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Opinion:
Dipak Gyawali
NEW

INSIDE:

ECONOMIC SURVEY : Uncomfortable Truth

VIEWPOINT: Peace first, then constitution



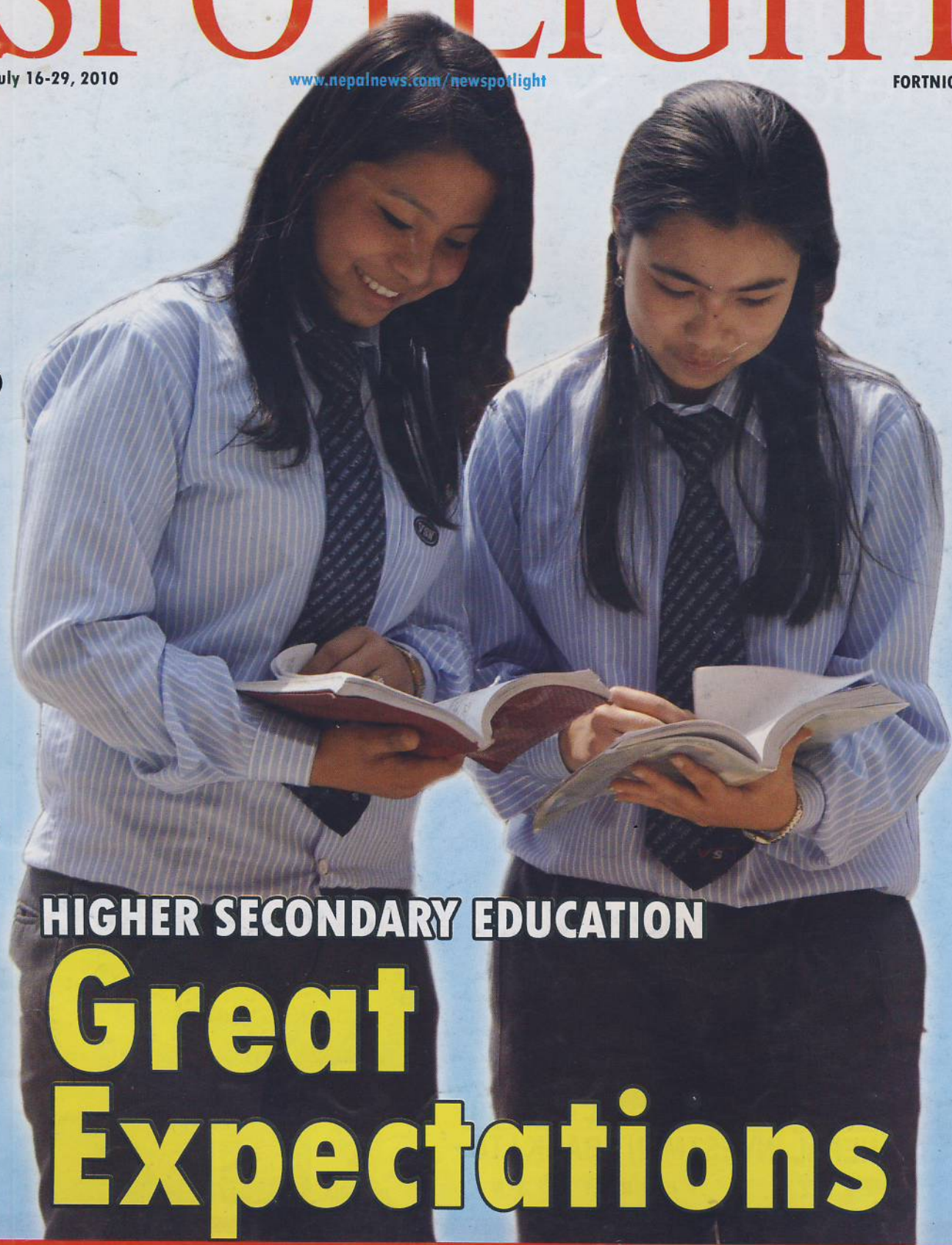
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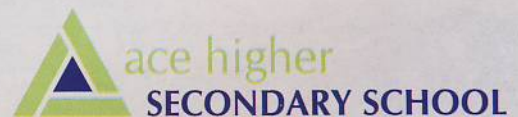
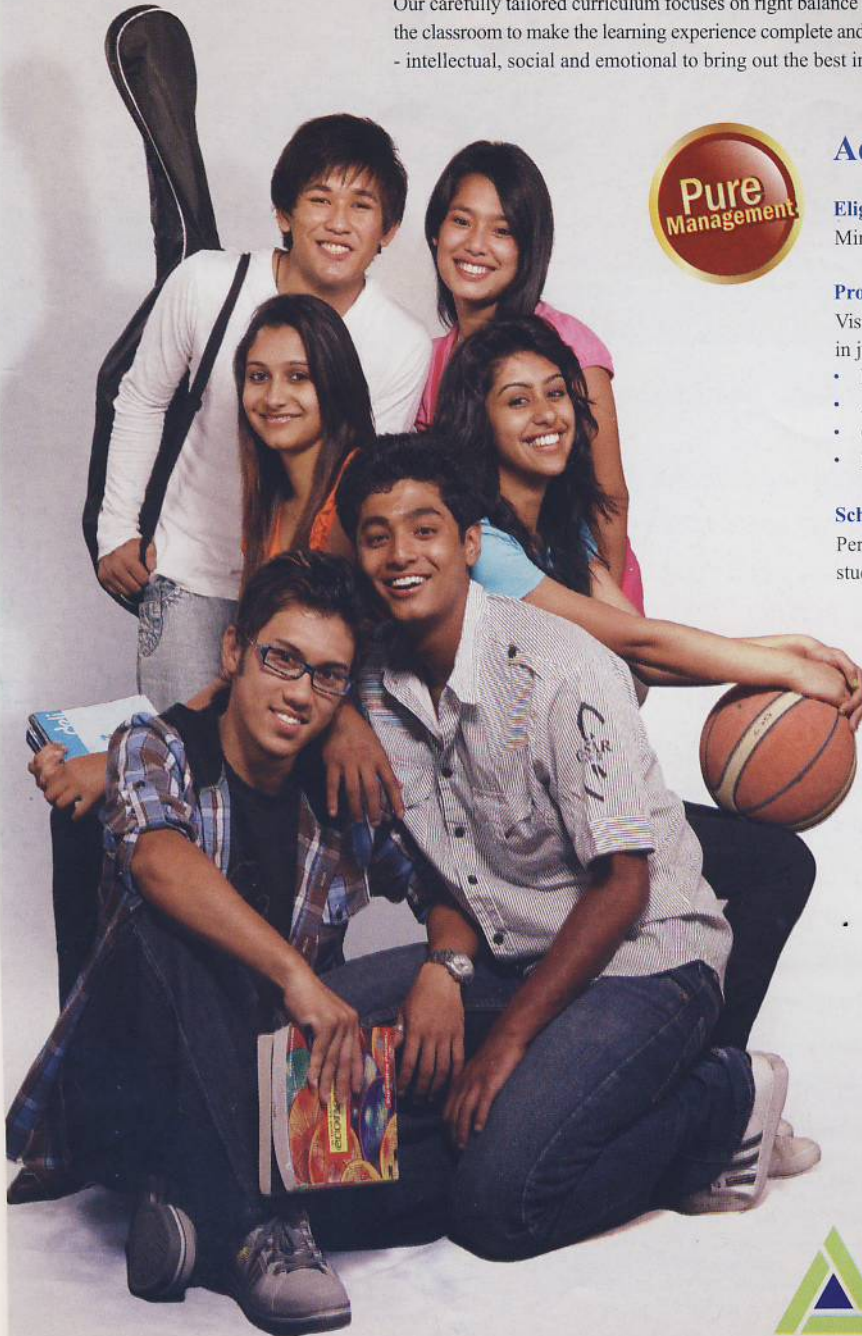
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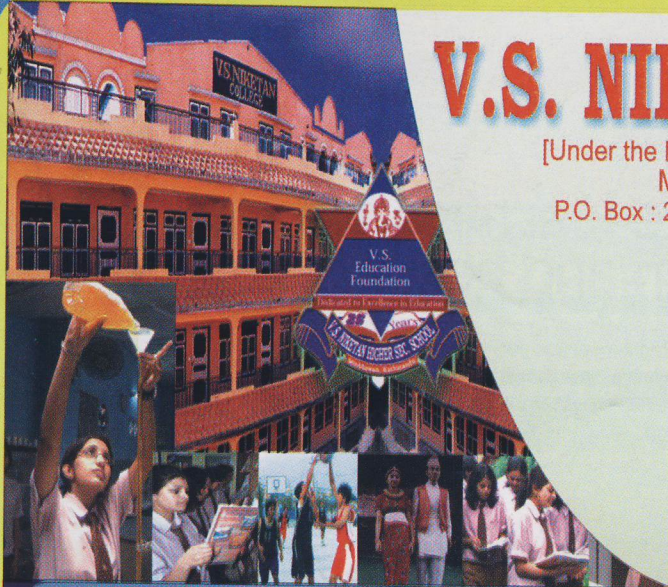
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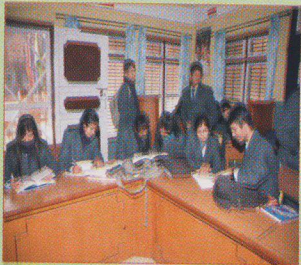
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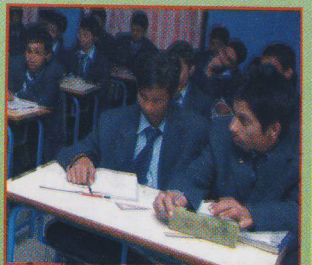
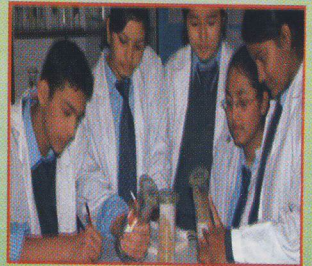
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From the Editor

The SLC results are out. Doors for higher education have opened for those who got through the Iron Gate. Many of them have been looking for options beyond the government colleges which once used to be the only avenue. Private schools and colleges have now become the major avenue notwithstanding many shortcomings. As government schools and colleges face resource crunch and quality infrastructures, private schools offer the best options to students. Of course, fees are too high for many to be able to afford it. But to those who can afford it, good education is available at home. They do not necessarily need to go abroad. The challenge still remains: to make higher education accessible and affordable to as many students as possible. For this the government needs to take necessary step to improve the quality at the government schools and develop a mechanism to offer scholarships to the needy in the private schools. This requires a political will which in turn warrants political stability. Unfortunately, Nepal has been passing through the same old phenomenon of instability. This we think need to be addressed. But that does not close the windows for taking a look at the state of higher education. This is what we have tried to do in the cover story in this issue.

Keshab
Keshab Poudel
 Editor

NEW SPOTLIGHT FORTNIGHTLY

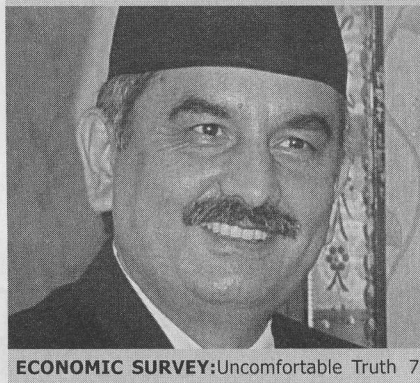
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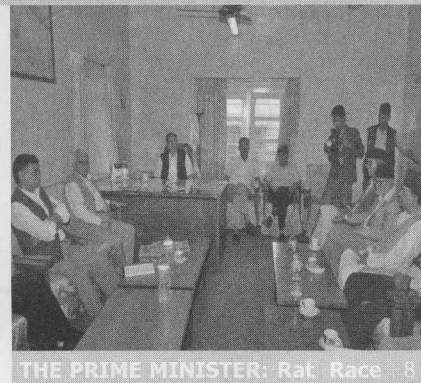
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WVIN's Book Launched

World Vision International Nepal (WVIN) has launched two books: Guidebook to ensure Child Participation and Protection in Local Institutions and at the Community Level; and Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction (A Nepali version).

The Guidebook to ensure Child Participation and Protection in Local Institutions and at the Community Level provides guidelines to address the protection issues of children at the local level. It was developed to suggest activities that need to be undertaken by the VDCs and Municipalities to ensure that children are protected, and that they participate in the development process for themselves and their communities. The guidebook is the first of its kind that has been developed in Nepal. The core recommendation suggested in the guidebook is to set up function committees and mechanisms at the local level for the protection and participation of children.



Apart from the books, several Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials were also launched. The books and IEC materials will be handed over to all district offices in Nepal.

Mahendra Shrestha, Secretary of the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, was the chief guest at the function. Government officials and international development community members were also present.

In his vote of thanks, National Director of WVIN Michael Frank said, "The launch was organized as a prelude to celebrate ten years of working for the needy children and their communities in Nepal."

India Supports Embankments in Lalbakeya

Ambassador of India to Nepal Rakesh Sood handed over a cheque of NRs. 248.79 million to Bal Krishna Khand, Minister for Irrigation, as India's contribution towards construction of embankments along Lalbakeya, Bagmati, Kamala and Bhakuwa rivers in Nepal.

The work is being undertaken in accordance with the decisions made by the India-Nepal Joint Committee on Inundation and Flood Management.

India is also providing grant assistance for river training works along Gagman, Trauma, Lachine, Sunsari and Kankai rivers in Nepal amounting to NRs. 195.21 million.

Likewise seven separate Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) were signed on July 7, 2010 by the Embassy of India, Kathmandu with concerned executing agencies of Government of Nepal and the beneficiary organizations for providing GOI grant assistance of NRs. 8.02 crores.

GOI will provide grant assistance of NRs. 3.57 crores to Nepal Netra Jyoti Sangh (NNJS) to cover the cost of conducting 15,000 cataract eye surgeries



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and 1,000 Trachomatous Trichiasis (TT) during the year 2010-2011 through eye hospitals and eye-care centers of NNJS in various districts of Nepal as a 'National Eye Sight Program'.

IFAD signs US\$ 7.6 million loan

With the goal of reducing poverty and vulnerability of women and men in hill and mountain areas in Nepal, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) signed a new loan agreement of US\$7.6 million as well as a grant agreement of \$7.6 million.

The loan agreement was signed in Kathmandu by Lal Shankar Ghimire, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Finance, Government of Nepal and Ron Hartman, IFAD Country Program Manager.

The new project aims to reduce poverty and social disharmony in the hill and mountain areas of the Mid-Western Development Region and address the issue of economic isolation. Poverty persists in these areas because of conflict, poor infrastructure, and lack of access to services and markets. This will help to integrate rural poor people, especially women and marginal groups into high-value agriculture, value chains and markets, and employment opportunities that lead to improved incomes.

This IFAD project is expected to benefit about 52,000 households (285,000 people). The target group consists of members of poor and vulnerable households that lack access to resources and opportunities. The most vulnerable among this group are women and members of socially disadvantaged groups such as dalits and indigenous groups (*janajatis*).

The project will be implemented under the responsibility of Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives of the Government of Nepal. The Netherlands Development Organization, SNV, is a key partner and co financier of the project.

Nepal To Host Mountain Conference

At a time when temperature continues to increase resulting in a threat to the Himalayas and mountains, Nepal's Minister for Environment Thakur Prasad Sharma has announced that Nepal will host a Conference on International Mountain Alliance.

"Nepal proposed the concept of this alliance during the meeting of COP15 in Copenhagen and we are in the process of materializing it," said Minister Sharma. "This is one of the major decisions taken by the government."

Although Nepal government has already decided to hold the conference of mountain alliance, the criteria of selection of the countries is yet to be set.

"We will set the criteria for the eligible to take part in the conference," said Dr. Ganesh Raj Joshi, secretary of Ministry of Environment.

"Every country has some sorts of mountains. What we want now is to fix the countries on the basis of the heights of these mountains. Within a few days, we will set the criteria," said Batu Krishna Upreti, chief of the Climate Change Division of Ministry of Environment.



Environment Division Chief Purushottam Ghimire highlighted the numbers of achievements made by the Ministry.

KOICA Volunteers Arrived in Nepal

Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) has dispatched four new KOICA Volunteers, who are the fourth batch of 2010, to work in Nepal for two years. They arrived in Kathmandu on July 12, 2010 and were welcomed by the Deputy Representative, Mr. Ki Jeong Song and other officials of KOICA Nepal Office at the Tribhuvan International Airport. These new KOICA Volunteers will be assigned in different government and public organizations with in and outside the Valley and will share Korea's knowledge in Korean language, Special



education, Regional development and Electronic engineering etc with the Nepalese people. They will be stationed in Kathmandu University, Baglung AWMR, Nuwakot DDC, TU (Pokhara) and other organizations.

KOICA Nepal Office will organize 8 weeks of local adaptation training that focuses mainly on learning the Nepali history, language, and culture. During this period they will also visit cultural sites which will help them to understand the local environment and localities. This training also includes on the job training in their respective organizations to familiarize them with their new working environment.

British Gurkha Death in Afghanistan

It is with sadness that the British Embassy announces the death of a Gurkha and two British soldiers, serving with the 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles in Afghanistan, early on Tuesday morning, 13 July 2010. It is believed that they were killed by a renegade member of the Afghan security forces. President Karzai has apologised on behalf of the Afghan government. Next of kin have yet to be informed.

A British Army spokesman has said that this sad loss strengthens the British Army's resolve to work closely with the Afghan forces in order to stabilise Afghanistan and strengthen the Afghan government

New Consular Fees

New fees for Immigrant Visas will go into effect on July 13, 2010. Fees for Non-Immigrant Visas were increased on June 4, 2010. The revised fees are the same worldwide and cover actual operating expenses for the 301 overseas consular posts, 23 domestic passport agencies and other centers that provide these consular services. The new Immigrant Visa fees are listed below:

	CURRENT FEE	NEW	FEE
Immigrant Visa Fees			
IV Application Processing Fee			
1. Family-based immigrant visa	\$ 355.00		\$ 330.00
2. Employment-based immigrant visa	\$ 355.00		\$ 720.00
3. Other immigrant visas (SIVs, DVs, etc.)	\$ 355.00		\$ 305.00
IV Security Surcharge	\$ 45.00		\$ 74.00
Diversity Visa Lottery additional processing fee	\$ 375.00		\$ 440.00



President China Visit Uncertain

Due to political instability in Nepal, the visit of Nepalese president Dr. Ram Varan Yadav proposed visit to People's Republic of China on end of August to take part as a special guest in Nepal day in Shanghai Expo which is schedule to celebrate on September 3.



Nepalese Ambassador to China Tanaka Karki reportedly is taking initiative to this visit. According to Lalit Basnet, personal secretary of President Dr. Yadav, they don't know anything about the proposed official visit to China. "It is the foreign ministry which needs to take initiative and manage such visit," said Basnet. Following the resignation of prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, there appear uncertainty over the visit and other matter related to Nepal-China relations.

Nepalese president Dr. Yadav reportedly gave his own consent to Nepalese ambassador to China Tanka Kari to his maiden visit to China. Dr. Yadav already paid his official visit to India last year as a first president of Federal Republic Nepal.

Despite uncertainty over president visit to China, Chinese government has announced a major policy giving duty free access to Nepalese products. At a time when Nepal's trade is growing all the countries, Chinese decision is taken as an important step. **Kantipur**

India Worry on China's Concession

China has decided not to impose any duty on exports from Bangladesh and Nepal. This zero-duty treatment to exporters in these countries is likely to affect Indian exporters adversely. Another Asian nation to benefit from its zero tax tariff system is Afghanistan

where India and China are seriously engaged in reconstruction and development.

The move is bound to force India, a major seller to these countries to sit up and take notice. For Nepal, the zero tariff moves that came into effect on July 1 means an opportunity to reduce its heavy reliance on Indian buying, sources said.

In case of Bangladesh, the move comes on top of Chinese support in building a 150 megawatt power project in Chandpur, which will be built by Chengda Engineering Corporation of China, and construction of the seventh friendship bridge at Kajirtek.

The Times of India wrote, "Business relationship between China and Bangladesh have picked up momentum since the visit of PM Sheikh Hasina to Beijing last March, when the two countries decided to establish a "Closer Comprehensive Partnership of Cooperation" and Beijing made an offer of concessional loans. The visit also saw the China National Petroleum Corporation signing a MoU on cooperation with Bangladesh Oil, Gas & Mineral Corporation and Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation." **The Times of India**

Former King Celebrated His Birthday

Former king Gyanendra celebrated his 64th birth anniversary at his private residence Nirmal Niwas, Maharajgunj, in a manner faintly reminiscent of the monarchy era.



A group of supporters carried pamphlets with photos of the ex-King. While wishing him, some suggested him to "do something to save the nation from going further down". The ex-king, who recently courted controversy by making political comments, only sported his typical smile, avoiding any comment.

This was his third birthday bash after the abolition the 238-yr old monarchy in the country. He had celebrated his 62nd birth anniversary at Nagarjun palace where he has been staying since his ouster from Narayanhiti. nepalnews.com

NEPALI PRESS

"I Want Work" Vice President

In his exclusive interview to vernacular Nepalese daily Rajdhani on July 8, the first vice president of Federal Republic of Nepal Parmananda Jha demanded some role in day-to-day affairs of the country to make himself busy. "I have given no responsibility at all. My duty is now to come to office at 10 a.m and back home at 5 p.m.," said vice president Jha. He complained that no senior officials came to visit his office in the last two years tenure. "Prime minister Nepal came just one time in his thirteenth months tenure. I have not seen chairman of Constituent Assembly. Don't talk about minister. If there is no role, it is better to abrogate this position," said Jha.



Vice president Jha's position was made non-functional till few months ago. By amending the constitution, his position was restored again taking oath of the office second time.

Vice president Jha also criticized the president Dr. Ram Baran Yadav for ignoring him. "I know president too has no power at all but he can at least consult with me in many issues," said Jha, a former judge of Supreme Court. "If I am a guardian of constitution, I should be given certain role." **Rajdhani**

Journalist Jasuda Died



Jasuda Pradhan, the managing editor of the People Review Weekly, died last week. Jasuda, 50, wife of Journalist Pushpa Pradhan was active Journalist having played major roles in promoting free media.

Politicians including PM Madhav Kumar Nepal and CA chairman Subash Nemwang. Journalists and large numbers of her well wishers attended her last rights at Pashupati Aryaghat.



Why This Penchant for Form over Substance?

— DIPAK GYAWALI

Since the muddy waters of Nepali politics will not clear until a new crop of visionary leaders with competence and integrity emerges, it is pointless to fret over who the next prime minister will be. More worthwhile is to explore the quixotic political sloganeering inspiring the current lot, which Shakespeare would have described as “full of sound and fury signifying nothing”. There is something very disturbing about Nepali politics that prefers form over substance, as if the party leaders are more in love with the words than their practical implications. This attitude is so different from leaders in the land of Mao who bluntly said that it is immaterial if a cat is black or white as long as it can catch mice. Consider the burning issues of hydropower, constituent assembly and federalism that plague the country.

An example of “form-over-substance” politics has been Arun-3, the hydro project on the eponymous river that collapsed because of its bad economics with pre-construction cost estimate four times higher than the going market rate. It also came pre-packaged with a set of debilitating institutional pre-conditions that would have crippled the Nepali consumer. Ironically, it is one of the best hydro sites in Nepal, which could be developed cheaply to meet Nepal’s own needs. Unfortunately, the political leadership of Kangress and EhMaLe spent their time blaming each other over who lost the project, rather than learning the lessons from it. Their pledge to “revive the project at all costs” has been precisely that, a very high cost to be paid by the nation — it has been criminally handed over by them, with Maoist acquiescence, for export to India. Yes, in form the project has been revived, but in substance it will now no longer energise Nepal’s development nor ameliorate the crippling load shedding we have.

The idea of a constituent assembly is another placebo that claims the impossible but delivers zilch, primarily because of the inherent contradictions therein. Ever since King Tribhuban’s speech in 1951 that mentioned it (poorly thought through, he even used the word *ganatantra*, i.e. republicanism, for “democracy” instead of *prajatantra*, since the draft had been prepared by Nehru’s advisors), it has been a holy grail for the form-worshipping brahminical left in Nepal. In form, India is a republic brought about by a constituent assembly that drafted its constitution; in substance it is a dynasty continuing the Raj. Nehru’s CA was not elected but hand-picked from the remains of the 1935 British act, which is what was dressed up and eventually legitimised. Even if it was what it said it is, the leaders of the 2006 experiment on Nepal should first explain why is it that the Indian republic, founded by a constituent assembly, now has a raging Maoist revolt shaking its polity. The republic born of a CA in theory should not have led to a Naxal insurgency; but it has. In Nepal this means that neither the 1990 constitution nor its constitutional monarchy was the

issue, and should not have been thrown out: rather, it was party kleptocracy since 1990 which has re-surfaced more virulently with the 2006 experiment.

The idea of federalism, another “driver” of the 2006 experiment, reminds one of a ribald Nepali expression that politely translates as “realizing one is inside the house after relieving oneself”. The demographic atlas *Infused Ethnicities: Nepal’s Indivisible and Interlaced Social Mosaic* by a retired government secretary proved, if proof were needed, that there is no place in this country, unlike say in Sri Lanka, where any single ethnicity enjoys a majority presence. Add to it the fact that Nepal is a country of minorities, and ethnic federalism becomes an idea even more impractical than a CA with no clear-cut agreement on the envisaged political framework. What was needed were decentralisation and the devolution of development authority closer to the grassroots; but on this count, the 1990 constitution, by removing the constitutional protection for local bodies that the Panchayat system had, made multi-party politics even more centralizing to allow the majority party’s bosses free to distribute the national booty to its cadre of local goons. The feudal party leaders of the 2006 experiment, arrogating the democratic mantle without the commensurate belief or behaviour, have gone a regressive step back by refusing to let their local leaders manage the local bodies these last eight years.

The list of political slogans without any serious homework behind them is long, and the din from these empty vessels roils Nepali politics. How did “feudalism” end with the monarchy when socialist and communist parties remain feudal to boot? What is “consensus” politics in a multiparty, competitive democracy when party leaders do not attend the parliament? How could the interim parliament of 2006 declare Nepal an “untouchability free country” when King Mahendra had already done this in 1962 through the constitution and the reforms in the *Mulki Ain* and when Dalits are even now excluded from top party leadership? Why does the EhMaLe think its *bahudaliya janabad* is a new invention by its dear departed Madan Bhandari when all it translates as is “multiparty democracy”, something known from the time of Socrates? How can the Madhisey politicians claim to be discriminated against when the bulk of infrastructure development since the 1960s has occurred in the Tarai? Ethno-opportunism? Why use the words “progressive” and “democratic” to describe the EhMaLe and the Kangress respectively when both of them took the highly regressive step of dissolving a robust parliament in 2002 (and welcoming the dissolution) and then clamouring for its restoration, not by the people through votes but by the King? How does one explain these incongruities? A simple incident might shed some light.

It was sometime during the monsoon of 2006, after the

Maoists had come above ground but had not yet been invited unelected into the resurrected parliament, that a red banner hung across Patan Dhoka. Obtuse even by Marxist standards, the slogan in about four lines made little sense in normal Nepali; but because it crossed my path between home and office, my eyes could not help lingering over the words. After several days of incomprehension, and while the Maoist bargaining was going on for a share of the government with an appease-at-all-costs Girija Koirala, it struck me what this meant. It was a bad Nepali translation of the April-June 1917 Bolshevik thesis "*Vsya Vlast Sovetam!*", meaning "All Power to the Soviets!" If anyone in the parliamentary parties – who with current hindsight seem to have signed up as porters to Maoist ideology – had been alert enough, they would not have deluded themselves into believing that Maoists had given up on the goal of Leninist-Stalinist rule of party oligarchy invoking in vain the name of the people, the *Jana Sarkar*. Today's drama in the zombie CA is simply a continuation of that party line.

Among the chatterati class, much of last week was consumed by two articles in the press – one by Khagendra Jung Gurung describing how Indira Gandhi, as part of her post-Bangladesh but pre-Sikkim imperialism, was pressuring him and other Janjati leaders to go against King Mahendra; and the other by veteran communist general secretary Keshar Jung Rayamajhi describing how the extreme left and the extreme right play into Mughlani hands. It might be worthwhile going a decade back when Prachanda spoke of the need for a South Asian Soviet Federation ('Soviet' in Russian simply means "council"). In the discussion circle around the leftie Mulyankan group, some thought this was treason and are currently battling to prevent the Maoists from leading a new government; but others who liked the idea have amalgamated with the Maoists. Is the idea of a Soviet-style *Jana Sarkar* mere form or substance of Nepal's convoluted politics? ■



Illam's Tea Garden: Over production

ILAM'S TEA

Price Of Bargain

Illam's tea farmers are facing a tough time

UMA KANTA KHANAL in Jhapa

The bargaining has been going on for the last many years. The green tea leaf producers are not satisfied with the price of their green tea. They blame that the tea factory owners have been cheating them by not giving them a reasonable payment for their product.

"There is a lack of trust between the green tea producers and the tea factory owners. We are getting a very low price for our product. So, tea factory owners are responsible for this," Saroj Bimali, a green tea producer of Jhapa, said.

Although attempts have been made to ease the tussle between the green tea producers and the tea factory owners, nothing has come out of them. Now the green tea producers say the government should intervene in this matter.

"We are in a great problem. At this moment, we request the government should take initiation to settle the case," another green tea producer Shiva Kumar Oli said.

The government has established a board to look after tea and coffee production in the country but the role of National Tea and Coffee Development Board has not been effective in the settlement of the price of green tea.

The office representative of the regional office of the board in Birtamod, Jhapa, Ram Awatar Shah, claimed, "Neither green tea producers nor tea factory owners have come to the board complaining about the price of green tea. And our responsibility is only to act as a mediator."

In Nepal, tea gardens cover approximately 17 hectares of land. The eastern districts of Nepal like Ilam, Panchthar, Jhapa, Dhankuta and Sankhuwasabha are known for green tea production. But tea gardens which have their own packaging companies do not have this problem. The orthodox tea which has a big demand in the international level has been produced in the hills.

The tea factory owners are also demanding the government's action to settle the price of green tea.

Bhakti Adhikari, owner of Jagadamba Tea Processing Company, Bhadrapur, said, "We have tried a lot to negotiate with the green tea producers but the case has not been settled."

Adhikari claimed that if the tea factories have to provide the price as per the producers' demand, all the factories will be closed in the near future.

In India, green tea producers get up to Rs. 21 and in Nepal, they get up to Rs. 18. The internal consumption of the ready tea leaf is only thirty percent. Seventy percent of the production is exported to India, so, that way, the green tea producers are not getting the price as per their demand and as the Indian producers get.

If the government develops a system of auction within the country, the misunderstanding between tea factory owners and green tea producers will be settled, said Chandi Parajuli, one of the tea factory owners. ■

ECONOMIC SURVEY

Uncomfortable Truth

The government is forced to confront the bitter truth that its efforts at increasing revenue are further pushing trade gaps and consumption

By SANJAYA DHAKAL

It became official with the release of the Economic Survey 2010.

The country is spending far too much on consumption and saving far too little – than is desirable for an ailing economy like this.

The GDP of Nepal has reached Rs 1200 billion. Of the total, almost 92 percent is spent on consumption.



This high consumption is fueled by the surge in remittance income – which totaled Rs 250 billion this year. In fact, 40 percent of the country's households have at least one member abroad. The money sent back by them are being used up in consumption.

That, in turn, has pushed the import growth.

The import has grown by astounding 42 percent this year compared with the 10 percent decline in exports.

The trade gap has widened to staggering Rs 298 billion.

These figures have come up as uncomfortable facts before the officials at the Ministry of Finance who were, otherwise, wallowing in the huge rise in revenue.

Primarily based on the import surge, the custom duties and other taxes like VAT collection have continued to grow in astounding rates.

The Survey showed that in the last one year, the revenue growth was 25 percent compared to the previous year.

The government collected Rs 178

billion this year as revenue.

Revenue Vs Trade Gap

The distortion in the foreign trade balance of Nepal has triggered a debate whether the government's policy of encouraging revenue growth has backfired.

"Definitely, there is a problem to be rectified. We must act to narrow down the trade gap. But handsome revenue growth, in itself, is a very positive outcome," said Finance Minister Surendra Pandey, addressing a post-budget press meet.

Encouraging the Ministry officials on this revenue drive are the multilateral donor agencies.

They have always been pointing out the benefits of strong revenue growth.

But the consequences of the revenue-centered policies are now becoming too glaring to ignore.

The huge trade gap that is almost one quarter of the total GDP and the resulting Balance of Payment deficit has rung alarm bells at the Ministry.

The minister himself admitted that had he been given the opportunity to bring the full budget – instead of the advance budget he submitted to the parliament – he would have introduced measures to control import.

The officials were already talking about controlling imports of luxury goods and promoting import-substitution industries.

"The fact that in an agriculture-based economy like ours, there were imports of cows, goats and buffaloes totaling Rs 15 billion, is a shameful one. We wanted to introduce measures to substitute such imports by promoting

local livestock industry," said Keshab Acharya, senior economic advisor at the Ministry.

Whether such policies would have been introduced and whether they would have been successful are now a matter of speculation.

But what has been established firmly is the fact that the one-sided policy of increasing revenue can no longer be sustained. The debate has already begun.

ADVANCE BUDGET

For the second time in the last three years, Nepal is forced to do with a truncated budget due to political instability.

The parliament, on July 12, passed an advance budget for fiscal year 2010/11 submitted by the Finance Minister Surendra Pandey.

Being a caretaker government, Minister Pandey could not introduce the full budget.

Instead, he proposed the advance expenditure bill of Rs 110 billion – one-third of the actual expenditure of the current fiscal year 2009/10.

"With this budget, the projects being carried out in the current fiscal year can be continued by remaining within the one-third expenditure limit," he said.

The advance budget, however, could not introduce any new policy, tax and revenue rate or new project due to the constitutional provision.

"This is only the interim expenditure management provision. It cannot address the current economic and financial problems faced by the country. Only full-fledged budget can do that. I hope a new government is formed quickly so that a full budget can be introduced expeditiously," said Minister Pandey.



Political Leaders : No common cause

THE PRIME MINISTER

Rat Race

With no common cause to bind them together power remains the only goal for major parties

By SUSHIL SHARMA with
SAROJ DAHAL

Four years ago, they looked like tiger that cleared the Nepali political jungle of "the beastly" monarchy.

Tall promises were made to turn the jungle into a beautiful garden called New Nepal.

The much-touted constituent assembly elections and two elected governments later, the promised garden threatens to turn into a deadly crevasse.

And the political parties have been reduced to rats that can not see beyond the race for power.

Yes, the race is on – again. To fill in the vacancy left by Madhav Kumar Nepal.

More than two weeks after Nepal

resigned under pressure from within and without, a consensus on his successor remains elusive.

The Speaker is set to blow the first whistle for the race in the parliament track next Wednesday.

But there are no front-runners yet, let alone clear winners.

The big three – the Maoist, the Nepali Congress and the UML – are at each other's throat to re-capture the seat of power.

The Delhi-brokered 12-point bonhomie of the *jana andolan* days is nowhere to be seen in Kathmandu today.

The all-party consensus mantra has not stopped. But agreements within the major parties have become a rare commodity.

Eyeing the top post one more time is the Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'. In case of a failure, he wants to throw the party's weight behind his UML counterpart, Jhahnath Khanal.

This is why Khanal has been nursing the idea of a two-thirds majority government which he can hope to lead with a Maoist-UML combine.

Senior Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai is opposed to both ideas. He has own ambition.

Instead of riding the Khanal bandwagon, he favours the Madhesi lot if a Maoist-led government did not look plausible.

Sources said, both Prachanda and Baburam are however one in the third option: to let a Madhesi party lead the government with the Maoists dictating its terms.

The idea is to take the international community – read India – into confidence even as the Maoists, being the largest partner, control key portfolios such as defense, home and finance.

The ever ambitious UML boss finds himself at loggerheads with none other than Madhav Nepal who accuses the former of being instrumental in his fall from power.



Singha Durbar : The seat of power

At a recent standing committee meeting, the two had a heated exchange with both trading charges of incompetence and sabotage.

Khanal appears to be the only clear aspirant for the prime ministerial job, but he has enough hurdles to clear before he make it.

With Nepal and K.P.Oli out to stop him from the finishing line, Khanal will have to show extra speed and skill which few believe he possesses.

Also in the rat race is the second largest party, the Nepali Congress.

It sees itself as a logical claimant to the job as the two other big parties "failed

to deliver" in the past two years.

It has not disclosed what cards it has up its sleeve to prove different from the other big two.

Few believe it has any, except the "international" backing.

On the surface, the parliamentary party leader, Ram Chandra Poudel, appears front-runner within the Nepali Congress.

But it is a divided lot, too.

Poudel faces more opposition from within, in the form of two other

aspirants, Sher Bahadur Deuba and K.B Gurung, than from the outside.

The Deuba and Gurung camps are likely to go to any length to stop Poudel from touching the red ribbon.

The race is on. First, within the parties. Then, among the parties.

The first hurdle is no less formidable than the second one.

As the parties and the leaders get set for the all-important dash next Wednesday, the first round looks increasingly unlikely to be decisive.

It is too early to foresee what the second round picture will be like.

The Contenders

UCPN (Maoist)

Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'
Baburam Bhattarai



UML

Jhahnath Khanal



NEPALI CONGRESS

Ram Chandra Poudel
Sher Bahadur Deuba
Kul Bahadur Gurung



WAITING IN THE WINGS

Upendra Yadav (Madhesi Janadhikar Forum)
Bijay Gachhadar (Madhesi Janadhikar Forum-D)
Mahanta Thakur (Teri-Madhes Loktantrik Party)

As all eyes get focused on the rat race for the prime minister's char, the search for consensus is certain to be elusive.

Said an analyst, the stalemate is unlikely to end without another "12-point" accord.

The signatories had set aside their declared political principles, ideologies and values for "a larger common cause"

But no such "cause" does exist today.

Making of a new constitution and the conclusion of the peace process are certainly not the "common cause" contrary to the claims of the parties. ■

NEW SPOTLIGHT

NEWSMAGAZINE

Available at the following stands

1. Bhatbhateni Supermarket: Bhatbhateni
2. Bhatbhateni Store: Maharajgunj
3. Mandala Book Point: Kantipath, Ph: 4227711
4. Vajra Book Store, Jyatha Ph.:4220562
6. Book Paradise, Jamal
7. Namaste Supermarket, Narayani Complex Pulchowk
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9. Himalayan Book, Bagbazar.
10. Bhaktapur Stationery, Nyatapaul
11. Utsav Books and Stationers, Putalisada Telephone:4220882

MEDIA TRENDS



DHRUBA ADHIKARY

Incredible events continue to make a dent on *credibility* of the media—worldwide. A recent incident involving Middle East editor of CNN may be taken as an indicator of a broader picture one may view at the start of second half of the year that is set to close the first decade of new century.

It was a question of credibility that figured at the centre of dispute that led the CNN to sack Ms. Octavia Nasr after she wrote on Twitter that she “respected” Lebanese Shia Muslim cleric Ayatollah Fadlallah, 75, who died on July 4 after a long illness. He was a controversial figure with alleged links with groups that carried out bombings claiming 260 American lives. Ms. Nasr’s explanation that she was merely alluding to late cleric’s “pioneering” views on women’s rights failed to impress her bosses at CNN. And reaction to her Twitter message, she herself conceded in a subsequent blog post, was “immediate and overwhelming”. She now advises her media peers to avoid using 140 characters to comment on controversial and sensitive issues, especially those dealing with the Middle East. A junior Indian minister, Shashi Tharoor, earlier lost his job when his country’s watchful media picked up one of his Twitter messages and raised questions about his

Subsequently, a meeting between Kantipur’s Kailash Sirohiya and Ambassador Rakesh Sood resolved the issue, although neither side has made public the details of what transpired at the embassy meet, and why both of them chose to bypass this country’s seat of authority in Simha Durbar.

loyalty and sincerity. He was obliged to resign ; nobody else could take blame for whatever happened to him. Actions speak louder than words.

Fiji Times is the name of a newspaper in trouble. It has to change its owner, by September-end, to remain in existence. The alternative is to fold for good, depriving the island nation in the South Pacific of its largest newspaper which also happens to be the oldest one, printed since 1869.

Would passing on this news to media magnate Rupert Murdoch (of neighboring Australia) be of help? The answer inevitably has to be in the negative, because this time it is Murdoch himself who is looking for rescuers! The publisher of *Fiji Times*, News Limited, was told by Fiji’s authorities on June 28, to change the paper’s ownership in three months or face closure. Under media industry development decree, media groups are required to change ownership structure so that 90

per cent of shareholders are Fijian citizens. The country’s attorney-general, Aiyaz Sayed Khaiyum, who announced the new measures, warned that any news organization that fails to comply with ownership requirements “shall cease to operate as a media organization”. The new decree also provided for establishment of a tribunal to monitor media’s compliance and ensure nothing is printed or broadcast against the “national interest or public order”. *Fiji Times*, together with other foreign-owned media outlets, have constantly and consistently been critical of the interim government saying that it was installed through a coup of December 2006. Despite censures and angry noises aired from nearby Australia and New Zealand, Fiji appears determined to implement its new policy, says the attorney general, “for proper accountability and transparency of all media organizations”. Politics apart, there is nothing wrong in the contention that a newspaper meant for Fiji must be owned by citizens of that country.

On July 1, China’s Xinhua news agency launched a 24-hour global news channel in English: *CNC World*. In a report on this event, BBC quoted Xinhua president, Li Congjun, as saying that the new channel would present an “international vision with a China perspective”. *CNC World* has initially started broadcasting in Hong Kong but has an objective to reach 50 million viewers in Europe, North America and Africa within its first year.

Xinhua is the largest of China’s three state media organizations, along with People’s Daily newspaper and the broadcaster CCTV which telecasts in Arabic, French and Spanish in addition to Chinese. From an official news agency Xinhua is trying to transform itself into a multimedia platform in line with China’s overall plan to expand media outlets with a view to taking its messages to a wider world. Investment in the media sector is

massive—running into millions of dollars—and the ultimate goal is to challenge the domination of BBC and CNN. Like al—Jazeera, *CNC World* aims at becoming a channel to counterbalance Western preferences and prejudices in news and analyses to be presented to international audience.

Recent initiatives show that China’s expansion drive is not confined to the electronic media. A new English daily, *Global Times*, was added last year allowing it to compete with the *China Daily*, launched in 1981. In an assertive article posted on July 7, the *Times* pointed out that

market-oriented media groups in China have wielded a huge social impact, “moving from a propaganda role to that of watchdog, with increasing independence. It is a phenomenon that foreign observers have been slower to identify.” In fact,

internet edition of Global Times has already being seen as a provider of reliable facts and figures on China to the media organizations beyond its borders. Nepal's elderly readers who have remained addicted to *The Times of India* thus far, may now find it refreshing to browse this English paper China has published for international readership.

Internet/web edition or online newspaper, however, is yet to become the best substitute for the news printed on plain paper—in both tabloid and broadsheet sizes. Examples abound, but a lively case was recently witnessed in Nepal itself when Kantipur Publications had to conduct a media campaign to secure a smooth passage for a fleet of containers transporting *newsprint* from Calcutta to Kathmandu. Indian officials working at the port had held up Nepal-bound consignments from Canada and South Korea ostensibly for special investigations. Subsequently, a meeting between Kantipur's Kailash Sirohiya and Ambassador Rakesh Sood resolved the issue, although neither side has made public the details of what transpired at the embassy meet, and why both of them chose to bypass this country's seat of authority in Simha Durbar.

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Sirohiya also owes an explanation to the readers of Kantipur and The Kathmandu Post as to why they were forcibly fed newsprint story every day for several days as if non-delivery of their imported newsprint cargo on time was an unprecedented national event shaking the very foundation of a country called Nepal. But, if it indeed was a case of striking magnitude, he should not hesitate to share relevant information with the audience on whose strength his media house ran a stinging campaign against India with whom Nepal has to have good, neighborly relations.

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GURKHA RECRUITMENT

A New Controversy

The Supreme Court asks the government to review part of the 200-year-old legacy of Gurkha recruitment

By BHAGIRATH YOGI in London

The Supreme Court had to come forward this month to refute media reports that the apex judicial body had issued 'order to the government of UK to stop Gurkha recruitment.'

Deputy spokesperson of the Supreme Court Hemant Rawal said, "It is beyond our jurisdiction to issue orders to a foreign government. The court has, however, issued a 'directive order' to the Nepal government saying that the recruitment of Nepali youths in foreign army should be done on the basis of bilateral agreements only."

Sharma had argued that the government of UK was violating the 1947 Tri-Partite Agreement (TPA) between Nepal, India and UK by sending Gurkha soldiers to Brunei and Singapore without separate agreements with those countries.

Historians say the case of Gurkhas serving in Brunei and Singapore is fundamentally different. While the British government recruits Nepali youths, trains them and sends them to Singapore police, many retired Gurkhas join the Gurkha Reserve Unit—that guards the palace and key installations in Brunei.

The Gurkha soldiers were able to earn the trust of the Sultan of Brunei after they successfully suppressed a revolt against him in December 1962. The tie still continues. A resident infantry battalion of the Brigade of Gurkhas has its barracks in Brunei.

Mixed Reactions

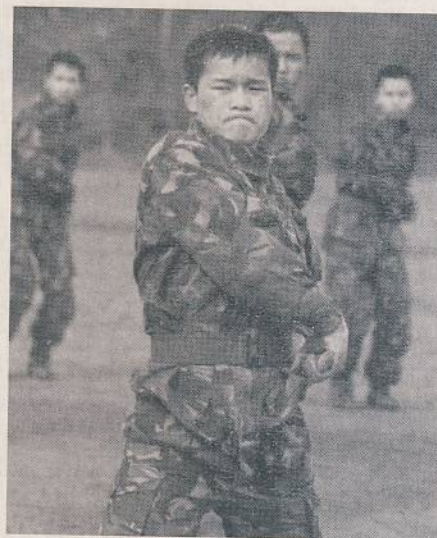
The organisations of British Gurkhas have had mixed reactions towards the Supreme Court verdict. Said Major (Retd.) Tikendra Dal Dewan, chairman of the British Gurkha Welfare Society (BGWS), "The issue should have been dealt in a diplomatic way. It's intriguing to see why the issue was taken up after more than six decades."

In fact, in 2001, a Gurkha activist Gyan Raj Rai moved the court asking it to direct the government of Nepal to take up the issue of alleged discrimination against Gurkha soldiers

in the British army through diplomatic channel. The Supreme Court, however, ruled that it could not intervene on the issues related to treaties Nepal had entered into with the friendly countries.

Rai, who is now convener of the United British Gurkha Ex-Servicemen's Association (UBGEA), said that the latest verdict by the Supreme Court is a positive step. "Nepal should not send its youth to Singapore without proper agreement," he added.

Major Dewan of BGWS is, however, worried that such controversy could have adverse impact on the Gurkha recruitment in the British Army, which has drastically



come down over the years. Britain now recruits little more than 200 Gurkhas every year out of tens of thousands of aspiring youths.

A senior official at the Foreign Ministry said he was still waiting to see the copy of the court verdict. "We will act in accordance with the court verdict," he said.

It is, however, not clear if the court verdict will, in any way, change the decades-old practice. "Gurkhas serving in the Singapore Police have never taken part in any armed conflict and it can't be termed as a military service," said Prof Surenda KC.

While the Nepal government may take up the case with the British government through diplomatic channel, it is least likely that on-going practice will be affected in any way—for now. ■

Promising and not Delivering

YUBARAJ GHIMIRE



Nepal's political parties saved the constituent assembly, and perks and privileges of their legislators by extending the tenure of the House by a year on May 28 after it failed to deliver the constitution. The House has, however, failed to get down seriously to pursue the constitution writing exercise except that Speaker Subhash Nembang has announced that the constitution would be delivered by Mid-April, instead of the new deadline, May 28, 2011.

Nembang is good at making promises and not fulfilling them. He has the knack to pass on the buck of that failure on someone else. This is exactly what he did this time around as well. As he was repeatedly asserting—mostly publicly—that the constitution would be delivered well within the deadline, and that no one should have any doubt on 'our sincerity, ability and commitment', people saw no reason to doubt the promise coming from the 'custodian' of their collective trust. After all, as the Chairman of the House, the highest representative body, what the Speaker says carries a lot of meaning and impression in the minds of the people.

In parliamentary practices, the Speaker is supposed to be speaking the least. But when he does, that carries a tremendous weight. It will not be easy for the people to dismiss him like any other politician of the day. However, unfortunately, that institution stands discredited in the same measure as political parties and their leaders. His latest exercises to put tremendous pressure on Madhav Nepal to quit in deference to May 28 agreement signed by leaders of the three big parties has not only discredited his image irreparably, but also projected him as a partisan person. Why would a Speaker who has never promised conduct the House 'come what may' get into implementing a deal signed by three leaders?

Madhav Nepal quit. But that did not pave the way for the formation of a national unity government as Nembang had said it would. The House and big political parties missed two deadlines—stretched over 12 days—which President Rambaran Yadav had given to the House to elect the New Prime Minister through consensus. Three paper tigers—Prachanda from the Unified Communist Party of Nepal—Maoists (UCPN-M), Ramchandra Poudel of the Nepali Congress and Jhalanath Khanal of the Communist Party of Nepal—Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML)—stuck to their claims over the leadership, but with no success. None of them came out with agenda.

And unfortunately, their claim to the leadership appeared more as their private decision than that of their respective parties. Poudel was nominated by NC's working president Sushil Koirala without even consulting the party's parliamentary board. NC's general secretary K B Gurung has already challenged the way Poudel was fielded, and announced that he would be a candidate too for the top executive post.

Amidst all this, another general secretary of the party, Bimalendra Nidhi took up with Indian ambassador Rakesh Sood an issue that many Nepali Congress leaders were sore about. Someone identifying himself as Rajesh Gautam posing as Sonia Gandhi's right hand man had been calling senior leaders of the Nepali Congress with instruction that "Poudel is Sonia Gandhi's candidate for the post". If that does not happen, no one can stop the Maoists from coming to take the government leadership. Poudel has only issued technical clarification to the episode saying "this is meant to defame me", but that is not enough. Understandably, some people like Hormis Tharakkan, former RAW chief, who was involved personally in getting the Maoists and the pro-democracy political parties to bring on the anti-monarchy platform, have advocated that Maoists should be heading the new government to save the peace process. That appears aimed at proving that India's Nepal Policy has not failed yet.

Hormis has expressed himself openly. He tries to make it a point that Indian and Nepali Maoists cannot be put in the same bracket as the latter are into a democratic exercise. But unless the government of India endorses that line as explicitly even today, it will not carry any weight in Nepal now at a time when anti-India feelings are at peak. The activities of the likes of Rajesh Gautam will be dissected more here than the straight forward opinion of Hormis, himself an actor, some time ago.

In fact, there is no dearth of characters from across as many people appear in Nepal posing themselves as India's representatives, with Nepali actors showing no guts to have it verified through appropriate channels. That India would have a lot of interest in who becomes the Prime Minister in Nepal is understandable. But whether its 'interest' or Nepali legislators and political parties opinion will prevail should have no room to debate or speculate. Discouraging clandestine interference will be the best way to recognising India's legitimate interest. And that is best achieved by the transparency of its expression. But this is also equally true that when Political leaders have ambitions not matched by their ability—and when they have no way to realise it through legitimate means—they tend to depend more on illegitimate, and sometimes outside sources for support. Nepali leaders' increasing dependence on external world in pursuit of their power centric politics is a case in point. They are largely responsible for inviting role from outside countries in Nepal's internal affairs. Similarly, neither Prachanda nor Khanal have got their party to announce their candidature in a manner of their respective parties' constitution. The responsibility to elect a new leader by majority now lies with the House, but whether it can or can not do that will depend on whether the members are given the liberty to decide on their own, or political zamindars like Nembang and many of his hues, will dictate the course once again. ■



Peace First, Then Constitution, Please!

SHIRISH RANABHAT

Democratic system is a rule of law where people are supreme and ultimate authorities. They govern the country constitutionally through their duly elected representatives who belong to different political parties. Government is formed by a single party or a coalition of parties with majority. A minority party serves as responsible opposition in the parliament. Constitution confines the limits within which such majority and minority may exercise their respective powers and perform their duties.

Nepal is running through unique and tricky transitional phase. Not only is it facing the dilemma of managing former and emerging armed forces but also drafting a sustainable and inclusive constitution for a federal regime. Unnecessary lengthening of a transition leads to a state of uncertainty, confusion, anarchy, and distrust. If not cautiously managed, these transitional periods may often turn to be fertile for corruption, impunity, violence, conflict, terror, socio-economic disorder, internal crisis of confidence, and external interference. Only peace, political stability and good governance can address these problems, which are the urgent needs of the nation.

The purpose of Constituent Assembly (CA) in our country was (and still is) to draft and promulgate a constitution that can fulfill the aspirations of the sovereign people and guide the nation toward enduring peace, political stability and socio-economic transformation for an advanced and civilized society. The constitution-making process (CMP) has been marred with the distrust among the political parties and lack of strong determination of the political leaders. CA itself seemed to have failed to perform its vital and sensitive responsibilities. Given the fact that the tenure of CA has been extended by a year from now, and assuming that the political parties with their leaders and CA members show their sincerity and act on their responsibilities to the nation, managing conflicts and drafting a constitution can be accomplished within the extended time frame.

Any conflict issue can be subdued and eventually terminated through the negotiations to a peace agreement. Looking back at the world's history, specifically the histories of the conflict-torn countries, constitution-making was unsuccessful when it was combined with the conclusion of a peace agreement. For example, Namibia's conclusion of a peace agreement was a precondition that enabled the negotiations among the interested parties on the future of the country. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Zimbabwe are examples of such countries where the peace agreement and the drafting of the constitution were combined into a single negotiation process. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, negotiations were focused on satisfying the interests and demands of the groups with the capability to continue the

violence. As the emphasis was given only on the termination of armed hostilities, the new constitution did not reflect an agreement among the warring parties on a common ground. As a result of disagreements, the constitution does not have the capacity to ensure the longevity of the current political system. Zimbabwe's 1980 constitution was not conducive to the resolution of conflicting interests in the long-term as the militarized nature of the conflict conflated the peace-making process. In both the countries, the constitution embedded disagreements without providing avenues for political change.

Other such examples where peace process and constitution-making were combined to a single process, and have failed, include Nicaragua and Colombia. In Nicaragua, the need to engage in extensive compromises among the participants prevented the emergence of a substantive consensus on the nature of the state. As a result, the 1987 Constitution of Nicaragua left many issues undecided. For example, the type of democracy was not agreed upon in the 1987 Constitution. Conflict continued for next three years. The resolution of the armed conflict in Nicaragua was possible only through the constitution drafting process and subsequent amendment to their 1987 Constitution. Colombia's 1991 Constitution was an attempt to mitigate the violent conflict. The constitution drafting process provided for substantial public participation and guaranteed the representation of a wide range of political actors.

In a situation where the intra-party political conflicts and inter-party group interests are intensified, the process of conflict management and drafting a constitution as well is badly affected. Achieving both the goals of addressing conflicts and drafting a constitution are possible when we tie together with wide and wise vision of national unity and reconciliation. This process requires open cooperation, true negotiations and lasting agreements among all parties on different grounds. It also requires public participation in order to gain legitimacy and to reflect popular aspirations. Experiences around the world demonstrate that the constitution-making cannot serve as a peace process while conflicts continue. Minimum conditions need to be in place before constitution-making commences. In our country's case, one of the required minimum conditions is the meaningful ending of peace process. Nepal should prioritize clear and immediate needs. A sustainable peace should first be achieved, and then it should work towards drafting a long-lasting constitution to successfully tackle the transitional phase.

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HIGHER SECONDARY EDUCATION

Growing Disparities

Despite so many shortcomings, the higher secondary education system has brought about many positive changes in the education sector. For years, Tribhuvan University's old Proficiency Certificate Level model dominated the college education. Because students did not like it, PCL is now on the verge of becoming a history. Although higher secondary education system is monopolized by private investors, the rush of students to private schools to acquire quality education seems to be increasing. Private sector education institutions are outnumbering public schools in urban areas. The choice of children of medium class families is quality education and quality of schools. However, the children with poor family backgrounds in rural areas do not have any other alternative than to go to public schools which do not have infrastructures and manpower. The result is a big gap in quality between rural and urban education

By KESHAB POUDEL

Attractive ads are everywhere these days. Have a look at the hoarding boards across main roads or narrow streets of Kathmandu or read newspapers, watch television channels and tune in to FM radio stations. It is easy to glean that higher secondary schools are engaged in a tough competition to attract new students.

When urban centers like Kathmandu are in a festive mood, the rural parts of Nepal are quiet, as usual. The rural students have only limited choices. Some

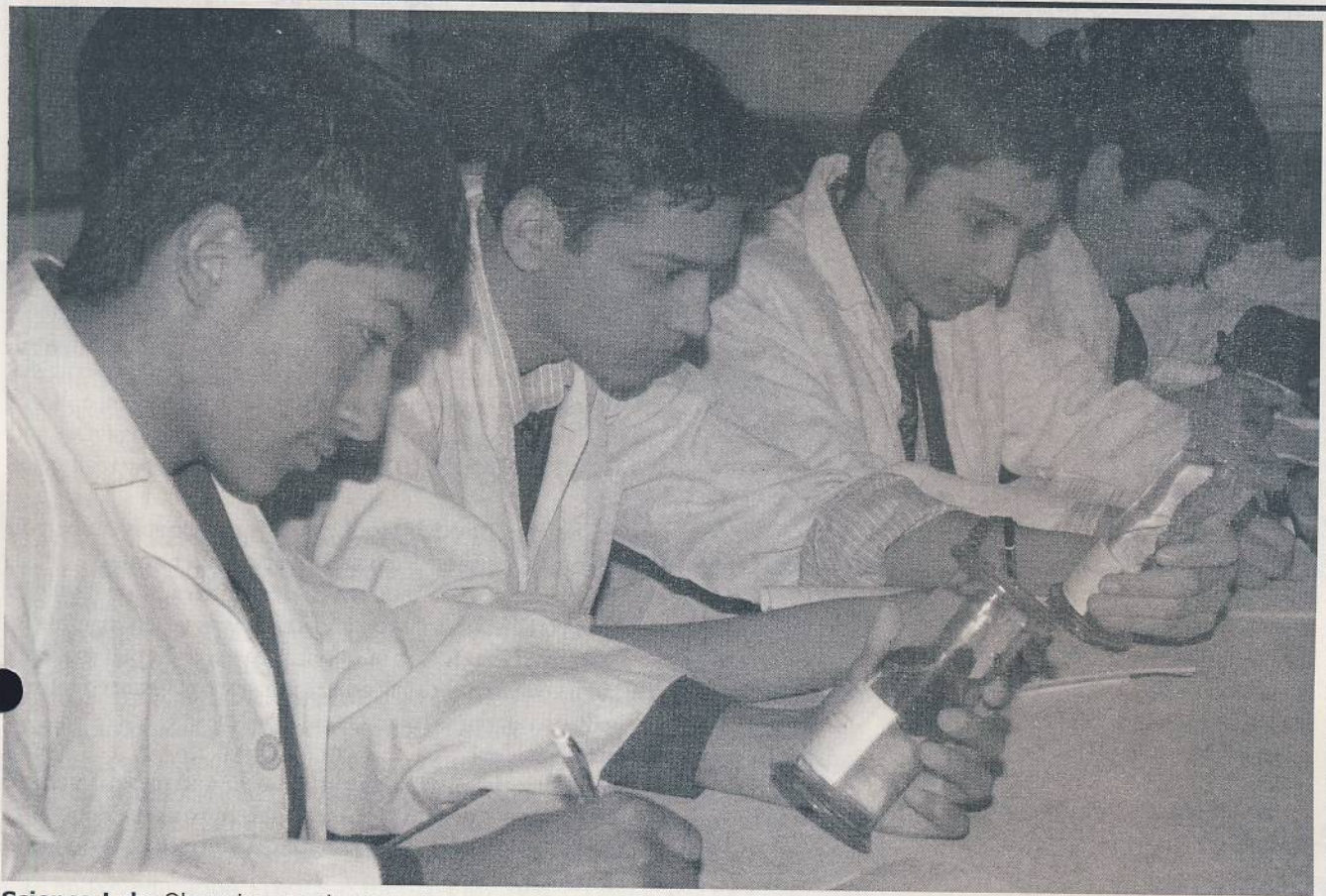
higher secondary schools of rural Nepal are facing a severe shortage of students and have little option but to shut down.

Thirteen years ago when then education minister Govinda Raj Joshi and the vice chairman of the Higher Secondary Education Board decided to introduce the +2 to replace the Proficiency Certificate Level education, they had to face tough challenges.

"I requested principles of renowned schools to take the lead by opening +2

and nobody was ready to risk their investment. I had to put pressure on the administrator of Budanilkantha School to open the classes," said Joshi remembering his experience.

The situation now is different. One needs to wait for more than a couple of years to get the permission to open a +2 school. It is reported that the license of +2 colleges are now sold in the market and some make money selling the old licenses.



Science Lab: Observing specimen

For good or bad, the +2 has definitely enhanced the quality and capacity of Nepalese students. Although the course of +2 has not changed in the last 12 years, the students of +2 are competing with the students from different parts of world. The HSEB has established that it imparts quality education.

"Because of its curriculum, +2 students can compete with anybody, anywhere in the world," said Dr. Baburam Pokharel, founder principle of VS Niketan College. "There is the scope as well as hope for the students."

Carnival After Results

Following the announcement of School Leaving Certificate results, the advertisements started to flood in the media as if this is a carnival. Targeted at parents and students, the flood of advertisements in the media makes it all the harder for them decide where to go and where not to go.

From name of schools to buildings, the urban higher secondary schools have been boasting about everything. With massive investments, several new schools are replacing the older ones, which have

had their monopoly for long. Some private boarding schools are even demanding to make +2 as a part of schools since they are not in a position to survive in this competitive world.

"The competition is so tough each school is struggling for survival. The market will decide which school is going to survive and which school is going to close," said Nara Bahadur Bista, principle of Global College of Management. "This is good for students and parents as private sector investment is growing and there are more choices for good schools."

According to Higher Secondary Education Board (HSEB), more than 13,000 higher secondary schools get affiliation from the board and an overwhelming number of them are in the private sector.

"Our policy is now to encourage the public schools to add the +2 so that the students of far flung areas will get the opportunity to acquire college level education at home," said Dr. Upendra Koirala, vice chairman of HSEB. "We have a long list of schools waiting for

permission to start classes."

Number of Students

Nobody knows the capacity of the +2 colleges and whether the students get the space at all. Given the present estimate, there are going to be more than 350,000 students who require a place in +2 schools.

Out of 427051 students who appeared in last year's SLC exams, 259916 students passed. There are 1030000 students who are appearing in the partial examination next month. Following the cancellation of the proficiency certificate level course by Tribhuvan University, the students have only one choice now: go to +2 colleges. It seems that that the rush will continue for some time to come.

Competition on Name

One can easily understand the competition among schools for fame. However, there is a competition among the schools for using an attractive name and those names are derived, mostly, from the west. It seems that there is no popular western name left to name again. Columbus. NASA. Golden Gate. Orient.

Einstein, Texas. Some other names are Noble, Milestone, Pentagon, Herald, Pyramid, Bern Hard, Gillette, Grammar, REHDON, New Millennium, Reliance Academy and what not.

According to Higher secondary education board, it is said that education is a lifelong process, but the basic education that one gets during the formative years definitely contributes to the shaping of one's future and outlook. This is where the school and high school education assumes importance.

The board claims that today's schools are not merely schools, they are much more. Its teachers and staff together with the guardians and students give them a wholesome environment. As students not only find gurus here but guides and friends for life. It is a place to inculcate the fundamentals of honored values. The education of the weak brains between the ages of 17 - 18 is counted within the school education in the international arena.

"The higher secondary education in Nepal is nothing more than the result of globalization, a need to come to terms with the global markets when the world is turning into a global village, and the countries, borderless," said Dr. Koirala. "Today is the time of multiculturalism, where every voice from every country is striving to be heard. Today the situation may be viewed as an indeterminate set of attitudes that has been shaped by various diversities of cultural and intellectual currents."

According to Higher Secondary Board's website, there are 1976 schools. Out of them 1313 are government schools, 373, 10+2 private schools, 100 10+2 schools and 130 campuses affiliated to the HSEB.

At a time when globalisation has changed the world, there is the need of an education system that helps to make extensive interaction with people of different countries possible. For this, it demands a system and standard of education that can earn international recognition. Here the +2 education is the best and the most uniform in this regard. In the first decade, people did not have to worry much but now the Higher Secondary Education is a critical stage. It has to manage the growing disparities between the rich and poor. ■



"I am Satisfied with My Decisions"

-GOVINDA RAJ JOSHI

GOVINDA RAJ JOSHI is not only a Nepali Congress politician. Joshi claims he has spent 25 years in the field of education and is known for his tenure as a Minister for Education a decade ago. His decision is credited for opening up education to the private sector. Joshi, who has been the founder of three colleges and a number of schools, took the early decision to allow private medical colleges and private +2 schools while diverting government resources to public primary and high schools. Joshi spoke to **KESHAB POUDEL** on various issues regarding the education sector. Excerpts:

You must be happy to see the flourishing of the private schools since you took a major decision to introduce the +2 education at a wider scale?

When I held the portfolio of education minister, there was a traditional system in higher education. It was certificate oriented and there was no change in the curriculum for 28 years. I realized that it was impossible to make Nepali students competent by going through such a traditional education system. I started reforming with an aim to provide quality to modern students.

Are you proud of your decisions?

Yes, of course. I am proud that the present growth of 10+2 and private medical schools is the result of the decision taken during my first tenure as the education minister between 1993 and 1995. Looking at all these issues, we introduced education policy to make Nepal self reliant.

There was no academic environment at the college level. Education is an issue of universal interest. In the international level, there were 10+2 high schools, 3-year bachelor's and 2-year master's degrees. We introduced the +2 in education to make it match internationally.

What was the purpose of introducing the new education?

Our aim was to create a good environment for students from Nepal as well as abroad. For this, we would require good educational institutions. This was the reason we allowed private medical schools and higher secondary schools. There is some weakness in the management side now. The government also failed to play the appropriate role. Higher secondary schools can allow brighter poor students to go to schools. During my tenure, 16 percent of the national budget was spent on education. Our aim was clear — the government should invest in primary level and higher education should go to private sector. We had to manipulate many schools in Kathmandu. Although TU has agreed to phase out proficiency certificate level from colleges for a long time, it is still running the classes. There is no utility of the students at the proficiency level except to bear the torch in the period of agitation. It does not have any future but the pressure is growing.

How about medial colleges?

During my tenure, I did not permit any medical college to open in Kathmandu valley. My objective was to allow private medical colleges to open outside the valley. All the medical colleges currently running in the valley were permitted during the period of other governments.

Are you satisfied with the changes that were brought about by your decisions?

Definitely, I am satisfied with the decisions I have taken. Students who learnt at private schools are definitely better in quality. Of course, the fees in the private schools are much higher than in the government schools. Children of poor parents cannot afford for private school education. It is just a problem related to the management. It is the duty of the government to create a proper atmosphere to give

quality education to children of the poor. This is a weakness of the government.

What dissatisfies you much about all this?

Of course, we opened three universities during my tenure, including Kathmandu University, Purwanchal University and Pokhara University. But the recent trend to open more universities in the different parts of the region will ruin our whole education system. That is discouraging.

What prompted you to take the decisions?

I was very much worried about the politicization of education at the college level by various student organizations. Another concern was the erosion of quality of education. The third reason was to make Nepal's higher secondary education compatible to the South Asian region as well as compatible to the world.

In the name of privatization, there is commercialization of 10+2 education. How do you look at it?

Actually, +2 education is also a part of high school education. In early days, no private or government schools were ready to teach +2 courses. Few individuals showed interest to open +2. I had to coerce some schools and colleges to start the +2. My objective was clear. I wanted to open the higher education, including +2, to private sector and channel the ministry's resources to primary and secondary education. Private sectors have invested a lot of resources. Along with quality of education, the infrastructures are also well built.

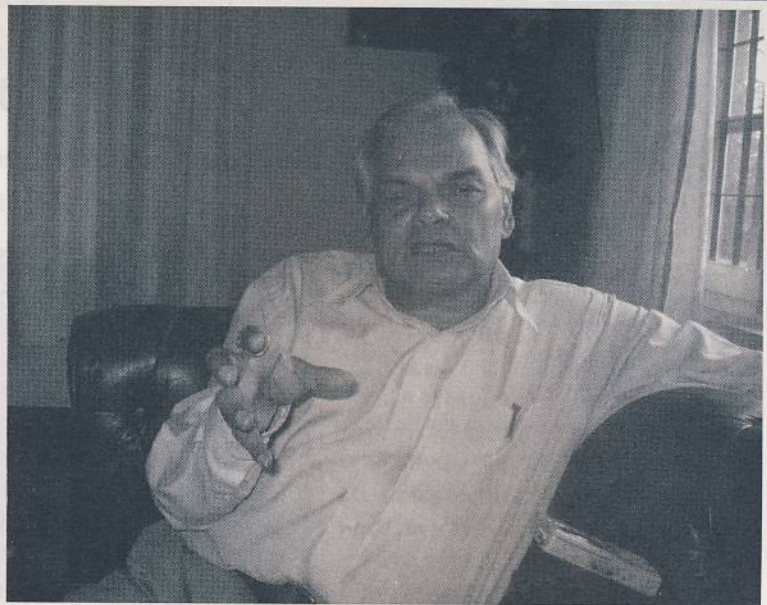
Don't you think the time has come to make +2 as a part of high school education in practice?

With some ifs and buts, the Tribhuvan University will have to stop admission of the students at the proficiency certificate level. It is almost certain now that no one prefers Tribhuvan University's proficiency certificate. Whether one likes it or not, +2 is a reality now. So far as integrating it with high school is concerned, the process has already started.

Opponents of +2 education accuse persons like you for encouraging too much commercialization of education. What do you say?

It is very unfortunate that those who are accusing us for commercializing the education are responsible for the worsening condition of government school system. Along with allowing private sector in education, I have also increased the numbers of teachers and government high schools. By allowing private sector in +2, I increased the government subsidy to government schools. Following my departure from the ministry, no single school is given permanent stature. There is weakness also and we need to change them.

What is the reason behind your understanding that this kind of education is better?



I want to remind something to you. My involvement in the education sector goes more than 25 years. During that period I had performed various roles, including as the founder of high schools, colleges and a number of other schools. I also worked as the headmaster for more than five years in schools. All these experiences helped me to understand the loopholes and lapses in the education sector. Actually, I was inspired by B.P. Koirala's vision when I met him in 1968 in his exile in India. B.P. suggested to me to go to village and work as a teacher. He strongly believed that without educating people it is impossible to transform society. Not only to me, B.P. Koirala recommended everyone to go to village and work in school if they really wanted to do a revolution. He thought that giving people education was more powerful than handing them guns. After my graduation in 1968 and meeting with B.P. Koirala, I returned to the village and started teaching at a local high school.

What are your other experiences in education?

I taught for 12 years in school and two years in college. I was the Minister for Education for five long years. I have almost spent 25 years in education. I can challenge anybody to discuss on the education sector. One needs to go deep inside the education sector to know about it. I am not claiming all but I can claim some expertise. I established high schools and colleges in my village and I taught at two colleges in Damauli. I have made personal contributions to change the education sector. I have never taught for the sake of job. I taught free of cost. I am the founder of three colleges. I don't think you can find any politician to have such experiences. My entry to education is to transform the society and change politics. I have made a lot of success in education. ■

I was inspired by B.P. Koirala's vision when I met him in 1968 in his exile in India. B.P. suggested to me to go to village and work as a teacher.

QUEST FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

Why Students Go Abroad?

The number of Nepali Students studying abroad has increased

By NITISH BHATTARAI

Although a lot of investments have already been in education sector by private investors with an aim to provide quality education at higher level, the number of students going abroad has increased rapidly in the last years. The trend to go abroad continues to rise.

In the last couple of years the number of Nepali students studying abroad has increased rapidly. The annual report on international academic mobility published by the Institute of International Education (IIE) with the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the United States Department of State says the number increased from 8,936 to 11,581 in 2008/09— a 29.6 per cent increase over the 2007/08 academic year.

Nepal ranks 11th among the leading countries of origin of international students, as it did the previous year. In the academic year 2006/2007, Nepal ranked 13th among the countries of origin of international students. India tops the list with 15.4% followed by China with 14.7%.

There are many reasons why Nepali students are going abroad. Firstly, because of Nepal's political uncertainty, students are under constant worry about whether the same education policies would be followed. So, a large number of students are affected.

Another reason is that overseas education is perceived to be superior to that provided by most Nepali institutions.

The lack of diversity in the choices that a student can make in studying in Nepal is another reason why students go abroad. In other countries if one takes biology or any other subject then there are numerous options to choose from.



Student's At Class Room: Learning time

The outdated curriculum of colleges and universities is also a problem that prompts students to go abroad.

Many students complain that Nepal

does not have appropriate opportunities to utilize the skills learnt abroad. So, the skills they gain in foreign countries are used in those countries and not in Nepal.

Coming back is not guaranteed because of disorganized companies and the lack of employment opportunities in

the country.

Nepal is losing a number of educated young people and for many this is a worrying sign. ■

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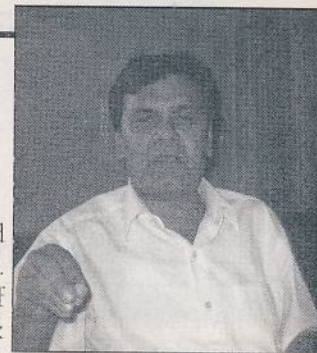


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" +2 Is a Part of High School Education"

- DR. TIRTHA KHANIYA



Member of National Planning Commission Dr. TIRTHA KHANIYA is a well known education expert of Nepal. Nepal opened the door for private schools after the appointment of Dr. Khaniya as the chairman of Higher Secondary Education Board (HSEB) in 1996. By now, the +2 education system has virtually wiped out the proficiency certificate level. Dr. Khaniya spoke to NEW SPOTLIGHT on various issues.

Excerpts:

You played the key role to start the +2 education system. How do you look at the evolution of higher education since then?

Actually, we failed to convince the people about the objectives of +2 education. The other failure is that we are not pushing the +2 education ahead as per our mission and vision.

What do you mean by this?

There are certain reasons behind upgrading 1 to 10 school education to 1 to 10+2. Our experiences have shown that the 1 to 10 high school education cannot make a student mature enough for university courses. It is better for students to go to the university level after completing +2. The aim of +2 is to make students capable to handle education at the university level. One cannot be matured enough at the age of 17 when he just completes his high school.

Why has it gone wrong?

The present crisis appears because we have made separate arrangements to run the +2 education system by constituting the Higher Secondary Education Board (HSEB) through an act. The act clearly defines the structure and state of higher education system. Instead of efforts of the whole Ministry of Education, only the minister is given the role in the Board. Because of this provision, the +2 became minister's prerogative rather than a whole part of high school education.

As a member of National Planning Commission and education expert, what do you suggest now?

The national education policy says

that class 11 and 12 will be brought into the school system. It means integrating the school curriculum of up to class 10 to up to 12. The Curriculum Development Center of the Ministry of Education is now preparing the curriculum for +2 also. This way the efforts are being made to streamline +2 under the broader concept of school education. There is no need to have a separate curriculum center in HSEB.

It is said that the curriculum of +2 has not been upgraded.

The curriculum is nobody's concern. It is not only the school education system moving to 12 but also the curriculum. Upgrading the school system up to 12 means, making the +2 also as part of the school system. When we introduced the +2 system, there was a policy to make 9 to 12 as a high school. The teachers who are given classes to 9 are also given classes to 12 and the teachers who are recruited to teach class 12 is also given to teach class 9. This is an integrated approach. But, we are also not going this way.

What is the objective of +2?

The aim of the +2 education is to make a student capable to distinguish what is right and what is wrong. Even you can see the difference between the students of +2 and the students going to university from colleges. Only a few students who go to university through +2 seem to get involved in politics. Students who jumped from class 10 to university colleges remained wild since they used to be suppressed in the schools by teachers. The +2 is a transitional phase when a student prepares his life from school to college. This means if there is over guidance at 9 and 10; the students should be given independent education at 11 and 12. It should be semi-guided to make the students more capable to cope with the university education.

What planning do you have to ascertain quality education?

The three years' interim plan has clearly stressed the need to amend the existing policies and acts to make them

timely and institutionalized. The number of people who talk about education at

the professional level is very few. When we talk about private school education, we can only name four or five schools. This is time to think about private sector in education, the why and how.

How do you look at the state of private schools?

Private schools are victims of unnecessary pressures from various students groups affiliated to various political parties, the government and unhealthy competition. Private sector in education does not mean +2 education only. It involves institutions from the Manipal Medical College of Pokhara to so many other engineering and medical colleges.

What do say about the row of 1 percent taxes?

Now the Ministry of Finance is tightening private schools on the issue of 1 percent tax. Some of the schools in Bhaktapur are unable to send their students because of their failure to pay tax. Has the Ministry of Finance ever talked about the taxes paid by medical colleges? Have they paid one percent tax on the money they charged from students? Nobody talks about this. There are many schools which are under institutional set up, including company, trust and others.

Don't you think it is necessary to regulate the private schools in making profits?

There is the need to develop a mechanism to regulate the private schools. We have to accept the fact that they are also a part of economic activity. The state permits private sector to do business. Of course, the state may ask stake holders about their contribution in nation building. Private sectors have made a lot of contributions by taking risks. They need to contribute to the betterment of the country also. ■

“Free Competition Is Good”

NARA BAHADUR BISTA



NARA BAHADUR BISTA, the principle of Global College of Management, has a long experience of working in the educations sector. At a time when colleges are competing to admit more students to their plus 2 programs, Bista talks to **NEW SPOTLIGHT** about various related issues. Excerpts:

How do you look at the present trend in the education sector?

It is good. The investment has increased and new colleges are coming up. Most importantly the participation of the private sector has gone up.

Some point out unhealthy practices in the education sector. What do you say?

Education sector should allow free competition and there should not be any restriction on investment. It is natural to see competition in the education sector.

Competition is good and the market will decide the fee structure. This is a globalised trend where the role of private sector is growing stronger in the field of education.

How many students are you planning to admit in your college?

Like last year, we will admit 550 students.

Since plus 2 is a part of school education in several countries of the world, don't you think that time has come to make it a part of school here and not a part of college?

There is a need to do a certain bridging at school level.

What is your impression about the market trend?

By spending huge money, some schools may attract students in the short term but that will not last long. Finally,

you need to provide quality education and what will matter is the result.

What should be the role of the government?

The government should work as a watchdog. Education is not a trade or a business like other sectors. If the present situation continues, it will increase the disparity.

Where is the place of the Global College of Management in the education sector?

We are specialized in management and our classes are run by well trained experts and well trained teachers. Our results are good and our placement is also good. Since our students are placed in good office and our results are good, we don't need to be worried.



“Higher Secondary Education Is Commercialized”

-KRISHNA K. PRAJULI

Following the publication of the results of School Leaving Certificate exams (SLC), various schools have been making efforts to attract students to their +2 courses. **KRISHNA K. PRAJULI**, founder principle of CANVAS International College, spoke about the present state of higher secondary schools. Excerpts:

How do you see the present state of higher secondary education? Don't you think education is commercialized?

Of course, higher secondary school education has played a major role to uplift the country's overall education. It has been providing quality education back home by reducing the number of students going abroad to pursue +2 education. However, the negative trend is that many bad practices are also coming into the education sector. Some

people are investing in education to make profits. In this way, the core objective of education is spoiled.

Is it not good to make investment in education?

I am not opposing investment in the education. What I am opposing is the commercialization of education. Education is not just a business and there are many things involved in it. I am very much worried about the involvement of all kinds of people in education in the name of investment.

What do you suggest to contain it?

There is the need to have strong mechanisms within the Ministry of Education and Higher Secondary Education Board to look after what is happening in the institutions. A lot of investments have been made to decorate the class rooms and buildings. Unfortunately, the parents will be charged for this.

Do you favour setting the criteria for the investment?

The time has come to set the criteria on who can invest in the education sector and who cannot. Only the persons having the academic background should be given the opportunity to invest in the education sector. If we allow every Tom, Dick and Harry to invest in the education sector, it will spoil the whole education system. That is not good. Education is not a sector to allow unhealthy practices.

How do you respond to the views of making the +2 as part of high schools and confining it to that level only?

I don't think this is the solution. Students who pass SLC want to go to other schools to pursue their higher secondary school education. Students should be given choices after SLC. I think some schools are pursuing this view to monopolies education. This is another bad idea. ■

After uniting all the Ph.D holders under Nepal Ph.D Association, Dr. RAJENDRA K.C took the responsibility as the principle of the South Western State College amidst the surge in the number of private boarding schools following the results of the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exams. Excerpts:

How do you say your school is different from others?

You can see a lot of schools in the nooks and corners of the city, but ours will try to be different from others. We want to deliver quality education and we will not compromise with quality. According to a study, annually 48.5 billion rupees will be spent to send the children abroad. People generate that amount of money by selling their house and land. I want to give quality

“Norm Is Needed ”

- RAJESH KHADKA

Nepal's pioneer in the private boarding education RAJESH KHADKA, founder principle and managing director of GEMS is watching all these developments. President of PABSON, Khadka spoke to NEW SPOTLIGHT on various issues. Excerpts:

As a pioneer in promoting private boarding schools in the country, what is your impression about the ongoing trend of publicity for competition?

My observation is that the competition is not like that of education profession but the competition is for others. You can see there is competition among various colleges to put the hoarding boards. There are hoarding boards all over the town to attract the students. I don't think this can promote the cause of education. Education is not a business at all but it also involves dedications and commitments.

What do you suggest to check the current unhealthy practice?

Since 10+2 is part of the high school, the permission should be given only to the schools having classrooms down to 10 and below. This will definitely check the present unhealthy practice. If +2 is also a part of school, it must be put at the school level. If we continue to run+2 outside the school system, it will create more troubles. ■

“We Want To Be Different”

DR. RAJENDRA K.C



education at home. I want to prove that there will be quality education back home. I don't think the government is not aware of the situation. We need to focus on such matters.

How do you see +2 ?

Even regarding the issue of +2, we have not gone in depth. Unhealthy practice prevails. Schools are competing with one another too fiercely.

Along with providing +2 classes, we also want to offer bachelor's, master's and M.Phil courses, leading to Ph.D. We have a very strong pool of qualified teachers whose experiences will be very helpful to the +2. We have very good human resources.

Why your college is expensive ?

I don't have any intention to make money through education. My only aim is to provide quality. I don't want to involve myself in unhealthy education practices.

I want to invite all the good manpower

to the college. As the president of the Ph.D association, I want to use their human resources for the benefit of the country as well as my school. I will make efforts to use the input of all these human resources. As a president, my effort will be to unite all of them. I have a very good rapport with all the Ph.D holders. There were only a few Doctoral degree holders until a few years back. Now there are many and I want to enlist all their support in the process of improving the quality of education.

It is said that your fees are high. What do you say about fees?

Although many people have said many things about our school but our school will not compromise on quality, our teaching system will be different, our efforts will be more focused on quality of education. ■

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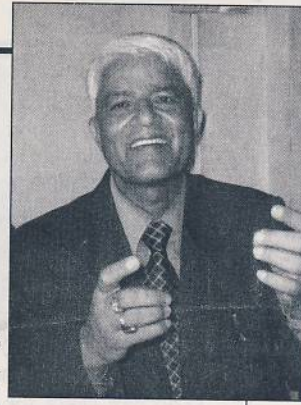
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“Higher Secondary Education is not a Business”

Dr. BABURAM POKHAREL



Dr. BABURAM POKHAREL is not a new name in the education sector. Founder principle of VS Niketan School and College, Pokharel has made a lot of contributions in promoting quality education in the country. As a pioneer in the higher education sector, Dr. Pokharel spoke to **NEW SPOTLIGHT** on various issues. Excerpts:

You are a pioneer of +2 education and have a long experience in the education sector. How do you see the present state of +2 education when there is a stiff competition? Don't you think it will make +2 education over-commercialised?

Higher Secondary Education Board (HSEB) was established under an act. The initial objective of the HSEB was to provide +2 education in remote parts of Nepal and to provide them opportunity up to +2 in their door steps. The other aim was to extend school education up to 12.

Do you think higher secondary education has been able to achieve its objectives?

We are unable to materialize these objectives. In fact, in a reversal, and the +2 schools are confined to urban areas. Most of the schools are located in the densely populated areas. Instead of government involvement, private sector jumped to +2 education. This is where the problems appear. Many see +2 education as a lucrative business venture where they can make money. It is very unfortunate that 10+2 education has failed to achieve its own objectives of expanding up to far flung rural parts of Nepal. Even infrastructure has not been extended up to the village level.

What is the state of +2 now?

One can see the involvement of people of various types. School is not only a business, it is also a part of social work. One needs to have commitment and

dedication in this sector. If you see +2 schools are just businesses, you will lose the essence of education. I have spent almost all my career in the education sector but I have not seen a very unusual situation like now where promoters are focusing more on buildings and facilities than projecting quality of education they are going to deliver.

Don't think the time has come to change the policy?

In the initial phase, the HSEB issued permission to all, including institutions which did not have high schools. This is the reason a number of education institutions were established for +2 only. Now the HSEB has stopped the issuance

of permission to such schools. Only those schools having +2 are responsible for present trend of unhealthy education. HSEB has made many contributions offering quality education within the country.

How do you look at the government's approach?

One of the positive steps taken by the government is to bring some sorts of reforms in the curriculum. Under the school sector reform project, the government is trying to improve the situation. The time has come to curtail the role of HSEB just to issue affiliation and monitoring. ■

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UMESH LAMA



There is a saying “no security without food security.” It means food security is basic. In order to be

food secure, operationally, there are three dimensions; food availability, food accessibility and food utilization that need to be addressed. These dimensions of food security are greatly affected by uncertainty and risks, hence vulnerability is often considered an indispensable dimension of food security. Food security, as defined by the world summit 1996, is a state when everyone every time, has physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet the dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

In Nepal, the degree of hunger and food insecurity varies mainly with the classes/groups of people, age, educational level, gender, culture and the geographical regions. The more food insecure people with extreme hunger are the low income groups of people living in remote and far flung settlements.

Nepal's policy and plans have been developed and implemented by focusing on the production of commodities. Further the focus on the needs of hungry people has remained in low priority. Food security projects have largely been limited to the growth of agricultural production, which is one aspect of the dimensions. The agricultural perspective plan (APP) gives high priority to national production but pays little attention to food security of the poor and socially excluded group. Although the present Tenth Plan recognizes food security as an important development objective, it has not been able to recognize the actual food insecurity groups, their resources and appropriate ways of mobilizing them. The plan's focus is on production and supply in the food deficit areas. The access to food of hungry households and individuals, which is a crucial dimension of food security, is not adequately reflected in the plan. The problem is not limited to the government projects, projects implemented by non-government organizations also do not adequately address issues of food security among malnourished and hungry people. Emergency food aid supports the rehabilitation and reconstruction of temporarily damaged areas, but ignores the perpetual food insecurity among underprivileged groups.

Today organic agriculture is growing throughout the world. The organic market is expanding worldwide. The worth of world organic products marketing reaches more than 39 billion USD annually, with an annual growth rate 15-25%. More and more farmers in the planet are making the decision to base their living on organic farming. Every country has more or less share in this development, so does Nepal.

With its holistic approach organic farming contributes to the society in many ways. Using no chemical is safer for farmers, and the environment and leaves no residue in the

products for consuming. Quality assurance is there for smart eating. Nepal is rich in indigenous knowledge, investing in building on the indigenous knowledge instead of synthetic inputs provides long term revenues for improving food security situation. Furthermore improving the soil fertility using locally available resources saves currency, reduces dependency, increases the resilience and stability of the production system, thus decreasing the vulnerability of poor small farmers to food insecurity and natural disasters and other disturbances, like climate change and desertification. Following a 3 year conversion period from chemical to organic farming, it will lead to sustainable yields sometimes higher than the conventional and in most cases premium prices improve the farm income meaning improvement in the accessibility to available food. There are many more positive examples; and this is why many government agencies such as ICCO the Netherlands, EED Germany, SIDA Sweden, KOICA South Korea, SDC Swiss etc and INGO such as FAO, SNV, Helvetas, ICIMOD, UMN clearly acknowledge this contribution and are starting to support organic farming initiatives in different ways. It is encouraging that the government of Nepal has in its 3 year interim plan included organic agriculture. There is also positive development in Nepal as the national organic standards is in hands and establishment of National Organic Farming Coordination Committee and National Organic Accreditation Body are pluses to this sector. Further the government should address time wise issues related to organic agriculture and develop effective support package and the mechanism of delivery to inspire organic farmers, traders and marketers.

It is obvious that tourists love unique places with peaceful, clean and natural environment. Organic farming, which is also termed as **None Violence Farming**, plays an important role in the promotion of responsible travel to conserve the nature. Hence the future project can be shaped in an holistic manner, in which the main interventions may include; awareness raising on the importance of organic agriculture and ecotourism, capacity building of local institutions on related areas particularly on knowledge transfer related to nature conservation, ecotourism, organic production, value addition of commodities and market development. Nepal with abundant heritage is our pride and its natural beauty in the world, if we could make it chemical and pesticide free organic nation, will add a feather in its cap to further beautify and enhance its attraction. Thus a combination of organic farming and ecotourism may result in an ideal destination with unique identity. ■

The author is the chairman of Organic World and Fair Future (OWF) and can be contacted at umesh.lama@yahoo.com

SURENDRA BAHADUR BASNET

Flying Success

Veteran bureaucrat Surendra Bahadur Basnet recalls his wealth of experiences

By SHRADHA GYAWALI

“Success is the good fortune that comes from aspirations and inspirations and along with success comes a reputation for wisdom.”

As Nepal emerged from centuries of isolation, the Nepalese people realized a dire need of developing basic infrastructure for travel and transport. Infrastructure building is still a big challenge in the country. The geographically difficult terrains come in the way to constructing roads, which involves a large amount of capital.

Against this background, Surendra Bahadur Basnet decided to make a debut by starting the Buddha Air. He is the chairman of the now largest domestic air service in Nepal. Besides this, Basnet has held very high level and important positions in the country. From being a Supreme Court Justice to the Chief Election Commissioner, he has accumulated a wealth of experience and knowledge. He also served the country as a minister in several governments and under important portfolios.

Basnet comes from a simple Nepali family with an agricultural background. His passion to serve the nation and its citizens is an inspiration to the younger generation. His timely realization of the need and the growing demand for air transport prompted him to establish the Buddha Air, a family owned operation with extraordinary success.

Basnet was born in Dingla, Bhojpur on 1st January 1929 in a simple Nepali family. He then moved to Biratnagar where he received his primary and higher

secondary education. He was then sent to Varanasi Hindu University in India

as was the custom those days. He completed his LLB, BSC and then MA from the same university before returning home in Nepal to practice law.

Buddha Air today has the largest fleet of the most expensive and brand new aircraft amongst all domestic airliners that are in operation. Buddha Air has safety records and reliability which earned it a host of awards including the “Highest Safety Award” given by the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation of the Government.

“We Wrote On Wood Planks”

Although Basnet came from a simple background, his determination and will to make a difference in the society brought him where he reached today. “There is a vast difference now from what Nepal was,” Basnet says, while opening up to Shradha Gyawali. Excerpts:

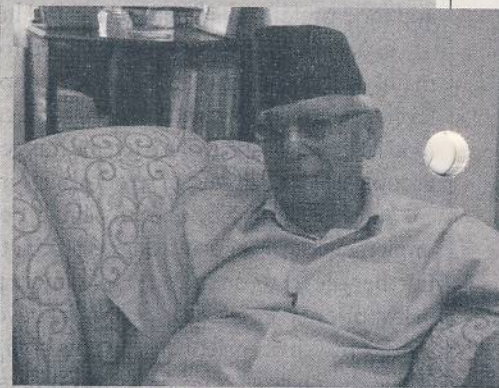
How is the world today different from what it was when you were a child?

There is a vast difference between then and now. During our times we wrote on wood planks and there were no technologies available then, whereas today every student has a laptop. Not only this, there is also a vast difference in the social life. In those days, there was a conception that girls should get married as soon as they attained maturity but now there is a change in the status of women, which, in a way, is good because if the status of women improves, the society gets better.

What was school like for you when you were a child? What were your best and worst subjects?

I started learning the English alphabets at the age of fourteen. I was the youngest child in the family who was pampered by everyone and didn't really feel like studying at that time. I started studying under the guardianship of late Krishna Prasad Koirala, father of late B.P. Koirala at Biratnagar. My best subjects were Math and Science whereas I didn't really like Hindi as I started studying Hindi from 9th grade and I had a lot of problems learning a new language.

What accomplishments are you



most proud of and what according to you is success?

Sometimes I laugh at myself when I think of all these achievements of mine and feel at the end that I have achieved nothing to satisfy my innermost desire. Every soul looks for peace and satisfaction is the first step to peace.

What would be the contribution of Buddha Air to make Nepal Tourism Year 2011 a success?

Buddha Air will definitely have an important role in making the Tourism Year 2011 a success. We have already extended our services to Bhutan and we have also taken the permission to extend it to India which I am sure will play a vital role to attract a large number of tourists.

At the age of 82 what is your typical day like?

Nobody grows old simply by living a number of years. We grow old by not following our principles and forgetting our values in life. I try to keep myself busy in my work as well as in different other aspects of life. ■

Solar Batteries Poisoning Springs in Nepal

ARJUN BAHADUR K.C.



Despite having over 6000 rivers and rivulets with abundant quantity of water flowing towards south, Nepal has gone through a severe water crisis everywhere in the country. In the remote areas, water sources are very scattered and people have to spend hours to get a bucket of water. In cities such as Kathmandu, getting a bucket of water in the morning is like getting a victory after fighting a big war. Quality of water does not come into discussion as quantity is yet a big deal. However, millions of people are suffering health problems not only because of insufficient supply but also having poor quality of water. Poor quality of water could be due to various reasons; however, the focus of this article is to highlight the water contamination due to batteries especially from solar photovoltaic home systems discharging in the vicinity of Silent Springs in rural Nepal.

Alternate energy development was supported in Nepal starting from Eighth Plan (1992-1997), and got continues focus in Ninth Plan (1997-2002), The Tenth Plan (2002-2007) and The Interim Plan (2007). Promotion of solar photovoltaic system was one of the priorities to enhance the rural livelihood in all of those plans. As a result, over 87000 solar home systems were installed by the end of 2007 through SHP and it is planned to install approximately 150,000 SHS by the month of March 2012 on a demand driven basis. Solar home systems have been even more popular recently as the country goes to load shading of approximately 18 hours a day in dry months where water level in hydro dams reduces substantially.

Lead-Acid battery is still the battery of choice for 99% of solar and backup power systems in Nepal and everywhere. As the name indicates, it contains lead and acids, usually sulfuric acid. According to WHO (1989), lead is a highly toxic metal that produces a range of adverse health effects. Lead exposure can cause brain damage; affect a child's growth; damage kidneys; impair hearing among several other effects. Elevated lead levels can increase blood pressure, kidney damage, digestive problems, nerve disorders, sleep problems, muscle, joint pains etc. Infants and children including fetus are more vulnerable to lead exposure as the tissues of small children are more sensitive to the damaging effects of lead. Acid is obviously a very caustic and toxic material as well. The haphazard disposal of batteries whether solar or car batteries has a high potential to contaminate water. USEPA has set 15 parts per billion (ppb) as the maximum level above which water system should be treated before consumption should it occur in drinking water.

The users of solar home systems in Rural Nepal have very minimum knowledge of the chemistry and operation of the batteries such as where to store safely, how long to charge, changing after its life cycle etc. The situation is severe in very remote districts such as Dolpa. Discharging the batteries in their backyards is a very common phenomenon in rural Nepal. In such cases, no safe methods of acid disposal are generally adopted such as neutralization, dilution, vegetation control, soil filtration etc. Over 180,000 batteries were imported for solar

electricity generation purpose in Nepal from different countries. After their useful life, the batteries are usually disposed as garbage discharging the acids to land or water bodies and sell the remaining part to India.

Management of batteries poses a certain challenge from health and safety point of view. Most of the users of the solar home systems are not aware of the general know how, the storage of used batteries and acid disposal practices. It is reported that in many cases, the users have been changing the batteries without following the proper health and safety procedures. Users do not know the harmful effects about the acid and lead. Moreover, the allowance of transfer of batteries in neighboring India is against the Basal Convention principle which came into effect in 1992. The Basel Convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal is an international treaty that was designed to reduce the transboundary movements of hazardous waste between nations. Being the signatory of Basal Convention, it is Nepal's responsibility to safely manage the battery waste as it provides subsidy to solar home system installation. However, to date, Government of Nepal has neither drawn any policies nor taken any actions towards battery waste management. This situation has created serious concerns on lead contamination in soil and groundwater especially the springs in rural Nepal. Even though, lead can be emitted from other sources, solar home systems could be the most dominating source of lead emission into water bodies in Nepal. A recent study (China Daily, 2009) in China showed that over 121 children out of 287 tested were exposed to over 100 and 218 micrograms of lead per liter of blood and due to this reason the villagers of Huaqiang Battery Plant want to shut down the battery plan forever. Daniel Chiras (2006) wrote that even residents of Nepal which is a non-industrialized country have 10 times higher level of lead in their blood level than those estimated to be present before the widespread use of lead which attests the global distribution of lead into the atmosphere. It shows that lead emission is a global phenomenon, however, thousands of batteries used in solar home systems in rural Nepal aggravates the problem contaminating the water bodies threatening millions of lives.

These alternatives are not only carbon neutral but do not have negative environmental impact from their life cycle operation. Based on the above mentioned facts, Nepal Government and Donor Agencies should promote micro/mini/small hydro, biogas, biomass combustion technologies such as improved cookstoves, gasifiers instead of solar home systems in Nepal in order to save the battery poisoning of Silent Springs of Nepal as well as stimulate the Nepalese economy.

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CEAPRED Changing Farms

CEAPRED has shown that Nepal's ecological comparative advantage can be used to boost alternative agriculture to bring prosperity to rural parts of Nepal

By A CORRESPONDENT

Megendra Gurung of Dhankuta had never thought that his barren land could bring him prosperity and help transform his entire village.

When the Center for Environmental and Agricultural Policy Research, Extension and Development (CEAPRED) began to promote off-season vegetable farms at the initiative of Dr. Hari Krishna Upadhyaya, a renowned agro-economist, two decades ago, subsistence agriculture was the norm in Dhankuta and elsewhere.

"Twenty years ago, we came up with a particular vision or philosophy for agriculture. It was not just an approach to agriculture development. It was like new paradigm that was fit for Nepal, a

paradigm that was fit for Nepal's unique geo-physical and ecological context," said Dr Upadhyaya, (see New Spotlight June 18)

"We did not have enough food to feed our families. We grew maize and left our lands barren for the rest of the year," said Megendra Gurung, a cooperative manager. "When Upadhyaya sir came to our village with his proposal to grow off-season vegetables, only a few people took the risk."

The situation has changed. Most of the corridor along the Dharan-Dhankuta highway now produces off session vegetables which are sold even in India. Gurung has been a witness to all this transformation that took place over the last two decades.

"CEAPRED taught us how to maximize our income and livelihood through off-season vegetables," Gurung, manager of Sidhuwa Multipurpose Cooperative Ltd, said. "We are exporting vegetables worth Rs.120 million in Indian rupees."

Ambika Sapkota, a vegetable producer of Kavre district, has a similar story to tell. With the introduction of off-seasoned vegetable, Ambika's village has also transformed drastically.

"Our land used to produce food just enough for four months and we had to go outside the village to make money to buy food for the rest of the year," Sapkota, vice chairperson of Chandrawati Vegetable Producers' Cooperative, said. "After taking up off-season vegetables farming, I now make more than Rs. 300,000 a year."

CEAPRED was established in 1991 under the leadership of Dr. Hari Krishna Upadhyaya, a renowned agriculture economist. The leading national developmental NGO of Nepal is now known as the first non-governmental organization in the country to work in the agricultural sector.

Dr. Upadhyaya's approach not only changed the vegetable production



Dr. Upadhyaya : Commitment for cause

pattern in the country but also inspired other farmers to replicate the achievements made by the farmers of Dhankuta and Kavrepalanchowk district. CEAPRED has programs also in Rukum and Salyan districts where farmers are getting a lot of benefits.

Dhankuta's successful off-season vegetable program is being replicated by farmers' groups all over the country. As the number of such farmers grows, it is getting easier to find off season vegetables in the market as well.

Noted among many programs implemented by the CEAPRED are the commercial off-season vegetable production program launched in eastern Nepal in the early 1990s and commercial vegetables seed production program currently in operation in several districts of Nepal.

"In remote and inaccessible areas, commercial production of bulky and perishable commodities, such as fresh vegetables, is not a feasible strategy for increasing household income and food security due to lack of market access. But commercial production of low-volume high-value commodities, such as vegetables seed is. Vegetable seeds can be stored locally for some time and without losing quality," said Dr. Hari Krishna Upadhyaya, Executive chairperson of CEAPRED.

"Over the past two decades of its operation, CEAPRED has implemented 64 development projects; most of them are related with income and employment generation through commercial high-value agriculture and agro-enterprise

promotion. Ever since its establishment, CEAPRED has consciously and consistently focused on sustainable poverty reduction and enhancement of food security and livelihoods of the poor, disadvantaged and deprived families including small and marginal farmers of rural Nepal," said Bharat Prasad Upadhyay, executive director of CEAPRED.

CEAPRED has directly worked with around 120,000 families in 42 districts of Nepal. The incomes earned by the participating families are estimated at several billion rupees annually.

"CEPARED has shown the way to transform livelihoods of rural parts of Nepal. We need to replicate the experiences gained by CEPARED throughout the country. Our past experiences have shown that we cannot uplift the life of rural people without bringing change in agriculture sector. CEPARED has shown that off season vegetables is the best way," said Jagadish Chandra Pokharel, vice chairman of National Planning Commission.

One of the keys to the success of any organization is its approach. CEAPRED follows a three-pronged program approach consisting of social mobilization, capacity development and local institution building.

CEAPRED has already promoted some 102 cooperatives of various types, of which 20 are multipurpose, 53 marketing, 27 saving and credit and 2 district unions.

"A number of new cooperatives including district and central unions are currently in the process of formation," said Upadhyay.

CEAPRED's two decades of experiments have revolutionized Nepal's agriculture sector while transforming it from subsistence to commercial farming. Although its program began from a small scale, the impacts were nationwide, establishing Dr. Hari Krishna Upadhyaya and CEAPRED's approach to off-season vegetable farming as a way to transform the life of people as well as the agriculture sector. ■

Census Data Vital: Bhatta

The World Population Day slogan 'data for development' assumes a greater significance in the context that Nepal is bracing for another edition of the national census next year.



PADAM RAJ BHATTA, chief of population division at the Ministry of Population and Health, talks about this.

How do you view this year's World Population Day slogan?

This year, we are celebrating the World Population Day with the slogan 'Data for Development'. This is a good slogan.

Next year we will have another national census. How relevant is this slogan in that context?

Next year, we are conducting a national census as well as a DHS survey and a living standards survey. In this context, the slogan is very relevant. Data have a very important role in census.

What is the state of Nepal's population?

The census was held in 2001 when the population was 23.2 million. The projection estimated that the population will be between 27.5 million to 28 million. According to a recent projection of Central Bureau of Statistics, the rate of growth of the population is going to be 2.13 per cent. Earlier, it used to be a 2.5 per cent growth rate.

What about the fertility rate?

The trend of fertility decline is very positive. The rate came down from 6.1 to 3.1. Since our population growth rate is still high, we need to reduce the fertility rate further down. Our interim plan is also projected to bring it under 2.1. We need to bring it at the replacement level. It is still higher in rural areas but it declines tremendously at urban level.

How is political instability affecting the population program?

It has not made a major impact since we are working under the national population policy and plan. Population is a cross cutting issue and there are multiple stakeholders. ■



High Altitude In Gosainkunda

BUDDHA BASNYAT, MD

Even as I observed this congregation of 5000 pilgrims at 4300 metres, ready to pray to the great Vedic deity Shiva at a magnificent mountain lakeside in Gosainkunda, I knew that many were in no mood to pray. They were stricken with altitude sickness in its various forms acute mountain sickness, high altitude pulmonary oedema, and high altitude cerebral oedema.

Acute mountain sickness, which is just like having a hangover, can be relatively benign (with a headache, some nausea, and tiredness), but high altitude pulmonary oedema and high altitude cerebral oedema are undoubtedly life threatening. The initial symptoms of acute mountain sickness are warning signs to be heeded carefully. Alas, many pilgrims climb too high too fast (from Kathmandu at 1300 metres to the lake in two nights) and totally disregard initial symptoms.

Just like many impatient tourists that come to trek in the foothills of the great Himalayas, these pilgrims too are a determined bunch and do not turn back even in the face of increasing symptoms. Many claim that once you undertake the pilgrimage it does not bode well for your spiritual welfare to give it up halfway.

Recent studies have shown that acute mountain sickness is rampant in this population of pilgrims to Gosainkunda and that many pilgrims are dehydrated because they are fasting. Many are so serious about the fasting that they do not even drink water. Women are more meticulous about fasting and sometimes they present with severe dehydration.

Many pilgrims still feel that the sickness they experience is caused by the scent of the flowers and alpine vegetation that grow on the wayside. This is akin to what many Catholic fathers thought in the early 18th century when they were crossing these Himalayan mountain passes. Indeed Spanish Jesuit fathers in South America were the first in Western literature to document the symptoms of altitude sickness. The scent of the flowers as the cause of altitude sickness does not make sense, as I am fond of reminding the pilgrims, because invariably the patients improve significantly on descent, even though the flowers are still giving off their scent.

One study postulated that the visions that these high altitude pilgrims often report may not actually be divine revelations but just hallucinations caused by the cerebral oedema. The pilgrim community may not favour this rather scientific explanation.

Gosainkunda is just one high altitude sacred place to which people trek. There are many such holy sites scattered in the Himalayas. Damodar Kunda, Dudh Kunda, Lake Tilicho, Kedarnath, Badrinath, Muktinath [* Internal error: Invalid file format. | In-line.WMF *] these are some other examples.

Finally, because of the immensely increasing fascination that Buddhism holds for people, many pilgrims, including vast numbers of Westerners, visit Lhasa (3600 metres), Tibet. Many experience the ill effects of altitude. This is because there is no chance for people to acclimatise as they make their journey quickly by air or by road. Acetazolamide (diamox) taken after consultation with their doctors could be a useful precautionary measure to ward off the ill effects of sudden hypoxia in Lhasa.

Pilgrims face other problems besides altitude. I have seen obese men and women, who can barely climb up stairs in their homes, undertaking high altitude pilgrimages on helicopter and horseback. Usually they decide to do this on the spur of the moment as a famous "guru" is going to lead them. The main problem is that you have to get down from the horse during the descent when the trail gets very steep, and your knees and hips may not be up to this. The pilgrimage then turns out to be a nightmare.

We have tried to encourage the Nepali government to campaign to increase awareness of altitude sickness among pilgrims. This has happened to some extent. So in brief to avoid altitude sickness, it is important to consider beforehand if you can do the trip, not to go too high too fast, to listen to your body, drink adequate amount of clean water, and use medicines if necessary.

Buddha Basnyat MD (This is a slightly changed version of an article by Dr Basnyat written in the BMJ in 2002;324:745)

CORRECTION

Please read the following instead of what inadvertently appeared in the focus entitled "The Situation is Getting Worse" in July 2-15 issue of New Spotlight.

After working years in Agriculture Development Bank, PITAMBER PRASAD ACHARYA with the mission of bringing tangible change in the life of rural poor conceived Development Project Service Center (DEPROSC-Nepal), in September 1993. Nobody would have imagined that DEPROSC-Nepal would emerge as a leading NGOs contributing to uplift the life of thousands of rural population, but Mr. Acharya has the vision for that. After eighteen years, Acharya shows that a small NGOs can bring changes in the socio-economy of rural population in the remote parts of Nepal. Out of 75 districts, DEPROSC has been implementing its projects in 41 districts of mountain, hill and terai region. From supplying food to food deficit region to high yield agriculture and micro-finance to health, education, nutrition, community development. DEPROSC has already established its name.

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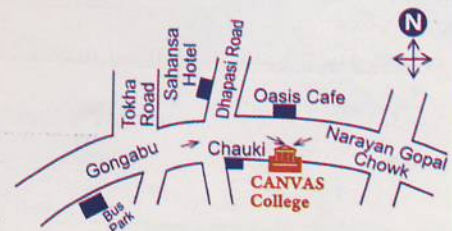


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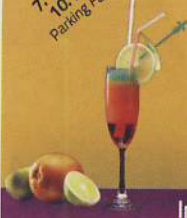


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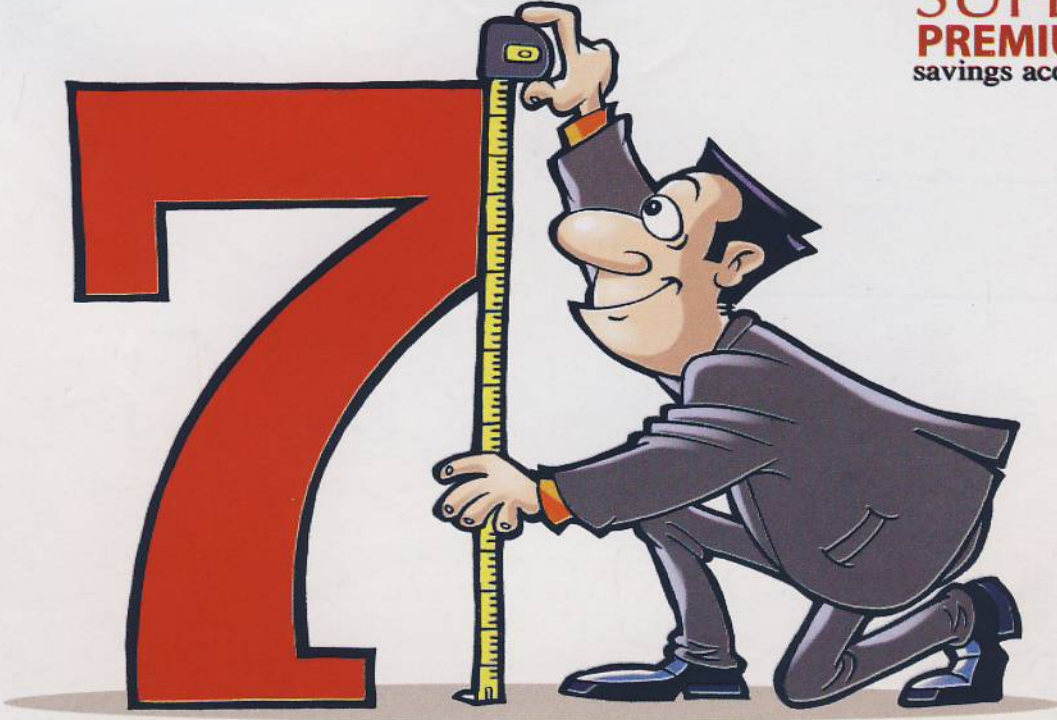
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