

NEW SPOTLIGHT

April 16-29, 2010

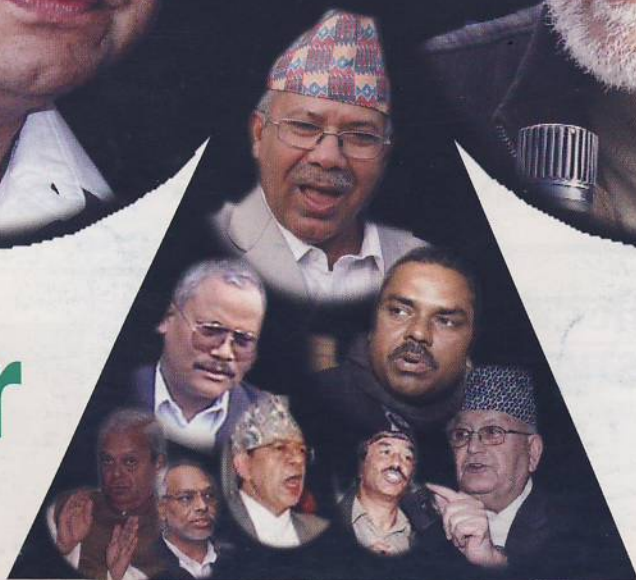
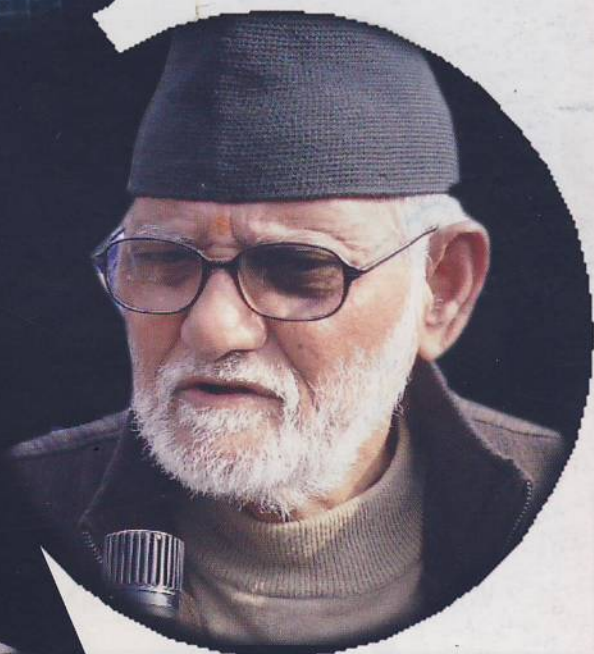
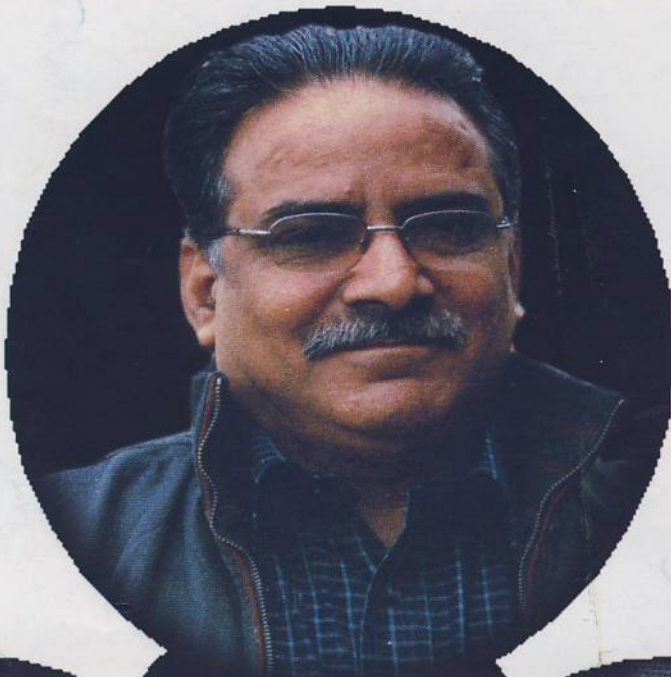
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Opinion:
Dipak Gyawali



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British PM's Special Representative Advises Compromise

British Prime Minister's Special Representative for Peace Building Jack McConnell concluded a three-day visit to Nepal. Delivering a letter from Gordon Brown to his counterpart Nepalese Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, McConnell urged the government to seek common grounds at this crucial juncture in the peace process.

"At this historic moment it is crucial that the Government of Nepal can be flexible enough to resolve differences with other parties, so that the new democratic constitution can be delivered to the people, and concrete progress made on driving forward other aspects of the peace agreement. Without progress on peace, development will be delayed," McConnell said.

McConnell further emphasised how Nepal should make good use of international support, in particular through UNMIN and OHCHR, during this still fragile transitional period.

Before his departure, Dr McConnell said, "I have had a constructive series of meetings with key political actors. It is clear that further efforts are now needed to resolve the future of former combatants, and to write the constitution, on time. If 28 May is an unrealistic deadline, then thought should be given to extending it sooner rather than later."

He also travelled to Kavre District and met with representatives from a women's para-legal committee, local female political leaders, and visited a health centre.

Indian Assistance to Nepal

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on March 29, 2010 by the Embassy of India, Kathmandu with Nepal Netra Jyoti Sangh (NNJS) for providing a grant assistance of NRs. 1.03 crores to NNJS for holding mobile screening camps in schools in various districts of Nepal during the year 2009-11. The Government of India will provide an assistance of NRs 1.03 crores to NNJS to cover the cost of providing 9,000 optical devices to vision impaired children and low vision dispensing devices to 300 children by mobile screening camps in various schools of Nepal as a 'National Eye Sight Programme' during the year 2009-11. GOI will also provide an additional assistance of NRs 3.57 crores for Trachoma and cataract surgeries through field camps.

Dali Awarded

Ms. Amira Dali had never thought her work would merit the headlines of Japan's largest circulated news papers like The Asahi Shinbun. What's more, her story won a Japanese award for which The Asahi Shinbun, the second largest newspaper of Japan, gave a big front page coverage featuring her photographs.

"I never imagined that I would get such a headline," said Dali to the media people at a reception organised by Japanese ambassador to Nepal Tatsuo Mizuno in his residence. "The headline has inspired me to work more for the poor people of Nepal."

Ms. Dali, ex-trainee of the Association for Overseas Technical Scholarship (AOTS), and immediate past president of Nepal AOTS Alumni Society, was declared winner in the field of Social Contribution. President of the Love and Green Nepal (LGN), an NGO working for the development of sustainable livelihoods for economically disadvantaged people in marginalised communities, Ms. Dali



was awarded for her integrated development endeavours for social economic and environmental change in Nepalese agriculture community, education, community small infrastructure, community health and environment conservation. ■

Since 2001, Indian government has been providing assistance to NNJS for eye care programmes in Nepal through country-wide free of cost eye-camps organized as part of the India-Nepal Economic Cooperation Programme.

Under the programme, some 75,000 people have so far been cured of cataract and trachoma and optical devices have been distributed to over 18,000 school going children with a total assistance of NRs. 1.63 crores. A mobile eye care van, duly fitted with ophthalmic equipment, was also gifted to NNJS for implementation of this programme in 2008.

UK Border Agency Announces New Visa Fees

UK Border Agency has announced new visa fees with the aim to strike what it calls a correct balance between maintaining secure and effective borders and improving the visa service to

customers, and ensuring that the fee structure supports the UK's ability to attract those migrants and visitors that make a valued contribution. It also takes into account the cost of processing applications.

In most visa categories, the maximum fee increase is 2.5%. Some fees continue to be set at a level lower than the actual processing cost because it is considered to be in the interests of the UK to do so. Examples of subsidised visa categories include tourist visas and also the Tier 4 student visa which reflects the contribution made by international students to the UK economy and education.

A new visa category of "dependent relative" is being introduced. This category allows grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles and siblings who are over the age of 18, to join family members who are settled in the UK or being

admitted for the purpose of settlement.

The short term visit visa fee increases from £67 to £68, Tier 1 (General, Investor, Entrepreneur) increases from £675 to £690, Tier 2 (skilled worker) increases from £265 to £270, the 5 year multiple entry visa increases from £400 to £420. The 10 year visa increases from £500 to £610, the Tier 4 student visa fee increases from £145 to £199, the settlement visa fee increases from £585 to £644, and the dependent relative visa is being introduced at a cost of £1680.

Drugs Destroyed

In a bid to stop the dramatic decline in the numbers of vultures in Nepal, over 52 litres and 13,064 tablets of veterinary drug- diclofenac were destroyed amidst a public function at Nawalparasi recently.

The drugs were collected over a three year period from the local people and veterinary drug stores. A cause of vulture decline has been blamed on the veterinary drug diclofenac which is widely used to treat livestock in Asia. Over three hundred locals, vet scientists, livestock, drug, nature conservation community and media people participated in the function to destroy the drugs.

According to Hum B. Gurung PhD, chief executive officer of Bird Conservation Nepal, the production and sale of the deadly veterinary drugs for livestock have already been banned in Nepal. Radha Raman Prasad Shah, Director General of Department of Drugs Administration, referred to this.

Five species of vultures in Asia are in grave danger of extinction across the Indian subcontinent. Populations of White-rumped *Gyps bengalensis*, Long-billed *G. indicus* and Slender-billed Vultures *G. tenuirostris* have declined by more than 99% in India and Pakistan and annual rates of decline appear to be increasing. Two more species of vultures, Red-headed Vulture and Egyptian Vulture, have rapidly declined in the recent years. Due to these declines, all five species are now listed threatened by IUCN - The International Union for Conservation of Nature. Except Egyptian Vulture, which is listed as Endangered, all other four are listed as Critically Endangered, which is the highest threat category.

DFID to Fund Digital Voter Register

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) has committed £961,822 (NRS 107 million) in UKaid to



procure voter registration equipment for the Election Commission of Nepal, through UNDP.

The UKaid contribution, made through its Enabling State Programme (ESP), will support the Election Commission's voter registration plan by helping procure 1,000 registration kits to support the first two phases of voter registration.

The procurement of the registration units will help achieve: Registration of 1,327,000 eligible voters in 16 Himalayan districts by the first week of May 2010, Registration of 3,000,000 eligible voters in 55 Municipalities by July 2010.

UKaid's funding will help register 4.3 million voters in order to prepare for nationwide Voter Registration with photographs. This will result in a full digital Voter Register for the first time in Nepal.

Making the announcement, DFID Nepal Head of Office Sarah Sanyahumbi said, "We hope the support will ensure inclusive and legitimate election results which will be vital to Nepal's stability. Lack of legitimacy of the election results would undermine the peace process, and further hamper development progress."

Acting Chief Election Commissioner Neel Kantha Uprety thanked DFID and the UK government for understanding the need of the hour and helping prepare a historically important document, the digital Voter Register in Nepal.

Indian Assistance

Ambassador of India to Nepal Rakesh Sood handed over two cheques of NRs. 350.99 million and NRs. 42.62 million to Bal Krishna Khand, Minister of Irrigation as India's contribution towards construction of embankments along Lalbakeya, Bagmati, Kamla and Gagan rivers in Nepal. The first cheque amounting NRs. 350.99 million is India's contribution towards extension of embankments along Lalbakeya, Bagmati and Kamla rivers, which is being undertaken in accordance with the

decisions made by the India-Nepal Joint Committee on Inundation and Flood Management.

India has also agreed to provide assistance for river training works along Gagan river in Nepal which outflanked its banks during floods in 2007 and 2009 causing inundation and flooding in Nepal and adjoining areas in India. The second cheque amounting NRs. 42.62 million is the first instalment of India's contribution for river training works along Gagan river.

Japanese Aid

Japan has agreed to extend a grant assistance of four hundred and ninety million Yen (¥490,000,000), approximately three hundred and seventy million Nepalese Rupees (NRs.370,000,000), or approximately five million, two hundred and fifteen thousand US dollars (US\$5,215,000), to Nepal for the Increase of Food Production (KR2), with special emphasis on underprivileged farmers, in Japan's Fiscal Year 2009.

Japanese ambassador to Nepal Tatsuo MIZUNO and finance secretary Ramesh Prasad Khanal signed and exchanged Notes today on behalf of their respective Governments.

The grant is extended for procuring the items necessary to increase food production in Nepal with special emphasis on underprivileged farmers. The grant will be used for the procurement of fertilizers needed to boost agricultural production, thus enabling the country to meet its growing food demand. Good quality of fertilizer is an important component for the growth of agricultural production. However, Nepal does not have domestic manufacturers of chemical fertilizer and is forced depend on imports. The fertilizer procured under this grant will be utilized to cope with acute shortages and price rising and will be supplied to farmers in remote regions where private market activities are inadequate. ■

Comparing Appeased Peace with Ones Sabotaged

– Dipak Gyawali

Buried in Kantipur's inside pages was the news of secular Nepal's President Ram Baran Yadav incongruously discharging a religious duty in favour of mass yoga guru Ramdev in Syangja. The real incongruity, however, was innocuously bemoaned in the last paragraph as a mere inconvenience to journalists: it described how Maoist cadres had managed to protest with black flags despite the fact that security had been kept tight for a week *and mobiles and telecommunications had been shut down for seven hours*. Were not these undemocratic, anti-free press outrages things that happened only under the 'autocratic monarchy' and not in New Nepal's *loktastra*?

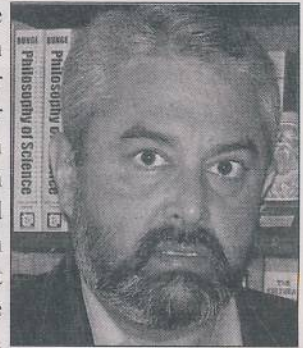
Nepal is certainly awakening to a rude, unromantic world of statecraft and power politics. History, it is said, is cruel in its verdict; and with the current Mughlani-brokered peace failing to stabilize, it bears comparing with the two earlier indigenous peace efforts that collapsed from sabotage, both internal and external. In early 2001, the Koirala government had been paralyzed for weeks following opposition protests surrounding the Lauda aircraft scandal when the royal massacre took place. The first political reaction was by Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai whose op-ed piece in Kantipur claimed that it was the work of 'Girija-Gyanendra clique' and incited the Nepal army to revolt. Koirala resigned as the second prime minister of the third parliament on 26 July 2001 (why the first one, K P Bhattarai, was removed has never been explained by the Nepali Congress, nor have the Maoists explained how the 'murderous Koirala' evolved to become their 'patron' in 2010). He was followed by Deuba who initiated the first peace talks; but the insurgents broke it on 21st November 2001, only to launch massive attacks across the country in nine locations. The elected majority Deuba government declared emergency on 26th November and the Nepali state began

confronting Maoist militarism seriously for the first time.

Baburam Bhattarai has written that it was in April 2002 that Koirala held secret parleys with Maoist leaders in New Delhi. Its inappropriateness was that Koirala's party then led the majority government that was battling the Maoists, and the incongruity was that Koirala had supposedly resigned as prime minister eight months earlier because King Gyanendra allegedly would not allow the use of the Nepal Army in Holeri! (The army brass's version was that, even though it was itching to fight, Koirala refused to give it the defense council's authorization as per the constitution.) In any other country and language, Koirala's underhand meeting with the insurgents would simply be called 'treason'. In Nepal's principle-less politics, however, it was the start of his 'grand design' machinations to unseat Deuba and become the fourth prime minister of the third parliament. Deuba, unlike K P Bhattarai, did not take this bullying lying down and decided to dissolve the parliament on 22 May 2002, a move welcomed then by the main opposition UML. It was five months later when, as an interim prime minister, Deuba claimed inability to hold elections within six months as per the constitution. It forced King Gyanendra to sack him as 'incompetent', but only after the seven political parties, following a meeting on 30th September, had asked him to, by using his residual powers vested in Article 127.

The interim Chand government was appointed on 11 October 2002 with the mandate to bring about 'peace, good governance, and to hold elections'. That peace began on 29th January 2003, three days after Armed Police Chief Krishna Mohan Shrestha and his teacher wife were assassinated by the Maoists. It failed in August 2003 at Hapure in Dang with the Surya Bahadur Thapa government at the helm. What happened in between? This essayist remembers

the tense nights in Baluwatar as minister Narayan Singh Punshuttled between the cabinet and the Maoists.



When the government sat down to approve the deal, acting chief secretary Umesh Mainali raised reservations about removing, as per Maoists' demand, the bounty on their heads declared by the Deuba government. His recollection was that there was no such bounty, even though a member of the Deuba cabinet had dramatically declared it as such in a television interview. It was close to midnight when Mainali returned from Singha Durbar with the recorded cabinet decision: it merely said anyone 'apprehending' the Maoists and turning them over to the authorities would be rewarded. The agreement was then appropriately re-worded. I was happy that, as a country that had previously done away with capital punishment, the Nepali state had not gone back to barbarism, and that we had capable civil servants who could be relied upon to prevent grievous official mistakes.

This peace agreement had not pleased the parliamentary parties or external forces, primarily because the credit would have gone to the King. The Chand government was criticized heavily for agreeing to limit the Nepal Army to a five kilometer radius from their barracks; but again there was no such government decision. It was only a bargaining proposal by the Maoists, and to what extent would the Maoist guerillas be limited or how the security of the national parks and other areas was to be assured by the state was still up in the air. The government negotiating team was divided on the issue as was the army, with the 'soft-liners' being those that later stampeded to the Maoist

camp after the declaration of the republic. What was ironic was that the partisan press, politicians and external interests that leveled this criticism would, in November 2006, limit Nepal Army to zero kilometers, leaving the whole country free for marauding by renegade Maoists and other armed gangs!

The peace of 2003 had collapsed weeks before Hapure, primarily because the King's government had rejected the Maoist offer to jointly crush the parliamentary parties. After that rupture, all subsequent Maoist negotiations were merely a strategic dance in bad faith. A naive government team had gone to Hapure with radical proposals for change but without realizing that the Maoists had already gone to the disgruntled politicians with the pitch to jointly crush the monarchy. Those doing the negotiating recall how the government's 14-point program included a radical re-write of the 1990 constitution to include all the demands of inclusiveness, empowerment etc. as well as referendum on contentious issues. But they were all rejected by the Maoists whose one-point demand was a constituent assembly that would scrap the 1990 constitution written by the parliamentary parties themselves, ostensibly because the goal was the removal of the monarchy and capture of total power. Thus, the political understanding reached between Koirala and the Maoists in Delhi in April 2002 found implementation in Hapure, and further repackaging in Delhi in November 2005 after the Dhaka SAARC summit backlash. It is this 'grand design' that is currently unraveling as the other parties realize the consequences of what Koirala's appeasing the Maoists was all about. ■

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Fund for Poor

Asian Development Bank's Japan Fund provides grant to protect women, children and help the poor

By A CORRESPONDENT

At a time when the efforts to raise the living standard of the people is going on, the Government of Japan and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) team up to support the Government of Nepal in setting up women and children service centers for victims of abuse, facilitating legal identity documentation for poor people and production of fortified flour in Chakki mills.

According to the press release of the Asian Development Bank, the three projects will be funded by grants totaling US\$ 4.55 million from the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR), administered by ADB.

Announcing the grant for the initiatives at a launch ceremony today, ADB's Executive Director of Japan, Mr. Masakazu Sakaguchi, said "In line with the poverty reduction goals of JFPR, all three projects are targeted at benefiting and empowering the most vulnerable and often excluded groups in Nepali society - women, children and the extreme poor."

"In addition to delivering lasting positive impacts to uplift poor and vulnerable communities, JFPR projects also build capacities, and promote partnerships among various

stakeholders for tangible and sustainable results through innovative approaches," added Mr. Sakaguchi.

Speaking at the same event, Barry Hitchcock, ADB's Country Director for Nepal, said, "ADB is very pleased to work with the Governments of Japan and Nepal on these projects which target the vulnerable and poor. The women and children service centers will support the Nepal police in establishing effective measures for protecting women and children who are victims of abuse, whilst the legal documentation effort will enable people in some of the poorest districts to gain access to essential services. The fortified flour in Chakki mills will help reduce anemia and other illnesses linked to vitamin and mineral deficiencies in children."

The Government of Japan, through the JFPR, supports high-impact projects to reduce poverty in developing countries in Asia and the Pacific. From 2001 to March 2010, the Government of Nepal has received seven JFPR projects for the agriculture, governance, and social sectors worth more than \$9.3 million.

Established in May 2000 as a trust fund managed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), JFPR has awarded financial grants for 132 projects worth over \$335.6 million to 22 developing member countries to date. ■



Legislative Parliament : Government under scrutiny

MRP ROW

Lost Battle

Whatever the nationalist slogans brandished about by the government and opposition parties in defending their arguments over awarding the contract for Machine Readable Passports, they went to produce anti-national results

By KESHAB POUDEL

With the decision of the government to revoke the agreement signed with India's public security press to print Machine Readable Passports (MRP), heated politics comes to a kneel. Nepal is yet to see many setbacks the nationalist slogans played out by rainbow coalition of opposition and ruling parties.

Although there are wide differences over many issues, including the writing of the constitution and issues of vital national interests among various political parties, the MRP issue surprisingly united them.

As per a commitment made to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) three years ago, Nepal was all

set to introduce Machine-Readable Passports (MRP) by April 10, 2010. The primary objective of the MRP is to minimize delay in border crossing formalities and safeguard international civil aviation operations against unlawful interference.

The arguments given by political parties including ruling CPN-UML that the printing of MRP involves vital security stakes do not have valid reasons to believe in them. At a time when the state's overall mechanism is crumbling and information of major national security interest leaks so easily, it is merely a rhetoric to say that one can safeguard secret information.

"The decision to award machine readable passports to India is against the country's security interest. By

awarding the contract, the Madhav Kumar Nepal-led government handed over Nepal's security to India," thundered Maoist leader Narayankazi Shrestha at a meeting of the Legislature Parliament. "This agreement sold out Nepal's national interest to India," said Shrestha, whose party leaders concealed that they lived in India for 10 years out of 14 long bloody years of insurgency, read top secret document signed between the government and other party.

Maoist leader Shrestha was not alone demanding revocation of the decision terming it as anti-national and against Nepal's interest. From leader of Madheshi Janadhikar Forum Upendra Yadav to CPN-UML leader Bam Dev Gautam and Nepali Congress leaders like Dip Kumar Upadhyaya and others, the rainbow alliance of various political parties, who have been part of the greater game in Nepal's destabilization process, joined a bandwagon invoking the slogan of Nepal's interest.

"We have decided to recommend to the government to cancel the MRP printing contract given to India, as it is against both, the international practice and the public procurement act," said Pokharel. "This is against the national interest," thundered Upendra Yadav, who has been demanding an independent Madhesh.

Deputy prime minister Sujata Koirala too had similar tone as she wanted to protect the national interest by awarding MRP to India. "If the government cancels the agreement, it will badly damage Nepal's diplomatic relations with India," she said at a public rally in Biratnagar.

"Since there is a very limited time, we have no option other than to hand over the printing job to India."

Although there are intensive differences among the members of the rainbow alliance of extreme right to extreme left and moderate, they seem to have a common interest to send a message to the international community that the government in Nepal is incapable to implement its decisions.



PM Nepal : A political setback

Backed by leading broadsheet newspapers and media houses, the opposition gets much needed public support to isolate the government.

As the decision taken by deputy prime minister and foreign minister Sujata Koirala and cabinet led by prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal was unusual, the overnight alliance over the decision was another mystery. Although both the groups claimed that their stand was in favor of national interest, all this produces anti national results.

This was not for the first time when the coalition of all brands formed to shake the institutions of vital national interests. From time to time, these kinds of unusual alliances were made and broken. Just a few months ago, the rainbow alliances forced Nepal Airlines to cancel its deal to purchase two Airbus Aircrafts from the manufacturer. Started from Public Accounts Committee, the process was finally cancelled thanks to the denial of finance minister Surendra Pandey to stand as a guarantor.

When Nepal's political process was transforming with relative constitutional stability under Constitution of Kingdom

of Nepal 1990, first rainbow coalition of leftists and rightists made the functional parliament defunct and extreme leftists assaulted parliament from outside.

Finally, it was another alliance among moderate party like Nepali Congress, extreme left UCPN-M, leftist CPN-UML and regional parties like Nepal Sadbhavana under the banner of seven party alliance signed 12 point agreement in New Delhi to overthrow the whole constitutional set up established under the Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal 1990 including Army, judiciary, parliament and monarchy pushing the country into a prolonged course of political instability.

Although political parties hardly unite for the genuine cause of Nepal's national interest, they can easily join the platform of so called nationalist alliances to bring anti-national results. For such an alliance, there is no need of any political ideology. All the forces unite so far as the agenda of destabilization is concerned.

MRP Row

The row started following the decision of Foreign Ministry on November 25, 2009 to go for MRP arguing that this technology was appropriate for the national security interest. After this decision, the process of international tender bidding began selecting four companies for final printing. However on January 14, 2010, Ministry of Foreign Affairs cancelled the tender process in which four international companies were selected.

On 15 January, foreign minister Sujata Koirala requested Indian foreign ministry S.M. Krishna to print the MRP in India. On 25 January, the first meeting between officials of ministry of foreign affairs and representatives of Security Printing and Minting Corporation, an Indian government undertaking, began.

As soon as this process started, Public Accounts Committee asked the government on February 8 about the reason behind the cancellation of the tender. Minister of Foreign Affairs Sujata Koirala went to PAC to clarify her stand on February 14. On March 20, Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested



DPM Koirala: Controversial decision

PAC to support them to award the printing of MRP to India. Despite the overwhelming opposition, the cabinet too under growing pressure from all sides and with the opposition Maoist party having announced a general strike Monday in protest, Nepal's cornered government Sunday said it was scrapping the controversial deal with India to print "smart" Nepali passports.

Nepal had floated a global tender to print three million modern machine-readable passports that are to replace the current handwritten ones to meet the norms of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

The government signed the agreement with Indian printing press March 23. Thirteen days after or on April 5, the PAC asked prime minister Nepal to clarify the government stand and PAC took the decision saying that cabinet decision was illegal and asked ministry to hand over the printing job on the basis competition. Supreme Court issued an interim order not to proceed on the agreement.

The government finally cancelled the contract with India on April 11, 2010 sending a message that Nepal is an unreliable country to deal with. There were joys and euphoria among populist papers and politicians of all sides but it badly hurt Nepal's national interest. ■

ANALYSIS

Lust For Power, Lost In Direction

Internal wrangling and external machination have almost ensured that the constitution deadline is missed. But as political parties – big and the small alike – focus eyes on the seat of power, they lose sight of the direction they are leading the country to, in the aftermath of the D-Day – May 28.

By SUSHIL SHARMA with
SAROJ DAHAL

The cat is out of the bag now. Finally. “Let’s stop lying to the people, let’s tell them the truth,” said the top Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba.

The former prime minister told a

gathering in his home region in the western Nepal, “the new constitution can not made on time.”

Two days later, in Kathmandu, UML chairman Jhlnath Khanal echoed.

“There is no point lying to the people: the new constitution is not going to happen on constitutionally scheduled time,” he told a radio interviewer.



Political Leaders : Divided we stand

The Maoist chairman Prachanda had long indicated the inevitable.

According to him, the new constitution is impossible without a Maoist-led national government.

And few doubt that such a government is impossible in the foreseeable future. Meaning for all practical purposes that there is a consensus on the May 28 constitution deadline not being met.

With the Big Three in such a circumstantial consensus, fringe outfits have no choice but to fall in line.

Parleys have intensified, predictably, on a way out.

Extension of the constituent assembly is high on the agenda of most parties – especially the big 3 ones.

Legal and political ramifications notwithstanding, the parties in the CA favour prolonging the 601-member body's life.

But none is sure about how to go about in the aftermath of an extension.

The only thing they have in mind is how to get to the seat of power and cling to it.

The Maoists do not see the future of the country without them leading a new government.

The Nepali Congress, having waited in the wings for two years after the CA election, is staking its claim. Its logic: both the Maoists and the UML have been tested.

The UML wants to keep the mantle – but with a new face from within. Prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal is in no mood to quit, but the party boss Jhlnath Khanal is dreaming to step into his predecessor's shoes, at Baluwatar. After a successful chase, at Balkhu.

Key international centres want to consolidate their hold of power in Kathmandu.

Having facilitated the constituent assembly elections, they are now least interested in a timely constitution.

It is more convenient to fish in the

troubled waters of Koshi and Gandaki than in a placid Rara or Fewa.

It is unfathomable that “a water-shed alliance” of the big three that managed to get rid of centuries-old institutions and traditions at one stroke can not bring about the epoch-making new statute through another stroke.

The constitution is clearly not on the agenda of any party – internal and external. Power is.

Prachanda has begun an appeasement drive. Once virulent critic of India which “engineered my ouster”, the Maoist supremo is now singing a different tune.

“We have never been anti-India.”

He even called president Ram Baran Yadav “constitutional guardian”. After leading protests against him for months on the street and in the parliament over the “civilian supremacy” issue which he said the president had violated.

Prachanda has detractors within. Baburam Bhattarai and the company



Prachanda, PM Nepal, JN Khanal and Koirala: An exclusive political club

would not let him to have a second innings at Baluwater.

And Baburam finds Prachanda and the company in his way to fulfilling the long-nursed ambition.

With both factions engaged in a tussle for the coveted front seat at Singh Durbar the once-international conference centre at Baneswor has been reduced to a back seat.

The Nepali Congress is no different.

Post-Girija Prasad Koirala, the party is embroiled in one-upmanship. Top leaders are too conscious of their status and position in the party than of their future in a constitution-less country.

To the troika of officiating president Sushil Koirala, senior leader Sher Bahadur Deuba and the parliament party leader Ram Chandra Poudel, party politics matter most than the national politics in the leadership transition.

In the hope of consolidating the respective positions in the party, at least two of them have their eyes set on the chief executive office by hook or by crook.

Small outfits are no smaller in nursing big ambitions.

Be it Bijay Gachhedar of the Madeshi Janadhikar Forum Loktantrik or Mahanta Thakur of the Terai Madesh Loktantrik party, Surya Bahadur Thapa or Pashupati Shumsher Rana of Rastriya Shakti Prajatantra Party. You name it.

They are all awaiting to turn the events in their favour. Irrespective of their strength at home.

It is quite obvious: the power game is on. The constitution-making exercise

is not; it was not and nor will it be.

This is the reason the parties are least bothered about the post-May 28 situation. Notwithstanding the rhetoric, to the contrary.

A near-unanimous move for the extension of the CA is a foregone conclusion.

But there is a section strongly opposed to the idea. The argument: the extension will leave the Maoists still in a strong position as the single largest legitimate party.

Having fallen out of favour of key international power centres, the Maoists find themselves in a tight spot.

Non-extension of the CA could bring them down at par with all other parties — legally.

This could follow a deadly “bring

them to their size” campaign.

The Maoists are aware of this. Hence the plan of nation-wide protest rallies and threat of a popular revolt.

Said an insider, “the Maoist posture is more defensive than offensive.”

In reality, all political forces are in the defensive. In view of the unpredictable future that awaits them.

Given the constitutional history of Nepal and the geopolitics that shaped it, a new constitution on time would hardly have been a license to the much talked-about “peaceful, stable and prosperous new Nepal”.

But without a constitution on the promised time, the country heads into an even uncertain future. The parties and even the intelligentsia are just pretending to be oblivious of the reality. ■

**New SPOTLIGHT
Magazine Wishes
A Happy New Year
2067 B.S.
To Its Pattorn,
Readers and
well Wishers**

UK ELECTIONS

Battle for Airwaves

As top British leaders are preparing for live television debates for the first time, role of electronic as well as new media becomes crucial to decide the outcome of the closely fought elections

By BHAGIRATH YOGI in London

A day after British Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced May 6 as the date for the next general elections, "Battle Between Hope and Fear," roared The Daily Telegraph in its banner headline. "Brown Launches Poll Battle," said the Financial Times in a sombre headline while The Times newspaper said the party leaders race to make impact in marginal seats as it will mainly be "The Battle for Middle England."

More than the print headlines, the major television stations will write a history of sorts in the forthcoming polls. Though live TV debate between the presidential candidates is a long-running tradition in the US elections, Prime Minister and leader of the ruling Labour Party Gordon Brown, leader of the main opposition Conservatives, David Cameron, and leader of the third largest party Liberal Democrats, Nick Clegg, will be taking part in live televised debates over the next few weeks—for the first time in the British political history.

The private sector ITV hosted the first election debate on April 15 in which presenter Alastair Steward grilled the candidates mainly on domestic policies. During the 90-minute debate, carefully chosen studio audience had an opportunity to raise their concerns.

The second prime ministerial debate will be hosted by the private sector Sky TV on international affairs, while the third and last debate will be presented by the veteran broadcaster David Dimbleby (on 29th of April) over the BBC, focusing mainly on the country's economy.

Some 77 million Americans had watched the first Nixon-Kennedy debate in 1960. In 2008, the viewing figure for Obama-McCain contest were higher than for the opening night of the Beijing

Olympics. "If the US experience is any guide, the television debates will matter a lot to (the British) voters who will tune in not just to savour a verbal pitfall but to take the true measure of their leaders in a time of deep and unrelenting trouble for the people of Britain," wrote Simon Schama, a historian, in The Financial Times.



British Politicians : Eying television

Shashi Poudel, a Nepali journalist who spent nearly two decades in Germany, recalls that some 40 million Germans watched the live TV debate among three contenders of the German Chancellorship in 1998 elections. "After that, the number of Germans who cast their votes was the highest since the second World War."

Poudel, who has now moved to the UK and is affiliated with the Everest Times weekly newspaper, is, however, disappointed with the coverage of mainly the British tabloids. "The role of the media, including the television, is to work as a bridge between the people and their leaders. Unfortunately, some British media have failed to shoulder their public responsibility and seem to be misusing their influence," he added.

'Survival of the Twittest'

Desperate to reach out to young voters—who are generally said to be unenthusiastic to go out and vote in the elections, almost all the candidates have set up their own websites as well as are using social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter.

Stuart MacLennan, a 24-year-old Labour contender from the Scottish constituency of Moray, however, learnt to his own peril that the use of such social networking sites could even be counter-productive at times. Labour party sacked him after it emerged that he had posted a stream of foul-mouthed Twitter messages. "Part of the problem with a Twitter election is that the noise-to-signal ratio is so high that it's incredibly confusing," wrote Sam Leith in The London Evening Standard.

Those watching the recent US presidential elections say new media and

social networking sites were, in fact, winners in the recent US presidential elections. "Barack Obama's victory was fuelled by the young voters, a group that candidates traditionally fail to transform into votes at the booth. Several presidential candidates raised a record amount of money over the Internet with an average \$5 or \$10 donations through social networking campaigns — most successfully of course by candidate Obama, who happens to have the most followers in Facebook and Twitter than any other politicians," said Rajesh Babu Shrestha, an IT professional now based in the US.

At a time, when several constituencies may be decided by a margin of few hundred, if not few thousand, votes, candidates are not taking any chance—turning the election hustings largely into a media battle of unprecedented scale. ■

"We will Prepare the draft of NAPA Within a Month"

-THAKUR PRASAD SHARMA

he situation has been and will be much worse in the Nepal Himalayas. Both Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal and myself, along with members of the Nepalese delegation, focused our efforts on highlighting Nepal's vulnerability to climate change.

THAKUR PRASAD SHARMA, who was appointed the Environment Minister of the incumbent cabinet nine months ago, has done a commendable job in the environmental sector. Minister Sharma, a native of Syangja, has devoted all his political life as a member of Nepal Communist Party (United). Now, from early in the morning till late evening, Sharma says, he spends his time brooding over the issues of environment, climate change and politics. Minister Sharma spoke to **KESHAB POUDEL** on various aspects of environment. Excerpts:

How do you assess the Nepalese participation in COP15?

Our participation in COP15 was historic in several ways. The Nepalese delegation was able to draw the attention of the international community on the climate change issues in the region. It was a milestone in the sense that we were able to convince the international audiences that Nepal has faced and will continue to face serious consequences due to the rise in global temperature. The situation has been and will be much worse in the Nepal Himalayas. Both Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal and myself, along with members of the Nepalese delegation, focused our efforts on highlighting Nepal's vulnerability to climate change. We became able to flag our issues at the international level. Addressing the High Level Segment of the COP15, Prime Minister Nepal urged all mountainous countries to make an alliance in order to raise the issues of the mountains and the climate change collectively and forcefully.

Did you notice any change in their views on these issues?

There was a realization among the mountainous countries to establish a kind of alliance to set a common agenda. We believe that there is a need to have such kinds of platforms to discuss the common concerns and issues and areas of mutual interests. We have consulted with the members of the mountainous countries during the international and regional meetings and discussed common concerns. After these discussion, we all have realised the urgent need for having some sort of alliance among the mountainous countries. There is a progress among us to form an alliance at the earliest possible. For this, Nepal has initiated further consultations and such consultations will also be continued during the meetings of the Subsidiary Bodies to the Climate Change Convention to be held in June 2010. We have decided to set the deadline following our follow-up meeting in Bali, during the UNEP meeting, to establish such an alliance. In Bali, Nepal stressed the impacts of climate change in the Himalayas. The chair's report includes our concerns about the impacts of climate change in mountain biodiversity and ecosystem.

How do you explain Nepal's position?

Based on our concerted efforts and advocacy, Nepal is now virtually in a position to hold a coordinating role among the mountainous countries. After COP 15, we are in the process to establish the things internally as well as preparing to hold

international conference on alliance of mountainous countries.

Other progress of COP15 is that we are now directing our focus to identify the problems faced by the vulnerable communities at districts and villages. This is a major shift on designing programmes from Kathmandu to grass roots levels. We are planning to focus our activities in the areas not covered yet such as in Far Western region of Nepal. We are now working to create awareness among people about the coping strategies. The COP15 gave us a message to move forward responsibly.

For the last many years, the issues of climate change were confined to the central level. What plans do you have to push it to the grass roots level?

First of all, the Ministry of Environment does not have any district offices. Neither does it have an Environment Department for the implementation of programmes. Since my appointment, I have been making efforts to push the Ministry's activities at the grass root level. As all know it, the environment related problems have different dimensions at different levels. Kathmandu has been facing the problems of air pollution but the problems at the grass root levels are quite different. The people living in the remote parts of Nepal have been living below the poverty line facing problems posed by degradation of the environment. People have been destroying the forests for livelihood without knowing the long-term implications. Along with establishing these issues at policy level, I want to see the implementation of field level activities and such activities must be in place, as far as possible, if we really want to address the adverse impacts of climate change in Nepal.

What changes in the policy have come about after COP15?

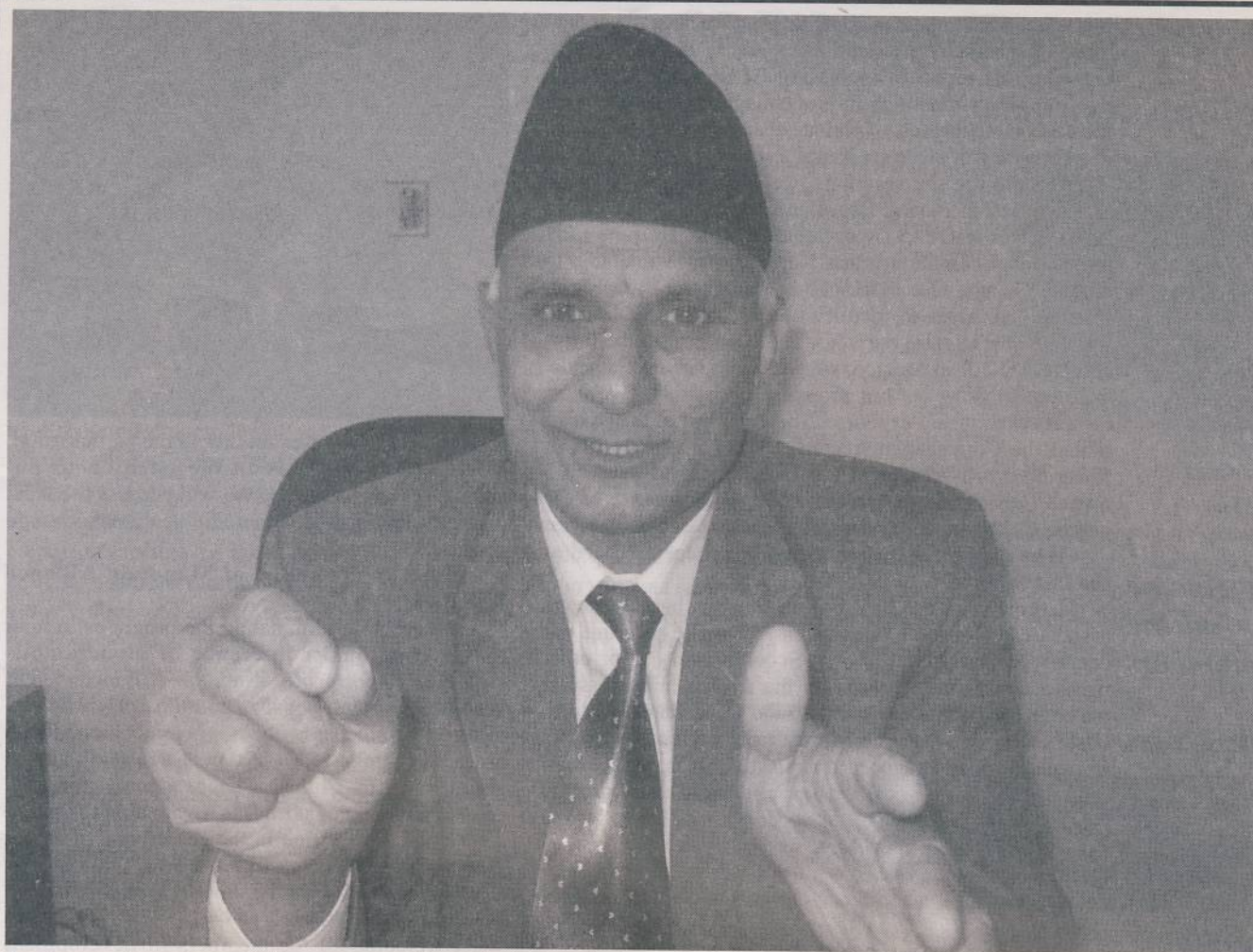
After COP15, we have already set a target to reach the village levels. From district headquarters, I want to see the implementation of programmes at the village level. In the first phase, I want to focus on raising awareness at the village level. We have recently conducted programmes in Dharan and Syangja and people's participation was very encouraging. There was a huge gathering of people from all walks of life. There is a widespread consciousness about environment. What we need now is to cultivate it and let it flourish.

Do you have any plan for alternative energy?

Along with awareness creating programmes, we are also taking alternative energy programmes to the village level. Under an agreement with the European Commission, we are working to encourage people to go for alternative energy. Our slogan now is "one village: one small hydro". We will make every effort to make it happen.

How is the response of Nepal's development partners?

Whenever I meet representatives of Nepal's



development partners, I always assure them that their taxpayer's money will be used to uplift the livelihoods of the poor people of Nepal. I also assure them that each and every penny provided by Nepal's development partners will be spent in the programmes. Nepal has to safeguard her image at the national and international levels for each support provided by the development partners through utilizing it effectively. We have also the responsibility to shift the programmes from central level to village level. Nothing will change if we continue to concentrate our program in the capital. Climate change is now another major issue of the country after politics. We need to respond to it.

What is the status of NAPA?

It should have been formulated a long time back. I have to accept the fact that there was some delay in formulating the NAPA. Now we are on the right track and we will prepare the draft NAPA within a month. I am happy to share the satisfactory progress of NAPA preparation. After the formulation of NAPA, we have plans to seek international support for adaption and other climate change livelihood-based programmes to address its impacts

What are the challenges you are facing at the policy level?

The major challenges are the lack of manpower, designers and experts. Our small team of experts is

busy in handling all the matters by themselves. They are overloaded. We have been requesting the Prime Minister and other concerned to provide us manpower as per our need at the earliest possible. Another set of challenges is related to translating our commitments into action at the field level.

Climate Change is now a reality. How are you getting support from other sectors?

I have been receiving tremendous support from all stakeholders and partners. From the Prime Minister to other Ministries like forests and tourism as well as development partners, they are very supportive and positive to our Ministry. Education institutions and civil society are equally supporting us. Our working areas are extended. NAPA has made tremendous efforts in involving people in its preparation through thematic areas, public awareness and identification of adaptation programmes.

As you said Nepal is emerging as a leader among mountainous countries, how are you prepared to deal with melting glaciers, especially posing threat to Nepal?

We need to prove scientifically the level of glacier melting but the experiences of our mountaineers like Appa Sherpa and others proved that something is changing in the Himalayas. In the past, mountaineers used to melt water for drinking purposes but the snow is melting quickly and they get water easily these days. We were told that there was no snowfall in Kalapatthar.

I have been receiving tremendous support from all stakeholders and partners.

It is a fact that Himalayas is melting but we need to conduct more intense scientific studies to justify it. We are also receiving the report of increasing GLOFs. I took part in two important meetings in Copenhagen and Bali which focused on the impacts of climate change in the Himalayas,

How do you evaluate Nepal's stand?

Despite the shortcomings, we are now able to stand on ourselves in raising issues and concerns as we did in Bali. After COP15, we became able to persuade international community that Nepal is very vulnerable to climate change. Our black cap is enough for anybody in international areas to identify us. In international arena, we were able to raise our voice and concerns. In the forthcoming COP16 in Mexico, we will have our own agenda. We need to carry out our program successfully. We must develop experts and expertise. The President of the COP15 tabled the Copenhagen Accord against our proposals of lowering down the global temperature rise to below 1.5 degree Celsius but we put our stand. Even the rise of 1.5 degree Celsius will have major threats to our Himalayas.

Why did you associate with Copenhagen Accord at the last minute?

I think it is the best option that we had. We have associated with the Copenhagen Accord registering our country's stand. Majority of the countries in one or other ways accepted the Accord. In the final plenary session, we have clearly put our stand on the Copenhagen Accord. Historically, what Prime Minister put as his position in Copenhagen has enhanced our prestige. It is for the first time in history of Nepal we agreed to associate with the Accord through intensive discussions at different levels. I do consider the Copenhagen Accord a one-step forward for the development of a legally binding instrument to address the impacts of climate change now, till and beyond 2012.

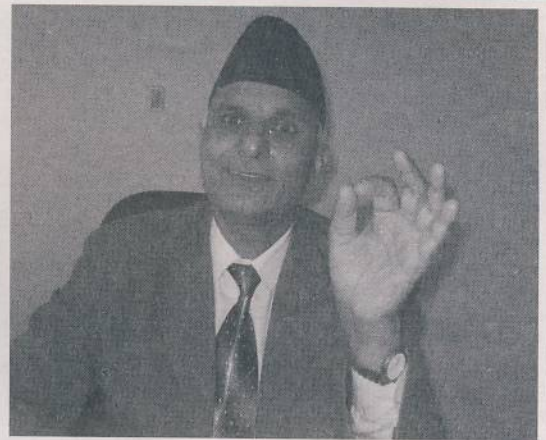
Now, how do you spend your time daily?

I come to the Ministry at 9 a.m. and I hardly find time to meet NGOs and INGOs people. I focus all my concentration on how to institutionalize the Ministry. Till a couple of years ago, every secretary used to consider it as a punishment to get transferred to this Ministry. Now the concept has changed. A lot of competent secretaries have shown their interest to work in this Ministry. I met about a dozen secretaries before choosing one. As most of the functions of the Ministry are technical in nature, I selected a secretary on the basis of technical background, professional knowledge, know-how and competence. I have now the secretary and the joint secretary in the Climate Change Division from the technical side.

What vision do you have for the future?

In a short time, the Ministry has been able gain its own visibility. The Ministry of Environment is developing mechanisms and enhancing its capability to work with stakeholders and development partners. Recently, I became able to establish the Climate Change Division in this Ministry and now I am working to establish the Department of Environment.

I want to show that we can do much better. I request to all my colleagues in the Ministry and department to do something positive for the country. This Ministry was in a very weak position when I came here. The overall status and position of the Ministry has changed. We have made a lot of progress. Nepal has now a unique position in the world. We are developing a strong team of negotiators who can have vision and who can explain Nepal's



position. Because of continuity in the participation, Nepal's delegation is in the position to put country's views strongly. We will address the local problems and provide inputs in the climate change negotiation process.

What is the status of Mountain Alliance Initiative?

We are now formulating the programs to hold the international conference of mountainous countries to form the Mountain Alliance. I feel proud to say that Nepal is coordinating activities to form the alliance without any opposition. There are many things to do. After issuance of the go ahead signal by Climate Change Council recently, we are now moving ahead. If we are able to issue a Kathmandu declaration in the conference, it would give a greater message to the world.

How do you look at the support given by Nepal's development partners?

I welcome all the members of development partners to extend their support on environment in general and climate change in particular. I have requested them to support for holding the international conference of Mountain nations. Nepal's development partners and international communities have agreed to support us. Some of the development partners have shown interest to support us to bring the mountainous countries together during the on-going Bonn meeting that will also contribute to organise the international conference in Nepal. I have seen the increased level of response of international community to support our agenda. I have already held two meetings with Nepal's development partners.

What do you say about the issue of toxic chemicals deposited in various parts of Nepal?

The government has decided to dispose all the toxic pesticides deposited in different places of Nepal with the support from GTZ. We have done some creative work.

How do you view the policy on mitigation?

Despite stressing adaptation, we also need to take some domestic measures to mitigate the greenhouse gas emissions, if any, as our contribution on global warming is very nominal, only 0.025% of the global emission. We want to develop and implement programmes for adaptation and make the Nepalese people benefit from the Climate Change regime.

I welcome all the members of development partners to extend their support on environment in general and climate change in particular.

On Seriousness Of Village Poverty

By Tatsuo MIZUNO

With the ADB's briefing papers and the preceding speeches, I learned the wonderful humanitarian objectives in the three projects to be launched under JFPR scheme today. We, Japan, highly appreciate those humanitarian objectives and can share them which can definitely contribute to alleviate local poverty and to improve local people's health condition and social awareness. Those projects can be widely supported by every Nepalese, every international donor, and every political party here in Nepal, regardless of their conflicting political positions. In this regard, I wish today's three projects to become some adhesive or impetus which makes all political parties understand more about the seriousness and urgency of village people's poverty problem, and make all the parties more united, more conciliatory in order to accelerate Nepali peace process and the writing of the Constitution.

I understand this country is at a very crucial juncture, but I believe Nepali people are fully capable of overcoming current difficulties with their profound wisdom and coordination-ability, through dialogue and a democratic manner without violence or intimidation. As long as peace and democracy is maintained, we, Japan, are fully determined to provide all possible assistance to Nepal, especially for unprivileged or displaced local people. In spite of some political confrontations, I believe this country has got more stable, more democratic, compared with one or two decades ago. Everything, and Nepali future should be decided by Nepali people themselves, and, "Yes, Nepali people can do," this is my belief.

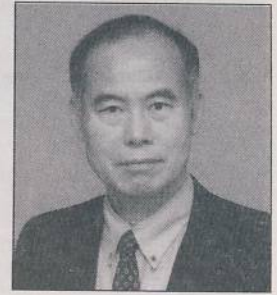
Now, let me review Japanese Government's assistance history of its ODA projects, because some of today's guests from abroad, or Manila, are not fully aware and informed about it.

Then, on what sectors Japan's ODA are mainly focused, let me review briefly. Being a major donor partner for Nepal, the Government of Japan has been making its utmost endeavors for Nepal

by extending Japan's ODA to a number of hydro power projects in Nepal since 1975. Starting with the yen loan assistance, Japan has extended about 4 billion Japanese yen (approximately 42.68 Million US\$) for the construction of Kulekhani Hydroelectric Project with installed capacity of 60mW energy. This hydropower plant is of water storage type in structure, which is an only water storage power plant constructed in Nepal till date. Besides, Kulekhani II Hydro Power Station Project with the installed capacity of 32mW with a total of 12.15 billion yen loan (approximately 129.65 Million US\$). In addition, in JFY 1996, a total of 16.196 billion yen (approximately 172.83 Million US\$) extended to the country's largest Kaligandi "A" Hydroelectric project

Grass-root, small-sized, community level projects, also.

The points I want to say is very clear, that is: Japan is fully supporting ADB and also keenly supporting to today's three JFPR projects, while Japan is bilaterally providing many similar kinds of socio-economic, humanitarian assistance to New Nepal. Japan's objective, ADB's objective are the same, that is, to enable all Nepalese women, children, displaced people to enjoy the fruits of peace in New Nepal.



I understand this country is at a very crucial juncture, but I believe Nepali people are fully capable of overcoming current difficulties with their profound wisdom and coordination-ability, through dialogue and a democratic manner without violence or intimidation.

with the installed capacity of 144mW. This is a joint funding project with the ADB.

In this regard, let me mention that Japan's contribution to power generation sector in Nepal is still considerably high (236 mW) which is about 35% out of present total installed capacity, a combination of NEA and IPP.

Also, multipurpose projects targeting on both infrastructural and socio-economic development are in progress, such as Sindhuli Road and KRM - Bhaktapur Road which are expected to enable the adjacent communities to see more smooth flow of people and logistics as well. We believe that those projects are making a significant impact on Nepali people's standard of life, in terms of improving social welfare and medical access. These are widely appreciated already all over in Nepal.

I have talked too much about Japan's big projects of ODA, but we have more

(Excerpts of Remarks by Tatsuo MIZUNO, Ambassador of Japan to Nepal, given at the Launching Ceremony of the Newly Approved Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction Projects in Nepal)

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Local People in Jhapa : Pressing for constitution

Lawmakers Not Invited

A Break For Business

Local community organizes a program to press lawmakers to draft the constitution in time

By **UMAKANTAKHANAL**
in Jhapa

This is a time when the lawmakers should have been busy in the constitution making process, or, at best, done with their work. But the ordinary citizens blame that the lawmakers from the different political parties have been engaged more with programmes of their own political parties. They rarely take part in the constitution making process.

Different organizations in the district have said that the lawmakers' only concern should be to engage in the constitution making process. These organizations have now decided that they will not invite the lawmakers from Jhapa to any formal programmes throughout the district until the constitution is made.

The organizations have requested the lawmakers not to leave the capital until the constitution making process is finished. Jhapa has 21 lawmakers from UCPN (Maoist), Nepali Congress, CPN (UML), CPN (ML), and other minor parties.

The decision of not inviting the lawmakers to any programme in the district has come when the countdown to the constitution making deadlines has

already begun. If the members of the constituent assembly attended their meetings, maximum work of the new constitution making process would have completed.

The hundreds of organizations working within the district have made a group to pressurize the lawmakers to concentrate on their work within the constitution assembly hall. The pressure group has also requested the citizens not to invite the lawmakers in any programme until they make the constitution.

The president of citizens' pressure group, Lal Raj Subedi, said, "We have requested our lawmakers not to attend

any programme or celebration until they make our constitution. They must give us the new constitution by Jestha 14."

The meetings of the constituent assembly gets disturbed frequently and the chances of constitution making by Jestha 14 are diminishing. Worse, the people do not find any seriousness on the part of the political parties and the members of the constitution assembly. The active social organizations in Jhapa say instead of attending the meetings of the assembly, the law makers attend the programmes of campaigning of their political parties.

The pressure group formed in Jhapa to pressurize the law makers to concentrate on constitution making work includes Federation of Nepalese Journalists too. The president of FNJ Jhapa branch, Mohan Kazi Neupane said, "It is the duty of a conscious citizen to pressurize them to concentrate on their work."

Another active organization, Federation of NGOs in Jhapa, has also requested the law makers not to return to the district before Jestha 14. Its Jhapa president, Rudra Sitoula, said, "They have to be more serious because the country is going to be a lawless country."

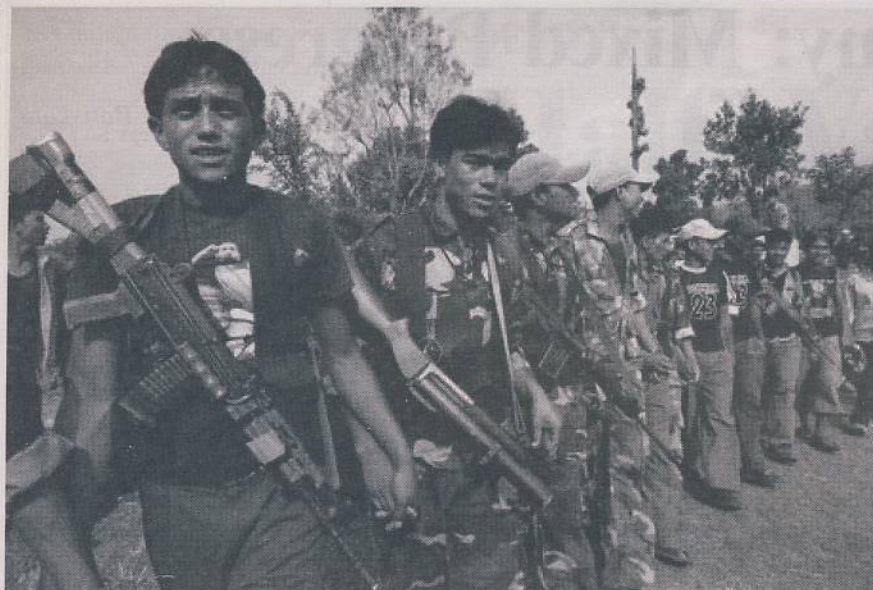
The reaction from the law makers is not negative. Instead they favour the people's decision not to invite them in any of the programmes conducted by them. A law maker of Jhapa from UCPN(Maoists), who defeated former home minister-Krishna Prasad Sitoula, Purna Singh Rajbanshi said, "I do not take people's rage in negative sense because we have failed to do our work as per the peoples' mandate."

Amrit Lal Rajbansi, a law maker from Nepali Congress, has said that if central leaders of the political parties came to the agreement in every chapter of the constitution, the time is enough for us to make the new constitution of Nepal. But the citizens are not optimistic that the law makers will be able to do it within the time limit. ■

नव वर्ष २०६७ को पावन अवसरमा हाम्रा समस्त
ग्राहकवर्गमा सुख, शान्ति, सु-स्वास्थ्य, दीर्घायु
एवं सफलताको हार्दिक मंगलमय शुभकामना
व्यक्त गर्दछौं ।



नेपाल टेलिकम
परिवार



Maoist PLA : Right concerned

HUMAN RIGHTS

US Concerned

US government expresses concerned over human rights violation in Nepal

By **ABIJIT SHARMA**

The establishment of 'Loktantra' after a decade-long armed conflict promised a fresh start for Nepal in several fronts. Yet, Nepal's long-standing problem of human rights violation continues.

Cases of rights violation have become more frequent in the last few years with new armed forces posing increased threats to locals and journalists, especially in the Terai.

The abuses in Nepal have been noticed not just at home. The recent US government's annual country report cites impunity for human rights violators, frequent threats and continuing violence by the Maoists.

Despite the comprehensive peace agreement (CPA), the Maoists have been found responsible for violence,

extortion from businessmen, workers and NGOs, abuses and 'unlawful use of lethal force'.

The report of the Department of State accuses the former rebels of defying the agreements made in the CPA and failing to return all the seized properties in their possession.

The blame goes beyond the Maoists. The US report accuses the government of failing to comply with the OHCHR recommendations on 49 disappeared persons detained at Maharajgunj Barracks and turning a blind eye to the inquiries on 170 disappeared persons in Bardiya district between 2001 and 2004.

The US report also highlights the ongoing violence against journalists. It echoes the bitter experience of the Nepali pen-pushers.

"Media and journalists have had to face threats and abuses for declining to publish news in favor of a particular ethnic/political group," it says.

Media houses have faced dire consequences with newspapers being burnt, distribution halted and strikes, it adds. ■

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Economy: Mixed Progress

By Krishnahari Banskota

There is a mixed situation in the implementation of the current budget so far. It is positive in the sense that there are many development projects that have been initiated from this fiscal year, including the construction of roads, irrigation canals and drinking water projects like Melamchi. In some areas like social sector, we are yet to meet the targets. For example, we have just started to distribute the cash to those who perform inter-cast marriage. It took several months due to delay in making the proceedings. We were unable to provide Rs.200 in allowances to *dalits* and poor people of Karnali zone from August. We have implemented similar things.

There are many positive signs in development projects. One thousand kilometers of road have already been completed. We have to complete 700 kilometers road. We have awarded Rs.800 million worth of contract for road construction in 13 areas. This will be used for construction of 500 kilometers road. Within three years, the construction of mid-hill highway will complete. This is a good sign. Another jubilant sector is the fast track road from Kathmandu to Nijgadh which is going to be around 84-85 kilometers. According to an estimate of ADB, it will cost Rs.57 billion for construction of the four lane road. This year we have sanctioned 250 million rupees and asked the army to open the track road. This road will touch four districts, Bara, Makwanpur, Lalitpur and Kathmandu. The construction of the road has already started from Bara. The army has just constructed .25 kilometer of track road but the army has already made alignment with 40 kilometers. Second International Airport at Nijgadh is also a part of this fast track. If we are able to build the fast track in time, there is possibility to start the second international Airport at Nijgadh soon. Without fast track, we cannot dream for an international airport in Nijgadh. This

year we have sanctioned Rs. 2.5 billion in budgets for Melamchi Drinking water project and the process of construction of tunnel has already started but what we are yet to start the work is in intake side. The process of construction of tunnel has already started from nine different locations by a Chinese Contractor. Despite all obstacles, the government has finally started the construction of tunnel. Other big development project is Housing for People with sanctioned budget of Rs. 1 billion. We have planned to build 1000 houses with the cost of Rs.65, 000 small families and Rs.110, 000 for big family. We have already sanctioned 300 million rupees for this and the piloting house will be constructed in three districts.

Another big program is People's Embankment. We have started to build embankment in 10 different rivers in terai with the budget of 1 billion rupees. We have already identified the rivers and the process of contract has already started. Similarly, in irrigation sector the work of the headwork of Shikta Irrigation Project has completed with the cost of 1.96 billion rupees constructed by Chinese contractor. Out of 42 kilometer canals, we have a plan this year to construct 15 kilometer long canal to irrigate 38,000 hectares of land in Banke. We have also distributed 7000 shallow tube wells. This is a good sign.

There is no mixed situation in revenue collections. We have decided to bring commodity market under the tax regime and three houses are now under the tax regime. We have also forwarded proposal for high seas but FNCCI has delayed its study. We have also decided to hand over bondage houses to private sector like the bondage ware house at Tribhuvan International Airport. This is delayed due to private sector. So far as the revenue collection is concerned, it is a good sign. The trends of revenue collection are very positive. The current trend showed that we will be in a position



to collect 125 billion rupees till April 13. In the customs revenue, we have a target of 177 billion rupees and we are expecting that the Rs.25 billion will be collected from the office till April 13. We have a target of Rs 52 billion in VAT and we will collect 35 billion in the same period. In the income tax, we set a target for 36 billion and we are expecting to collect 20 billion by April 13. In additional tax, we set a target of 20 billion but we will collect 18 billion and we are collecting 18 percent higher. In the land registration, we set the target for 6 billion but we will be able to collect Rs.4 billion. The target of vehicle tax is also lower than our expectation. We set the target for 3.5 billion rupees but we will be able to collect 2. Non tax areas, we set the target for 26.25 billion but we are able to collect 15 billion rupees.

This year's current expenditure is Rs.160 billion. According to Nepal Rastra Bank's data, we have already spent 87 billion rupees till April 2. Out of 106 billion rupees, we have already spent 26 billion rupees under capital expenditure. Our increase rate is 45 percent. The increase in the current expenditure is the result of frequent visits of VIPs, programs related to relief, reward and donations, increase of logistic in government offices and parties.

We have a target to raise Rs. 177 billion in revenue. Till April 2, we have already collected 115 billion rupees. This is an increase of 27 percent. I am expecting that the revenue collection will be 125 billion by April 13. We will collect

189 billion rupees or 13 billion higher than we have targeted till the end of fiscal year.

The reason behind the lower tax collections in non tax sector is failure of government own corporation to pay back money. For instance, Nepal Oil is yet to pay Rs 10 billion tax similarly NEA is yet to pay 13 billion royalty and Civil Aviation Authority is yet to pay back the loan.

Despite dismal picture shown in Nepalese economy, the collection of income tax and other domestic tax showed that the economic activities are going on in Nepal. One can say that Nepal's economy is heading towards trade and commerce rather than in industry. The consumption pattern also showed that living standard of the people has also gone up. It is definite to say that we are unable to use the remittances in productive areas and it is now used in consumption sector. People are consuming high, because of the revenue pattern, we can say that the cloth and food items are imported in high volume. The poverty level declines but the gap between rich and poor is growing. So far as foreign currency is concerned, it saw a decline from the past. We used to have huge surplus of foreign currency to sustain the import for nine and half months but now it is 200 billion reserve which can sustain seven months of imports. The inflation rate also declined from 13 percent from 14. This year the inflation is going to be 10. We are unable to maintain the balance of payment of Rs.20 billion but we are able to contain it. It is stable now. One of the disappointing thing is trade deficit. Nepal has a trade deficit of 222 last year. In nine months period we have already imported goods worth of 200 billion but exported products worth merely 35 billion rupees. The consumption increases because of rising purchasing power. In the past we used few items but now people use varieties of products.

(Banskota is a secretary (Revenue) to Ministry of Finance and this is as told to New Spotlight)

DEMINING

Half Way Down

Despite signing comprehensive peace agreement, landmine continues to pose threat to life

By ABIJIT SHARMA

A bidding by the commitment made in the Comprehensive Peace Accord, Nepal government has cleared about half the mines laid during the decade-long armed conflict. Fifty three mine-fields and more than three hundred improvised explosive devices (IED) were planted by the Nepal Army and the Armed Police Force. Out of the total number of minefields, 26 have already been cleared with the help of the UN Mine Action Team (UNMAT). The remaining mines,

percent of the casualty. Women victims comprised 31 percent.

Experts believe the exact locations of the planted mines are difficult to track, as they are hidden in many places.

"This International Day for Mine Awareness provides an opportunity to inform and educate the public about the risks of landmines and efforts to eliminate them," said Gillian Mellshop, UNICEF representative for Nepal on the occasion of the 5th annual International Day of Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action. She added that UN would



it is targeted, will be cleared by 2011.

Despite this decent progress, accidents due to land-mines still occur in the former war affected areas. Children have been the victim of most of the accidents. Seventy casualties were reported in 2009 from the explosives even as the government claimed the remarkable progress in the area of mine clearance, risk education and advocacy. Far worse, children made up fifty four

sustain its current support to Nepal government in the mine action works.

The Ministry of Education has also assisted by carrying out Mine Risk Education program in more than one thousand schools in the former war affected areas. A network of four hundred and thirty Emergency Mine Risk Education focal points is ready to provide emergency risk education in sixty eight districts. ■

COOPERATIVES

Reality Check

Despite sitting with nearly Rs 100 billion of funds under their belt, the saving and credit cooperatives have enjoyed lax scrutiny. But not anymore, if NRB has its way

By SANJAYADHAKAL

Four months ago, the central bank issued a strong directive to the banks and financial institutions to reduce their investments in what was perceived as high risk sector of real estate.

The move by Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) was prompted by the spurt of unprecedented growth in realty sector. The housing boom and soaring land prices meant that the banks and financial institutions rushed to invest – cornering a huge amount of money in a blatantly unproductive and largely speculation-driven sector.

But the NRB's move failed to affect another big player – the savings and credit cooperatives.

Operating under lax regulations of the Department of Cooperatives, these institutions have, in the last couple of years, mushroomed and become, in many cases, financial monoliths.

There are about 5000 such institutions across the country and conservative estimates say that they have collected funds between Rs 70 to Rs 100 billion, among them.

Some fear that a bulk of that money, up to two-third has been invested in real estate.

Recently, the Department of Cooperatives with the cooperation of NRB, conducted a study of the financial health of ten 'big' cooperatives.

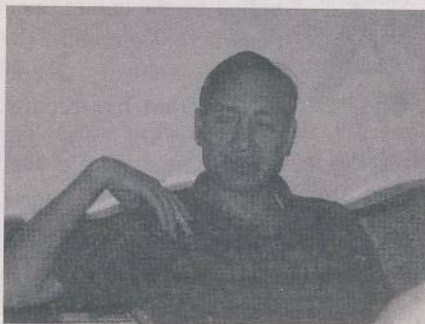
The result was 'disturbing.'

It found out that the cooperatives had flouted even basic banking rules despite handling such a huge amount of public money.

Those cooperatives were then asked to submit financial reform plan to improve their health.

The results were actually a wake-up call to the central bank – which is ultimately responsible for the money management.

Soon after he was appointed the governor of the NRB, Dr. Yubaraj



Governor Dr. Khatiwada :
Time to act

Khatiwada made it clear that the cooperatives involved in the financial transactions will have to be, somehow, brought under the umbrella of the central bank.

"The NRB has the responsibility of safe-keeping Rs 600 billion that is in the market in banks and financial

institutions. And then there is another Rs 100 billion in other sectors, which also have to be safely managed," he said in a statement he delivered at a function held to welcome him as new NRB governor.

The other Rs 100 billion, which he indicated, are mostly managed haphazardly, if the study report is to be trusted.

In a clear indication that NRB is going to act tough against the cooperatives, the central bank has already corresponded with the saving and credit cooperatives to notify the Financial Information Unit (FIU) of the bank with detailed information about their customers

The NRB has used the Anti-Money Laundering Act to ask the cooperatives to report all transactions over Rs 1 million within seven days and all suspicious transactions immediately.

That apart, governor Khatiwada has said that efforts to control the cooperatives are being mullied.

He said that it was necessary to strengthen the supervising capacity of the central bank.

Left to work on their own for such a long time, the sudden moves to control them may not be welcomed easily by the cooperatives.

But at stake is a huge amount of public money and the image, itself, of the central bank and its new governor ■

Concert On Climate Change

With the aim of creating awareness among members of the public concerning climate change, the British Council and its 'climate champions', the young representatives of the climate change issue, organized a first of its kind, a 'carbon-neutral concert' at the Basantapur Durbar Square.

Under the theme 'Climate change: Mero Bhawishya, Mero Chaso' (climate change: my future, my concern), organizers claimed that the carbon emitted during the program would be later offset through a tree plantation program, as a single tree is capable of absorbing 23kgs of carbon.

The concert featured the launch of



a song "Jagou", which talked about waking up to the problem of changing climate, by Rojesh Shrestha, one of the climate champions and a musician and also the opening of a digital library on climate change by another champion Sushila Pandit.

By **ABJIJIT SHARMA**



Shrestha, Joshi and Malakar : United against Bandh

TOURISM

Bandh Call Hit It

Although Maoists withdrew the general strike, it had already sent a bad message to the world tourism market

By A CORRESPONDENT

"**M**e request the Maoist party to fulfill its written commitment given to us not to call any general strike in Nepal Tourism Year 2011," demanded Kush Kumar Joshi, president of Federation of Nepalese Industry, Chamber and Commerce. "Maoist leaders will abide by their commitment."

When Joshi, along with president of Nepal Chamber of Commerce and Industry Surendra Bir Malakar, and executive director of Nepal Tourism Board Prachanda Man Shrestha, called on Maoists to withdraw the general strike, Maoist leaders were busy in the Legislative Parliament justifying reasons behind the general strike.

Whether it was just a coincidence or pressure, the government decided to cancel the process of awarding MRP to an Indian company. The Maoists had reasons to rejoice and called off the general strike on April 12, 2010.

As the country is heading towards confrontation and uncertainty in the

coming days with the hope to draft the new constitution fading further, more troublesome days could be in store ahead.

The entrepreneurs and various others affiliated to business fraternity organized a press conference at Nepal Tourism Board, Sunday, and urged the Maoists to comply with its own commitment to abstain from *bandhs* to make Nepal Tourism Year 2011 (NTY-2011) a success.

19 political parties including UCPN (Maoist), Nepali Congress and CPN (UML) had signed a joint commitment paper amid a public function pledging not to organize any *bandhs* or strikes that affect the tourism industry, when the campaign for Nepal Tourism Year 2011 began about two months ago.

With an ambitious objective to bring one million tourists, in the year 2011, Nepalese tourism entrepreneurs are now organizing the national campaign in different parts of Nepal. The regional level programs have already been organized in Pokhara and Lumbini.

"We would like to remind about the written commitment expressed in public by 19 political parties including the UCPN (Maoist), Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML) not to organize any programs that hinder tourism, NTB has mentioned in the statement," said Prachanda Man Shrestha, Chief executive officer of Nepal Tourism Board.

Compared to last year, the visitors continue to rise in Nepal recently. Visitor arrivals to Nepal by air saw 34.6 percent surge in the month of March 2010, compared to the same month last year, Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) said, citing figures released by the Immigration Office at the Tribhuvan International Airport.

The arrivals from South Asian region, except for the arrivals from Sri Lanka, have gone up.

According to NTB, it is the tenth consecutive month Nepal has witnessed growth in the international tourist arrivals and this confirms the improved prospects for Nepal in the year 2010 with rising business and consumer confidence. In the first three months of 2010 a robust 29.8 % of cumulative growth has been observed in comparison to the same period last year. A total of 39,221 foreign tourists departed from TIA in March 2010.

As the tourist arrivals continue to go, there is the need to have some kind of tranquility to maintain the momentum. If something goes wrong, our industry will have to face a severe situation," said Surendra Bir Malakar, president of Nepal Chamber of Commerce.

Some promising figures are: Growth of 35.3% with India (35.5%), Bangladesh (53.8%) and, Pakistan (3.2%). Visitor arrivals from India, which is the largest source market for Nepal, have been increasing since the very beginning of 2010.

A robust growth of 21% has been observed in the arrivals from the South Asian region during the first three months of 2010, in comparison to the same period last year, NTB said. ■



SOLID WASTE

Hope From Dirt Heaps

As the population of the capital valley grows, solid waste management has proved a daunting task

By ADITI PANDEY

Heaps of stinking garbage strewn about here and there, now and then, no longer surprise any denizen of the capital valley. More than being an eyesore or a health hazard, they are becoming grounds for dirty politics these days.

Stakeholders of the rotting heaps range from local people near the landfill, to metro officials in Kathmandu and from laymen to leaders.

Political parties obviously want to get a mileage out of dirt heaps. What is the the next powerful form of protest after *banda*? Whenever something goes

wrong in some sectors, you better stop collecting garbage, rendering the city unclean, unhygienic and nose-wrenching. Fulfill your demands.

Solid waste problem is not new in Nepal. Ever since the restoration of democracy in 1990, successive governments have made all efforts to solve the crisis by announcing various measures including selecting a permanent landfill site.

From Gorkarna's landfill site to present Okharpauwa, the story plot is the same: politics of garbage. Despite a huge potential to make money by recycling the solid waste, the authorities

are stuck up in a mess to manage it properly. This is the reason management of over 500 metric tons of wastes generated in the valley has been a daunting task for all the governments.

Although people from all over the country migrate to the capital city for better opportunities, the valley seems to have suffered from a different fate. Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur produce 360 tons, 75 tons and 26 tons of waste, respectively, every day. The result of tons of waste disposal can be seen right before our eyes.

Despite 53 agreements being signed between the government and the locals of the Sisdole Landfill Site, waste management continues to remain the capital's perennial problem. Experts suggest that the problem could be tackled if we could significantly reduce the volume of garbage by setting up compost plants in our own backyards. Experts claim that this can bring down the volume of garbage by almost 80 per cent.

Bhushan Tuladhar, executive director of the Environment and Public Health Organization (ENPHO), claims that waste can be turned into a source of income. He reminds us of how Nepalese household culture teaches us to segregate wastes into organic and non-organic. Methods of composting have remained amongst us from a long time back and these traditional methods should be continued.

Sixty-eight per cent of the total waste produced is organic. If we are successful in composting all our organic waste, the Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) would only have to manage 16-19 percent of the total waste produced in the Valley, as 13-16 percent waste that include plastic, glasses, metals and bottles that can be reused. At a larger scale, waste management will also reduce greenhouse emissions, thereby making a contribution to reducing global warming.

The concept of achieving 'zero waste', or coming even close to it, is a challenge for a developing country like

Nepal. Therefore, the immediate solution is none other than reusing and recycling. By composting waste we can also assist other citizens as majority of the Nepalese population are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood.

However, in the present context, a major requirement is spreading awareness. People are mostly unaware or have misconceptions of composting and waste management. With the current pace of fast growing population and poor urban and municipal governance it has become a necessity that methods of waste management be introduced from individual level.

Organic waste management can also be conceptualized as a business opportunity. They can be used as animal feed. Through composting, waste can be turned into fertilizers that fertilize our crops. They can also be burnt and used as a source of energy.

In order to introduce composting at your own house there are a few myths that need to be disproved. "It stinks," if aerobic composting is used then one can be free of any unpleasant smell. "It is non-profitable," Nepal being an agricultural country with majority of the people dependent on agriculture for their livelihood, composting waste and selling of nitrogenous fertilizers is profitable. "It is inconvenient and time consuming" vermi-composting takes effort and time as the earthworms are delicate and die easily.

However aerobic composting is easy and very fast. If waste is segregated into organic and non-organic, one can easily begin aerobic composting. This requires containers that are especially designed to pass air and hold optimum amount of waste. These containers are available at most municipalities and have a reasonable price.

Waste management is not impossible. If every individual takes charge of his own waste produce, Nepal can also reach the goal of "zero waste." ■

SOUTH ASIA-CHINA FAIR

For Better Trade Balance

Nepal has been on the losing end of its trade with China. A four-day South Asia China Trade Fair shows a way to forge better a trade balance

By A CORRESPONDENT

With more than 80,000 visitors, the four-day South-Asia China Trade Fair 2010 concluded in Kathmandu recently.

Organized to promote quality products of South Asian countries and China, visitors had many choices to see.

The expo, the fourth of its kind, was organized by Nepal-China Executive Council and attended by businesspeople from seven countries.

"I am happy that these kinds of fair will help to narrow down the gap between the two countries. As China has already agreed to increase the number of products with zero duty, there is a great possibility for Nepalese traders to do business with China," said Rajesh Kazi Shrestha, president of the council.

In the fair, inaugurated by Vice President Parmananda Jha, five countries including China, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh took part in with various products of their concern.

"Nepal can be the trade center linking Asia's leading economic power China with other South Asian countries," said vice president Jha while addressing the opening ceremony.

He said the expo will support Nepali commodities to be promoted in an international arena.

Similarly, envoys from participating countries sought for the regional trade cooperation.

"Intra-regional as well as trans-regional trade cooperation is a must for the development of the region," said Syed Abrar Hussein, Pakistani ambassador to Nepal.

Addressing the fair, Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Qiu Guohong



said that the expo was a great event which will enhance bilateral trade relation between South Asian countries and China.

"To strengthen the economic exchanges between China and South Asian countries, China will continue to host the third South Asian Countries Commodity Fair in June," Qiu added.

According to the organizers, the expo put on exhibit diversified products. They are confident the outcome of the four-day event was positive.

The organizers expected 60,000 visitors during the expo and around 100 companies were attending the fair with the Chinese delegation covering 30 stalls exhibiting various products, like power, machinery, automobile, electronics, chemicals and textile.

"This trade fair also helped Nepalese business communities to know the market of China and other South Asian countries. We have a great potential to increase the trade between the countries of the region including China," said Shrestha.

After linking the rail from China's rest of the country with Tibetan capital of Lhasa, Nepal too has many opportunities ahead to increase its trade volume with China. Although Nepal's trade gap with China is over 10 billion rupees, there are possibilities to reduce the gap. ■

EXPOSITION

All The Best

The exhibition of paintings of Chaitya shows vivid views of valley

by PRADIPTI BHATTA

Looking for a place to spend your quality time? Go see 'Chaitya and Silent Flow'. It is an exhibition taking place at Siddhartha Art Gallery. This exhibit of paintings and installations no doubt is one of the best exhibits the city has seen in recent times.

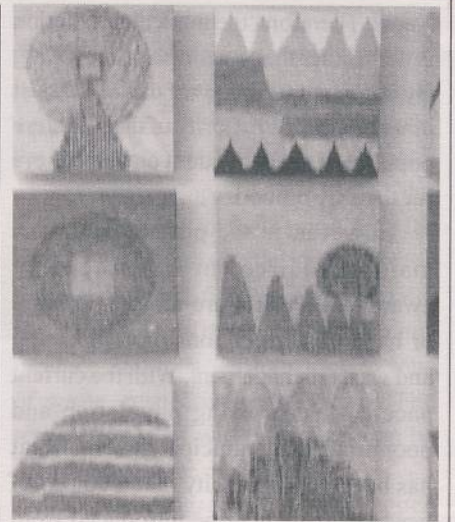
The artists, Sushma Shakya and Kailash Shrestha, both the first batch of alums of Kathmandu University Center for Art and Design, were chosen to receive the 2009 Australian Himalayan Foundation Art Award. This alone is evident of the fact that the two, excelling as students and now as artists, are continuing to explore even further. 'Silent Flow' works are the figurative paintings of Kailash whereas 'Chaitya' that consists of images of damaged and lost Buddhist shrines are the works of Sushma.

In an attempt to know his 'true self', Kailash has come up with self portrayals of the human head which show various emotions. Some of his portrayals are tipped at a curious angle-cavernous nostrils rise in the center of the painting and unwittingly create a disturbing effect on the work. He has used bold colors along with subtle pastel colors used to create meditative spaces in his larger than life paintings. The 'non representational elements' in these paintings create their own shadow giving an impression of time, distance and space which according to the artist represents his opinion that every individual exists in mystery.

A representation of a community in which she grew up, Sushma offers works reflecting her impressions of the Chaitya. She has beautifully played with various mediums in her twenty two paintings. The artist has used soft pastel

colors and serene blues, to set a mood of serenity in her works. These colors have been painstakingly sponged on to generate a meditative blackness around the chaityas. 'Hundred and Eight' is one of the best works exhibited there.

Other than painting's, Sushmas installation consists of nine wire frame chaityas and an entire wall covered with cut out pieces of papers from a diary that forms the shape of a chaitya. Even



in her paintings she has used wires which make her work intriguing. Her illustrations have given a wonderful fun touch to the event.

The exhibition which was inaugurated on 4th April will run till 21st April. ■

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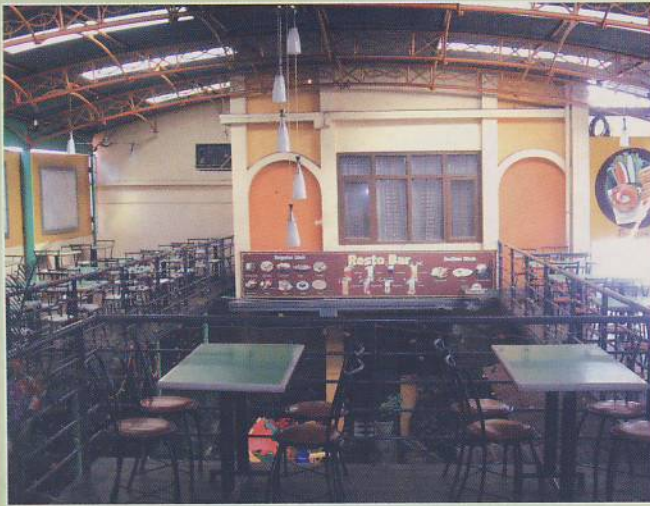
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Ad: Manoj SINGHLOD

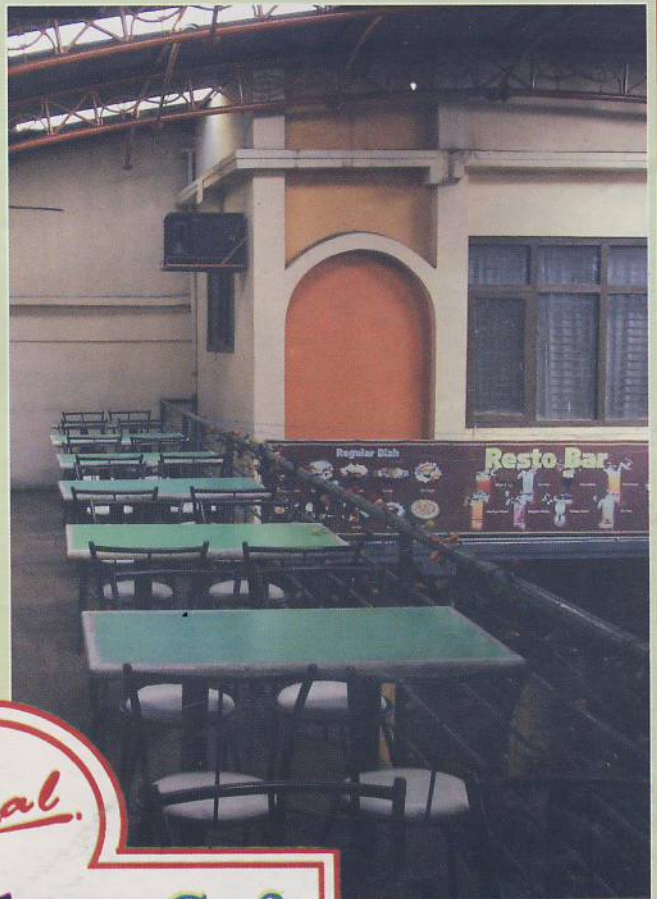


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