.

A recent experience in one of the air transit terminals in a gulf country

says it all. The laborers are herded like a flock of sheep in the terminals; left to defend themselves against lurking predators found in such places; placed in lounges and around without food for many hours simply to board another flight.

When the scheduled flight is cancelled, these laborers are at the mercy of the airlines which are supposed to provide reasonable lodging and boarding arrangements. What they mostly get is the terminal lounge without a food coupon (unless the group fights for it) if they are lucky and their contractor is normally out of sight, perhaps drinking and dining with the airline ground staff.

With a view to regulating the recruitment agencies and taking action against those which exploit laborers, an office of commissioner of NRI (non resident Indians) has been recently set up in Goa, India. The Indian government has ensured that in order to protect workers' rights, both sides - sending and receiving

countries, are taking requisite measures. While this seems to be good news for the Indian laborers of Goa, what is the Nepal government doing to protect the rights of its laborers?

Foreign employment for Nepal has now become a necessity considering the transition period that is well ahead of the country. One comes across news after news of the government passing newer legislations followed by several regulations. Has it improved the rights and welfare of Nepali laborers traveling in hordes to foreign countries for employment? Certainly not! How can Nepal ignore its labor force in foreign countries which generates sufficient revenue providing essential social security to its family which the government has conveniently ignored citing reasons of paucity of resources, among others?

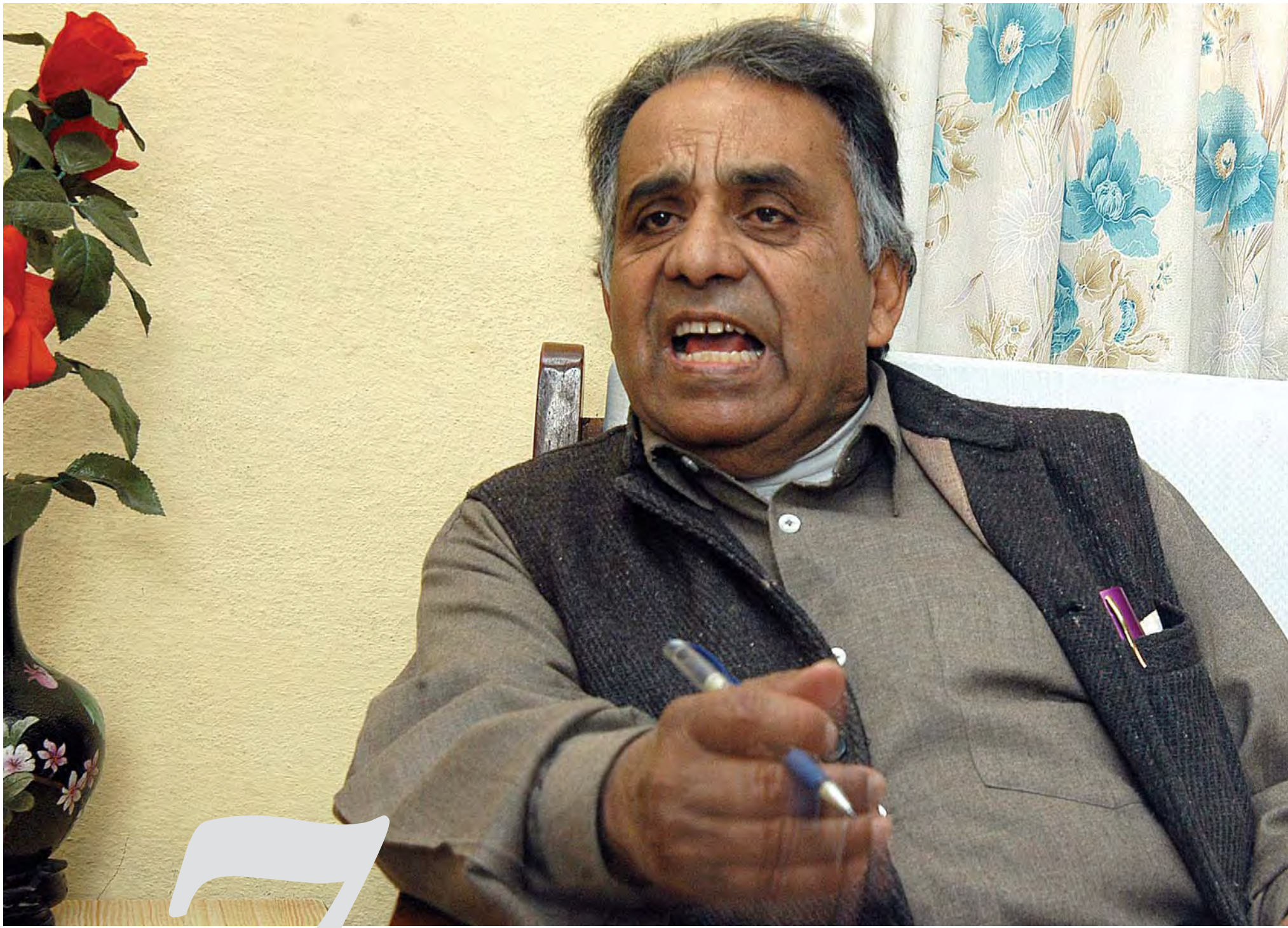
A new approach that truly promotes the welfare of the laborers, institutes mechanisms to prevent unscrupulous employment agencies exploiting the laborers, including agreements between countries based on standard international practice, seems to be the need of the hour.

NEPALI LABORERS abroad

Recent news puts 500 deaths of Nepali workers last year in the gulf countries alone.



Nepali workers in Qatar:
On demand and at risk



Pix by Bhaswar Ojha

SEVEN PARTY autocracy

This country faces the threat of a civil war. There is total erosion of the authority of the state.

Damannath Dhungana has never suppressed the voice of his conscience. As a Congress leader, he was one of the first to demand 'dialogue' with the Maoists. He was again in the forefront of the civil society led movement when King Gyanendra took over. Once again, Dhungana has come out openly against the 'authoritarian and undemocratic' activities of the present government and the interim parliament. Excerpts of his interview with **Yubaraj Ghimire**:

How do you analyse the political situation following handing over of power by the king to the seven party alliance and the Maoists?

We are in a very unpleasant and difficult situation now. The ordinary people who sacrificed so much and handed over the power to the leaders are feeling betrayed. The current leadership apparently learnt no lessons from the past.

Are you annoyed with Nepali Congress since it leads the present government as well?

Certainly, the leadership is in the hand of

Nepali Congress. But it had never been so weak before. Even during the Panchayat regime when the king was trying to stall democracy by using the communists, it was not all that weak. It once again has become a common target of many forces.

Does this mean that the prospects of democracy have also become weaker?

That is my biggest worry at the moment. I have always been involved in 'democracy building.' But our movement failed to throw an alternative leadership. It was a big mistake on our part to hand over monopoly power to the seven parties.

How do you rate the performance of the present government as well as the interim parliament, especially in the context of the people's movement?

The main objective of the people's movement was to make the people sovereign. We thought bringing Maoists to the political mainstream at any cost would solve all the problems of the country. We did not feel it necessary to implement provisions of the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA). There was no

monitoring mechanism or process set up. Maoists were not at all made accountable. And on top of that, the Madhesh problem emerged.

But the government and the Maoists have now signed a fresh 23-point agreement.

It does not address the Madhesh problem. Moreover, there is nothing new in this 23-point agreement. This is only a face saving device that GP Koirala has given to the Maoists to return to the government. But our experience has shown that the Maoists are very good in breaking their promises. They broke their promises earlier by walking away from the government in September. They defied the interim constitution. That is why their 'commitment' does not quite convince me.

What do you think went wrong after the seven parties came to power?

I think our journey up to the point of drafting the interim constitution was right. But we faltered within months by not holding elections in June- a deadline the interim constitution had set for the purpose. Except for the model and process of election for the Constituent Assembly (CA), every other important issue should have



But how should the monarchy be treated now?

I am not in favour of any space being given to the king. I have already stated that the country has somehow moved towards republicanism. But the interim parliament and some political parties are now provoking the king, inviting him to join the confrontation. They are challenging him to create a space for himself. I am sure tomorrow someone will ask him to quit the palace (*This interview was taken before Minister Deb Gurung had made such a call*). How long will this country run grappling with such non-issues?

Obviously, in a republic, people will be sovereign and run the business of the country and their representative would be running the highest executive office. But it is not necessary to abolish the monarchy outright. He could be a symbol or representative of our traditions and heritage. He could even administer the oath of office to the Prime Minister. I have no objection to that. We could easily settle things by honouring the monarchy, and not by abolishing him.

What possibility do you see for the election taking place in April?

The issue has not yet been settled. Nepali Congress has failed to take issues on major issues, and conceded too much to the Maoists. People have not taken kindly the decision of the seven parties including the Maoists to have a House of 601. I do not see any loyalty of the parties including the Maoists towards the interim constitution. As I have already stated, mere signing of the agreement does not inject fresh hope.

Are you questioning the legitimacy of the process, or the intent of the parties in the ruling alliance?

Interim constitution is the property of the nation and the people. It might contain many lapses. But it cannot be tampered with or used in a high-handed manner. Maoists are subverting it now. They did subvert the constitution of 1991 during the insurgency in the past. They are subverting the present constitution from inside today. They must be very clear and truthful whether they want to be part of the democratic set-up or not. Their actions indicate that they have come to finish democracy or make it impossible as in Pakistan.

Unfortunately, Nepali Congress has not been able to understand or negate that campaign. Elections are being postponed repeatedly. Maoists have not come to the democratic fold. There is no clarity on the basic process of election. There is no way one can feel confident about election taking place in April. GP and Maoists both have proven to be promise breakers in the past. The 23-point agreement alone does not create atmosphere for polls.

What will be the outcome if the government- that now includes the Maoists- fails to honour its commitment yet again?

These parties have become representatives of the vested interest. The civil society has also become a part of the power clique in one form or the other. But there is an undercurrent of disapproval of the authoritarian tendency of the seven parties coming to the fore. That will expose the seven parties. In the worst scenario, it might lead the country to anarchy and total vacuum. Maoists, in its haste to re-join the government have totally undermined the people. It did not even insist for a round table conference as they were in a hurry to get back to power.

A drift towards vacuum also might invite serious humanitarian interven-

Interim constitution is the property of the nation and the people. It might contain many lapses. But it cannot be tampered with or used in a high-handed manner. Maoists are subverting it now. They did subvert the constitution of 1991 during the insurgency in the past. They are subverting the present constitution from inside today.

tion. We are in a dangerous situation. We have not tried to address the issue of Terai. What happens if violence increases there? There is China, US and there is India which will naturally have a bigger concern than the others. There is not only a situation of a breakdown of law and order machinery but the country faces threat of a civil war. There is total erosion of the authority of the state.

What could be the best way to avert that drift?

The role that we gave to the United Nations could not prove to be effective. Either there should be an international initiative, of course led by India, or the PM should initiate a national dialogue. We have no dearth of people who represent the national conscience. Those in parliament now are mere litigants. The negative competition that we see in the current politics must be stopped.

People are inching closer towards a struggle against the very leaders who they handed over power to. Even the media contributed in making these seven parties authoritarian by supporting them in almost everything they did; in the same manner that the media supported the king during the Panchayat regime.

been left to CA for settlement. I am sure the CA will have the best brains.

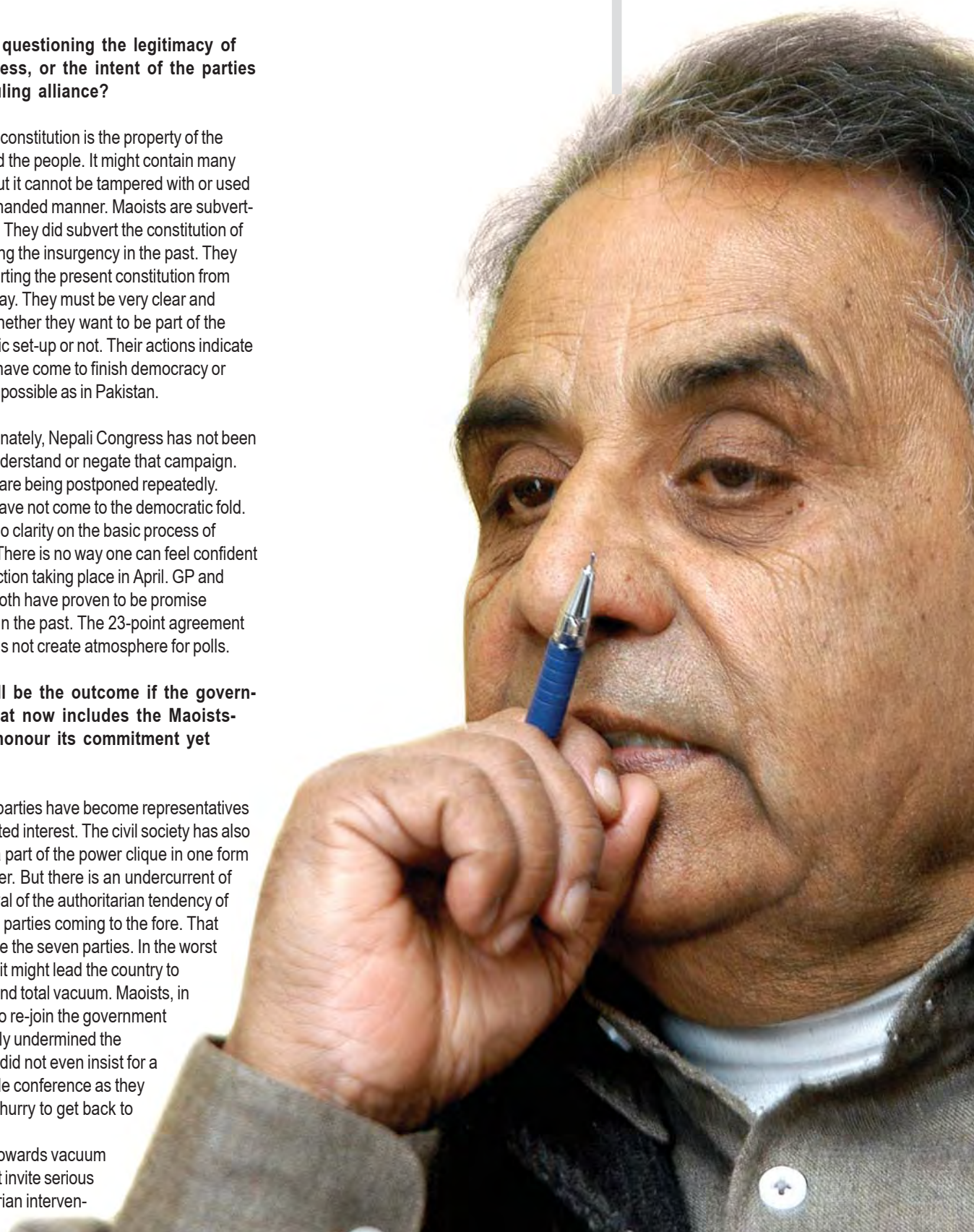
This could have been a process of tough bargain between those demanding and those conceding. It would have led to a proper understanding. But we adopted a process of settling every issue 'now'. Let us for instance take the example of the decision of the interim parliament to declare the country a federal republic 'now'. Since the interim constitution had clearly stated that the first meeting of the CA would decide on the issue of monarchy, it is wrong to bypass that in the manner it happened.

Was not the people's movement for republic Nepal?

I am very clear in my mind that democracy has suffered a lot in the hands of the kings in Nepal. Its' journey towards republicanism began way back in 1960 December when King Mahendra made an onslaught on the elected parliament.

But as Nepali Congress leadership has always been moderate in their approach, we followed that legacy even this time. That is why it was decided to have a CA decide on major issues; and all these issues like monarchy, secularism and federalism, are the subject matter of the CA.

It is clearly a pre-mediated judgment on the part of the interim parliament to declare Nepal a republic now. It has encroached upon the jurisdiction of the constituent assembly. CA is the highest court of the people. There could be litigants within it - some favouring continuation of the monarchy in one form or the other, and there could be others for republicanism. What the interim parliament has done now is like a unilateral verdict delivered by one section of the litigants on behalf of that court.



■ Siddhartha Thapa



The possibilities of elections happening are slim. Although the Election Commission may be

in a position to clear all technical hitches that might have stood as an obstacle to pave way for elections, political difficulties and issues still remain unsolved and these unsolved political issues are most likely to stand as obstacles for the upcoming elections.

More than fifty percent of the electoral constituencies are in the Terai. After 1999, that is when the last elections happened, the Maoist insurgency escalated. As a result, there was a political vacuum in the Terai and the Maoists took advantage of the situation and filled in the vacuum in Terai. Early this year, a forceful agitation erupted in the Terai that symbolically altered the political dynamics of Terai. Consequently, all political parties, more significantly the Maoists lost their base in the Terai. Ever since, the Indians have been insisting that the Prime Minister move the Nepali Congress in the Terai and fill the vacuum there. However, due to Maoists' pressure and Sitaula's maneuvering in collaboration with the Maoists, Nepali Congress failed to enter the Terai.

India, on the other hand has had to reconsider her strategy vis-à-vis Nepal. It now becomes apparent that an issue such as 'national security' is more of a priority than democratising Nepal. The Indian Prime Minister recently described the Maoist problem in India as the greatest threat to their national security. The Indian establishment is particularly worried that should the Maoist regain ground in the Terai, the neighboring states that are vulnerable (Bihar, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh) would

Reality check



Girija and the present government have lost the steam and momentum to either hold elections or solve the Maoist problem.

ultimately fall into the hands of a greater Maoist movement. This is because the RIM dictates the Maoists and concurrently the RIM initially wants the Maoists to establish total control in Nepal before attempting to make further inroads into India from their perceived base in Nepal.

After Mahanta Thakur quit the Nepali Congress, GP Koirala called a meeting of the NC, UML, and CPN-M high command. In that meeting, it is learnt that GP Koirala had told both Prachanda and Madhav Nepal point blank that India was now scheming designs to remove all of them out from power. Having gauged the political developments wrongly, GP Koirala

initiated the 23 point agreement out of annoyance towards India.

On the other hand, the Maoists realised that a serious crisis of confidence had emerged between GP Koirala and India; and naturally the Maoists capitalised on this situation and forced their way through the agreement. Secondly, GP is now more reliant on the Maoists because he has now distanced himself from India, Nepali Congress and other democratic forces. And the Maoists have given him assurances to back him lest he yield to their demands. Therefore, the importance and relevance of Sitaula can be best explained by concluding that Girija

now depends heavily on the Maoists to propose his name as the first president and for that matter, Sitaula is Girija's main man.

For the Maoists, the 12 point agreement and all other consequent agreements are a catalyst through which they aim to achieve their revolutionary goals. For that matter even the elections are a catalyst through which the Maoists aim to achieve their revolutionary goal. Like Baburam Bhattarai recently commented, "We do not want to participate in an election we will lose." When the agreement was signed there were two other agreements that have not been made public: seat sharing agreement in which both the NC and UML are to give some seats to the Maoists and; a Finance Ministry source has confirmed that the GPK government has allocated the Maoists a substantial amount of money that amounts in millions as a compromise for their participation in the polls.

But more importantly, elections will only make sense to the Maoists if they can win and implement their revolutionary ideals. However, if they lose the elections, their revolution would have ended and their purpose of participating in the elections to achieve their revolutionary goals would also have failed. Similarly, an electoral defeat would also put the party in a crisis both ideologically and politically.

There are two other hurdles: YCL and the relocation of internally displaced people. Firstly, it is unlikely that YCL are going to mend their ways. Since the PLA are locked inside the cantonment, YCL is the only force through which the Maoists can demonstrate their machismo in the street and mobilise force during elections. It is very unlikely that the Maoist high command would put pressure on YCL to curtail their unruly attitude because the Maoists high command rely on them as their

only effective organisation to organise both violence and to mobilise cadres for elections. Since the Maoists have come closer to knowing that they are more unpopular than they think they are, the Maoists rely very heavily on the YCL to force people to support them either through force or intimidation.

The other last hurdle is the relocation of the internally displaced people. The internally displaced people are primarily the cadres of Nepali Congress and the UML. In the last ten years when the army and the PLA fought in rural Nepal, people left in exodus in search of safer places. Unfortunately, the Maoists cadres are cultivating empty fields and have taken in possession of thousands of empty houses across Nepal as theirs. Today, due to the government's indifference there is growing disillusionment towards NC and UML as both these parties have failed to protect their displaced cadres who are also now considering associating themselves with other political parties or launching a political movement simultaneously with the Terai movement.

Everyone knows that the possibility of elections happening is remote. The Maoists will walk out of the government in a couple of months when it becomes obvious that elections are not possible. After quitting the government, the Maoists will try to position themselves as the alternate and try to capture state power yet again. On the other hand, blaming the Maoists solely will not solve the problems. GPK and the present government have lost the steam and momentum to either hold elections or solve the Maoist problem. Not only has Girija succumbed to the communists and committed a political suicide but; he has also dragged Nepali Congress and now efforts are underway to drag the Nepal Army into complete destruction to pave way for the communists to capture state power. ■

BOOK REVIEW

■ Tara Dahal

Mike Moore, "How Does Taxation Affect Quality of Governance?" Working Paper 280. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, April 2007, PP. 39.

The old saying "no taxation without representation," is as important now as it was important in the past for the establishment of representative governance. The tax system establishes the entitlement of citizenship rights to governance. But, the connection of tax to responsive governance has long been ignored by policy scientists and decision-makers. This study, thus, makes a great contribution to development studies.

Prof. Mike Moore defines governance to, "refer to outcome and to the political process that generate these outcomes: the manner in which state elites acquire and use their power and authority" (p. 14). Many develop-

Links between taxation and governance

ing countries do not rely much on tax for their development because they have easy flow of foreign aid. Others have alternative source of income such as oil, gas, mineral export, forest products, remittances, etc.

Still others rely on non-tax income for their survival and progress. The weak institutional capabilities of the governments to diversity the source of public revenue have weakened their ability to provide public goods and services that markets do not have the capacity and authority to provide. Internal sovereignty of the government on setting priority largely depends on its capacity to muster critical minimum resources from its own source of revenue.

Prof. Moore argues that if the state is not dependent on citizens for its basic financial resources, it can easily undermine the quality of governance because ruling elites become independent of citizens. In such a condition they become less and less transparent, responsive and accountable. Poor tax base is thus associated with incapacity of state to design their sovereign social,

political, economic and foreign policies.

Likewise, a democratic state is embedded in society and is autonomous of the powerful interest groups. Autonomy of the state from the social, economic and political interest of the needy citizens implies that they have

This study rediscovers the links between taxation and governance.

no control over the state's priority, policy and programs.

This study rediscovers the links between taxation and governance. Prof. Moore unveils answers to three cardinal questions regarding the amount of tax government should collect, distribution of the burden of tax among the citizens and minimisation of the adverse economic costs of taxation on society and economy. Adverse economic costs for

the citizens might provoke resistance causing political turmoil. Negotiation between the state and society is, therefore, highly important. Public revenue as a form of tax determines the nature of state, its apparatuses, state-society relations and mechanism to make the state responsive to citizens.

How governments tax is central consideration for state-society equilibrium. Democratic governments tend to foster this equilibrium while non-democratic ones lays stress on the primacy of the state's only coercive mechanism and face various forms of opposition causing regime instability and crisis of governance.

Prof. Moore is critical of the role of International Monetary Fund (IMF) because it has the capacity to undermine "governance in the long-run by encouraging, however, unintentionally, tax collection practices that worsens relations between states and citizens" (P. 29). He equally blames the aid regime arguing that "provision of large aid volumes without taking steps to encourage the

expansion of (efficient) domestic revenue-raising capacity in the long-run is irresponsible" (P. 31). This means internal tax collection efforts and external development cooperation should complement each other.

Both the regimes undermine the politics of compromise and consensus that democratic governance foster. Because increasing alienation of the governments from the interest, values and experiences of people decreases the level of trust and withdrawal of their consent. He, therefore, defends a more "consensual taxation" practices to improve the quality of governance. This study mainly based on the experiences of developing countries is historically grounded on the literatures of developed countries of Europe, rich in content and innovative in analysis. It is useful for all those who want to understand the importance of fiscal sociology and its contribution to good governance. ■

Musharraf: Bhutto responsible for her death

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf has admitted for the first time that opposition leader Benazir Bhutto may have been shot by a gunman, but said she bore responsibility for her death.

Facing intense criticism over his government's explanation of her slaying, Musharraf told the US television network CBS in an interview that the former prime minister should not have stood up in her car as she left a rally.

"For standing up outside the car, I think it was she to blame alone. Nobody else. Responsibility is hers," he told CBS, according to a partial transcript of an interview to be broadcast Sunday.

Bhutto, leader of the opposition Pakistan People's Party, was murdered as she left a campaign rally on December 27 ahead of elections which were to have been held this month.

The government has said she died smashing her head on the lever of the car sunroof when a suicide bomber blew himself up nearby, killing about 20 people — an explanation



that has been widely ridiculed.

Party aides who were with her at the time insist she died from a

gunshot to the head, and video footage taken at the time appear to confirm a gunman fired at her.

Her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, refused to allow an autopsy before she was buried.

Musharraf admitted to the CBS programme "60 Minutes" that a gunshot could, in fact, have been the cause of Bhutto's fatal injuries.

Asked if Bhutto might have been shot, Musharraf answered: "Yes, absolutely, yes. Possibility."

He added that his government did everything possible to protect Bhutto, in the face of death threats she had received.

"You have to remember: She had the threat. So she was given more security than any other person," the Pakistan president said.

His comments came as British anti-terrorism police begin examining evidence in Bhutto's assassination after being asked by Musharraf to assist in the probe and help dispel criticism of the government.

Meanwhile the national elections originally scheduled for January 8 have now been pushed back until February 18.

(*Inquirer.net*)

Suharto's health improving

Indonesia's ex-leader Suharto is showing some signs of improvement after reports of his critical condition, a hospital official says.

"Suharto's condition is now showing some progress. In general, (he is) still weak," Djoko Sanjoto, acting director of Pertamina Hospital, told a news conference.

"The heart and lungs have shown some improvements, excess liquid in the whole body has started to decrease, especially in the lungs," he added.

Suharto, 86, was taken to hospital on Friday with symptoms of anemia and low blood pressure. His health deteriorated rapidly on Saturday, and he was given hemodialysis to remove excess liquid from his body.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was among those who visited Suharto at the hospital.

Suharto, who ruled Indonesia for 32 years, was ousted from power in 1998. Though accused of corruption, he has not yet stood trial due to his poor health in recent years.

(*Presstv*)

Tamil rebel Intelligence Chief shot dead



Sri Lanka's police stand guard at the scene of a claymore mine explosion suspected to have been caused by Tamil rebels in Vavuniya December 27, 2007.

Sri Lankan soldiers shot dead the head of military intelligence for the Tamil rebels in an ambush in the country's northern province, a Defense Ministry spokesman said.

Shanmuganathan Ravishankar was killed, along with 20 other members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, when the soldiers ambushed a van in which he was traveling in the Adampan area of Mannar, spokesman Udaya Nanayakkara said in a telephone interview from the capital Colombo. "There was a heavy exchange of artillery and mortar fire. He was shot dead by the soldiers."

Ravishankar was in charge of "internal intelligence" of Tamil ground forces and led a regular combat force that has been deployed in the Mannar region, TamilNet reported on its Web site. Three of his lieutenants were also killed in the "claymore mine

ambush," it said.

Sri Lanka on Jan. 2 announced its plan to formally withdraw from a 2002 cease-fire accord, saying the Tamil rebels had used the cease-fire to rearm, recruit and prepare further attacks on the South Asian island. Norway, which brokered the agreement, said it may have to withdraw international cease-fire monitors, weakening efforts to protect the civilian population.

The Tamil Tigers, designated a terrorist group by the U.S., the European Union and India, have been fighting for 24 years in a conflict that has killed more than 70,000 people. The group hasn't commented on the government's decision to end the truce.

Fighting intensified in late 2006 in the country's north and east after two rounds of peace talks failed.

(*Bloomberg*)

U.S. says N.K. yet to provide nuclear declaration

North Korea has yet to provide a full declaration of its nuclear programs despite its reference to having done so in November, the White House said Friday.

"Unfortunately, we have not yet received a complete and correct declaration, and we urge North Korea to deliver one soon so that we can all get the benefits offered in the six-party process," spokesman Gordon Johndroe told reporters. At the State Department, spokesman Sean McCormack also he U.S. was "still waiting" for the declaration and expects it to include the controversial uranium weapons program.

The North Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), quoting an unnamed foreign ministry official, said Pyongyang had drawn up the declaration in November and "notified" the United States of it. The report said North Korea also had additional consultations with Washington.

South and North Korea, the U.S., China, Russia and Japan are members of the six-party talks aimed at denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. Through a series of agreements, Pyongyang agreed to eventually give up its atomic weapons in return for political and economic benefits, such as diplomatic normalization with Washington and Tokyo.

Described as "action for action," the agreements lay out interim steps that required North Korea to disable its key nuclear facilities and submit a declaration detailing its nuclear stockpile and proliferation activities by



North and South Korean soldiers stand guard in the Demilitarized Zone in Panmunjom as seen from the North Korean side of the border.

the end of 2007.

Other parties would reciprocate by supplying energy aid, and the U.S. was to remove North Korea from the list of terrorism-sponsoring states, a measure that prohibits bilateral exchanges between them.

Christopher Hill, top U.S. nuclear envoy to the six-party talks, said there was discussion with Pyongyang about the contents of the declaration but that he does not regard it as the final disclosure.

"We've been notified about some of the contents," Kyodo quoted him as saying at the airport before leaving

for Asia. "But when we receive a declaration, first of all, the declaration should be received by the chairman of the six-party talks — the Chinese."

Hill was in Pyongyang last month and is said to have pressed North Korean officials to include all the required details in the declaration. U.S. officials said Pyongyang wanted to hand over the declaration to Washington, possibly to make the issue a bilateral one, but Hill made a point of ensuring that it is given to China.

Instead, Hill and the North Koreans discussed the contents as "reference material," they said.

The KCNA report said North Korea still hopes for "smooth implementation" of the six-party deals but blamed others for not meeting their obligations, such as a delay in fuel delivery and removal from the terrorism list.

"Looking back, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea stands foremost ahead in implementation among the six parties," it said. "Regarding the nuclear declaration that some are wrongfully making an issue of, we have already done what is required."

The White House said it was "skeptical" after Pyongyang missed the year-end deadline on the declaration, but U.S. officials have reaffirmed the six-party process will continue, that they still expect the North to submit a "full and complete" disclosure of its nuclear programs.

(*Yonhap*)

Undistorted teachings

The Buddha also warned very clearly that there are false Samadhis which do not lead to the enlightenment.

Marshland Flowers

■ Mahayogi Acharya Sridhar Rana Rinpoche

The Buddha defined clearly what enlightenment was and what false enlightenment was. He analysed and classified various levels of Samadhis and the elements found in them. He also warned very clearly that there are false Samadhis.

For example, in places like Tibet, Mongolia, Korea and Japan it would be foolish to continue wearing the scanty dress of the Bhikchhus, which the Buddha had devised for the hot climate of Madhyadesha (central north India); nor would it be sane to expect Bhikchhus to walk barefoot in such countries, as the Buddha had insisted upon the Bhikchhus of Madhyadesha. So these minor rules would have to be changed in accordance with the intention of the Dharma and the Buddha. To insist that Bhikchhus of Tibet walk barefoot would actually be going against the intentions of the teaching of the Dharma and Buddha.

Then we have the third Pitaka which are more a collection of the logical and analytical, thus philosophical teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha defined clearly what enlightenment was and what false enlightenment was. He analysed and classified various levels of Samadhis and the elements found in them. He also warned very clearly that there are false Samadhis which do not lead to the enlightenment that the Buddha meant.

He broke down and classified all the



elements of the world (Sansar) and of the sentient beings, material, non-material and mental. He classified Vipassyana and Samatha and their

levels. All such things were recorded in the Abhidharma. So in the Abhidharma, we also find a very fine and detailed classification of what is

today called the Psi phenomena. So these are the Tripitaka which consists of the teachings of the Buddha, as handed down from generation to generation.

Various councils (Sanghayanas) were held at various periods of times to check and maintain the purity of the teachings, and to ensure no unnecessary false elements were allowed to enter the teachings. Thus even from the scholarly transmission point of view, the purity of the teachings were maintained as far as it is humanely possible. It can certainly be said that no major tenets of Buddhism were changed or distorted.

Thus the major tenets of Buddhism like the four Arya Satya; the 12 chains of interdependence (Dwadasha nidana); Samatha and Vipassyana; the classification of universe (Sansar) as the Pancha Skandha (aggregates); 12 doors (12 Ayatanas); the 18 Dhatus; the 3 doors of liberation; the 8 freedoms; the teachings on Shilas, Samadhi and Pragya collectively known as Tri Sikhya; i.e. the three teachings, etc. are all to be found in all forms of Buddhism.

(To be continued)
(Sridhar Rinpoche is a Vajrayana Master)

देशको तात्कालीन कार्यदिशाका बारेमा तपाईं के सोच्दै हुनुहुन्छ ?

अनि राजनेताहरु के सोच्दै होलान् ?

शुभशंकर कँडेलको साथमा विशिष्ट व्यक्तित्वको दृष्टिकोण कार्यक्रम

OUTLOOK मा

हरेक शनिवार साँझ ८:१५ बजे मात्र सगरमाथा टेलिभिजनमा

सगरमाथा
समाचारको शिखर नेपालको गौरव

FIREFRONT

Journeys within

You feel the difference once you have traveled

■ Yuyutsu RD Sharma

friends remarked.



Journeys are crucial to the makeup of a creative writer and his world.

Journeys make us better human beings. They make you understand the basic facets of humanity that otherwise you might simply ignore or generalise.

The actual feel of the landscape and the people in it gives you a vision of what postcard simplicity or a touristy television show might not offer. As the New Year approaches, my visions of the days spent in London on the New Year eve last year and the recent visit to Helumbu where I witnessed a ritual ceremony in a monastery made me understand the difference that these tourist destinations offer.

Journeys made in the outer world cause a dramatic transformation within. You move out to turn deeper within. The paradox of journeys is most vividly described in our folklore and legends. You feel the difference once you have traveled, the changes you perceive most when you see realise how human life in spite of all the changes has remained the same.

During my journeys, to most people in Europe, the Nepali man woman relations in Asia were reminiscent of their own society some fifty years ago. The way I approached my spouse and the way she reacted to my so-called orders at every step of life reminded people in Europe of their parents. In the middle class Nepali families, men are seldom allowed by women to do any menial work. "My father used to behave like you do in my mother's presence," one of my English

After my journey to Europe I can never ever write a poem or create an episode in a novel approving such a behavior that a writer who has not traveled could easily write about. Nor can I ever dismiss the same sex relations as monstrous and unsocial. Even if you do not approve, you accept that these people exist, like you do. There is very little available in Nepali literature on the same sex retaliations. They are simply ignored as obscene.

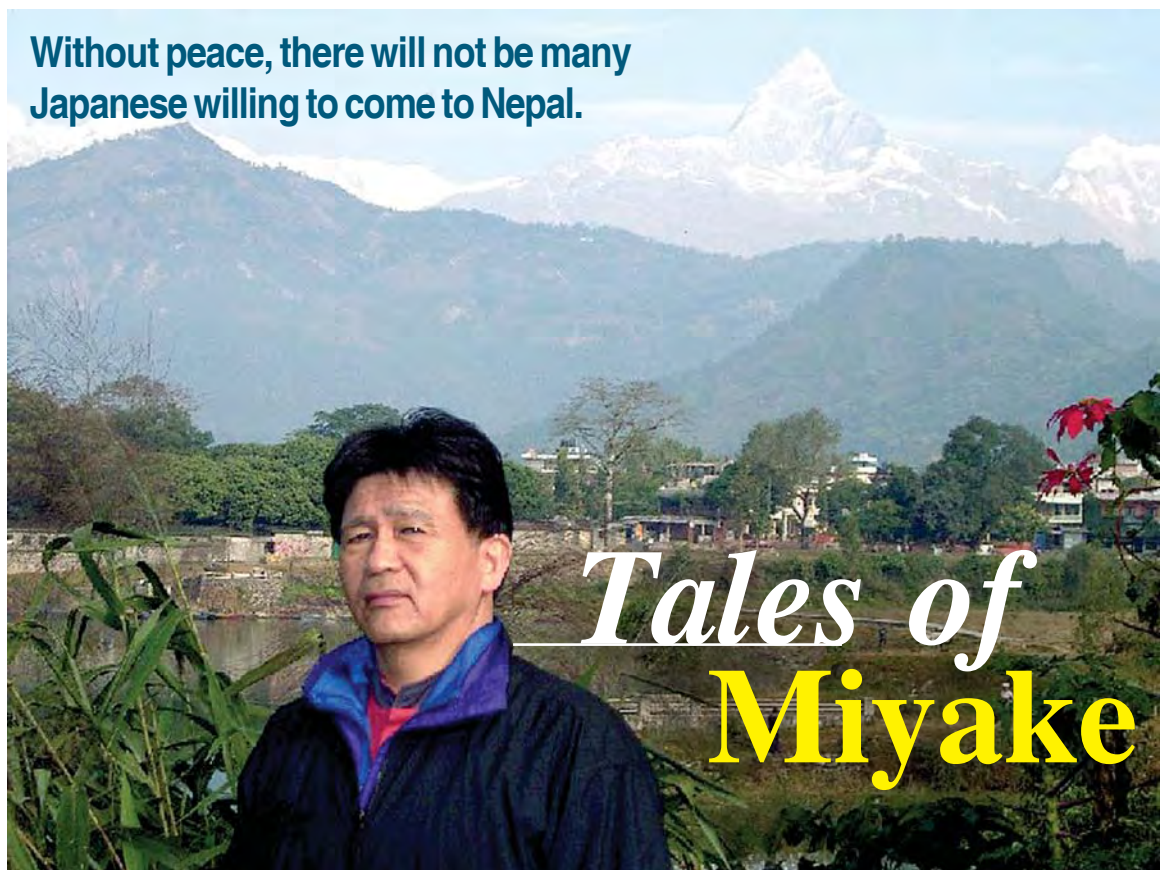
One gay writer I met in London seemed appalled by my aesthetics. He strongly disliked my "River" poem. To describe a man woman relationship, the poem employs erotic images reminiscent of Sanskrit masters evoking the Shringar Rasa. I had great difficulty in translating the famous Irish language poet Cathal O' Searcaigh's poems into Nepali. Some Nepali critics refuse to understand the poems as they do not or cannot comprehend the nuances of a poem celebrating the same sex relations. Also with male dominated Nepali verb, it is difficult to express the emotions containing the same sex relationships.

On meeting people from all over world in London, for example, you release how multiculturalism remains the future of the modern world. And that in spite of tribal uprisings and rise of obsolete ideologies, the future of Asian society like its economic metamorphosis lies in understanding the essentials of the other world.

A journey outside become a journey within, leading you to the ultimate nirvana of the new millennium.

(The writer can be reached at writer@yuyutsu.de)

Without peace, there will not be many Japanese willing to come to Nepal.



■ Raman Grandon



On the eve of New Year 2008, I ran into Shizuo Miyake alias Santa Bahadur Gurung at Momotarou,

a popular Japanese restaurant in Thamel. He greeted me with Namaste and spoke fluent Nepali.

Miyake is a 60 years old who can easily pass of as 40. After retiring as civil engineer from Kobe City Hall in 2000, Miyake has been coming to Nepal on a regular basis. "I come here three or four times a year and each time I stay not less than two to three months."

Every season, from October to April, Miyake brings along organised groups of tourists from different cities of Japan including Osaka, Kobe and Hyogo. Till December end this season he arranged Pokhara trip for four Japanese families, sent two to Annapurna base camp and other two for a sightseeing tour in Nagarkot. He is looking forward to receive five more guests from Osaka during the first week of January 2008.

"This will wrap up the season," says Miyake, bursting into peals of laughter. According to Miyake, Himalayas and culture are the main attractions for Japanese tourists. "But until the situation turns out to be a peaceful, there will not be many Japanese willing to come to Nepal. I tell my friends it is okay to travel in

Nepal right now, but I do not know what will happen tomorrow. In this regard, I strongly urge the government and Nepalis to work hard for peace," suggests Miyake.

Miyake had first come to Nepal in 1976 as a tourist. "But it was more of luck than a planned one. We had a three day transit in Bangkok so I came for a quick trek here." As part of Alpine Federation group, Miyake had come with 45 Japanese tourists. Miyake chose a five day camping trip to Ghorepani. "Since the connecting road was still in progress, we had to walk all the way from Pokhara to Phedi and then to Ghorepani."

By the time he came back to Nepal again in 1982, Miyake was ready for a climbing expedition on Mt. Chulu West (6419m) in Manang. With six people in the group, they not only scaled it successfully but further did Annapurna Round trek making a total of 45 days trip! Since 1983 he began coming to Nepal six times a year.

One of Miyake's most memorable years in Nepal has to be 1976. As the plane hovered over the airport he was quite not sure whether the barely paved grassland below was the right one. Moreover, he became irritated at having to wait for over three hours for his luggage to arrive. And as if this was not enough, rain started leaking through the roof and left him wet all over.

Miyake has witnessed lots of changes since his first time in Nepal.

"Thamel was almost a vast stretch of barren field, a majority of Sherpas used to work in trekking industry and herds of cattle blocking the roads was a usual sight. Now everything has changed but one thing that still has not is the immigration delay and lethargic custom procedures. Although you have all the modern equipment, the operation is still not prompt and efficient."

Getting together with his Nepali sisters and brothers is an important part of Miyake's life when he finds time to know and learn about Nepali culture and language. He also teaches part time Japanese language in a local institute and is helping run schools in Gongabu and Nuwakot for deprived and poor children. "I am always willing to help Nepalis in education and health. But it will not do any good for Nepalis to accept millions of dollars in donation without any proper use."

At present Miyake is the president of 15-year old Kobe-Nepal Friendship Association and advisor of Amateur Veterans Athlete Committee based in Nepal. He is also involved in Hyogo Worker's Alpine Federation (HWAFF) which has altogether 3000 members. It has been well over 30 years since he has been visiting Nepal and every time he comes he admits he experiences something different and unusual. "I do not know for how many more times I will be coming to Nepal. I am only 60 now," says Miyake. ■

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Playful baby elephants

Teach me tenderly

In this training method, the trainer avoids inflicting any pain on the elephants or arousing any fear in them.

■ Sanjib K. Chaudhary

The sun was about to set. Although the day was coming to an end, the ticket selling counter at the Elephant Breeding Centre, Khorsor was packed with visitors. Crossing the counter, the sight of the huge stable was astounding – giant elephants were tethered to wooden posts with iron shackles. The mammoth animals looked helpless. Even older baby elephants were tethered in a similar fashion.

As I neared the iron bar, a cute baby elephant lunged towards me. It crossed the fence and chased me. Immediately another elephant calf, a little older than the one chasing me, came to take back the younger elephant. However, it got hold of the orange I was carrying and ran back to the stable along with its brother (on asking the mahouts I came to know about their relationship). Nearing its mother, it threw the orange on the ground and peeled it with its foot and ate the contents inside. They are

such intelligent creatures!

The baby elephants amuse the visitors at the stable with their playfulness and mischief. However, as they grow older they are taught to behave properly. On reaching two years of age, the elephants are trained to obey the mahout's commands.

Initially the young elephant is separated from its mother for few days. It cries and laments in agony of separation and becomes desperate. Two men each on two elephants with the fifth man on the distressed calf go for long rides – the calf is made to run, go up, come down, jump and do all sort of activities as commanded by the rider.

"When the calf is tired and desperate, then the real training starts with the mahout teaching the jumbo language with the help of bamboo sticks hurting the back of the ears and shoulders," says Vikram Mahato who has been training elephants for the past 34 years. "In the process, the baby elephant gets angry and tries to throw away the rider. Sometimes the trainer gets hurt, ends up with broken neck and fractured limbs."

The trainee elephant is tethered in between the two other elephants with the help of a strong rope while it learns to respond to the basic commands of moving forwards, backwards, to the left and right, sitting, standing, stopping and grabbing. After two weeks the elephant learns to be ridden by the trainer without the assistance of other elephants.

Contrary to the traditional painful training, three young elephants from Khorsor received some basic training through Positive Learning Method, and all three proceeded quickly in their learning. The young elephants were Saraswati Kaili and Kush Prasad, who were habituated to calmly accept a mahout sitting on them and to respond correctly to the signals for forward, backward, stop, turn etc. A younger, as yet unnamed calf of one year of age was not ridden yet, but was habituated to calmly accept handling and to understand the same signals that will later on be

used when riding.

The Elephant Training Workshop at the Elephant Breeding Centre at Khorsor, Chitwan on 11 to 14 December 2007 was carried out under the guidance of Dr. Andrew McLean from Australia, who is an internationally highly recognised expert in the science of animal training, Tuikku Kaimio from Finland, who also conducted the previous year's workshop, and scientist Marc Pierard from Belgium led the foreign team.

The Positive Learning Method promotes elephants' willingness to cooperate with people. It is a combination of two scientific approaches in animal training – positive reinforcement (rewarding the elephant for correct actions) and pressure release (guiding the elephant with as little force as possible and releasing the pressure immediately when the elephant performs the correct action).

"As soon as the elephant performs the right action, it should be rewarded with Kuchis – food packages for elephants," says Dr. Andrew McLean. "The elephant is then sure about what it performed."

In this training method, the trainer avoids inflicting any pain on the elephant or arousing any fear in them. Training elephants in this way makes the training sessions a pleasant experience for both the trainers and the elephant. The other benefits are fast learning – in this way, elephants learn the tasks faster than with any other training method – as well as increased reliability and safety of elephants at work. "Elephants trained this way will have less behaviour problem and will be more obedient," says Marc Pierard.

According to Dr. Kamal Gairhe, the top expert in elephant veterinary medicine in Nepal, the positive learning method can not be compared with the traditional method of training.

He said, "We have the results of traditional training method at hand but we still need to wait for the positive learning method's results and its effectiveness."

However, Tuikku Kaimio is

confident about the success of the scientific training.

"They (mahouts) have already applied some of the techniques that we taught during last year's training," says Tuikku. "If they use their traditional methods combined with scientific knowledge, we will be glad, because they are the experts of elephant training."

The officers think that the new method is more humane than the traditional training and it will avoid the risks of mahouts being killed by elephants. "When an elephant gets insane, it searches the mahout who had treated it badly and tortured during the training," says Gangaram Singh, Project Manager, Terai Arc Landscape Program. "In the past there have been several incidents when mad and angry elephant killed the mahout ruthlessly."

Next day I attended the workshop on management of health of elephants. In this workshop, knowledge about handling of elephants at work in order to further promote reliability and safety of elephants, about various possibilities in the design of equipment, about ways to promote elephant health, and about elephants' role in conservation, was shared. While the participants discussed the issues, I could see a group of baby elephants busy playing football on a ground nearby, guided by young mahouts.

The elephants seemed to follow each and every command of the mahouts and were trying to kick the ball past the goal post. I was amazed to see the camaraderie between the elephants and the riders. The sun was again about to set but the sight looked like beginning of a new era. People were gathered to see the elephants play and practise for the upcoming elephant football match. They were clapping and at a distance Tuikku looked more than satisfied.

The workshop brought forth a new advancement in elephant training combining Nepali mahouts' vast experience and long tradition in working with elephants, and the foreign experts' expertise in the scientific knowledge on best ways to promote learning in animals.

Elephant calves vying for the ball

